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Presentation date: January, 2024

Date of acceptance: April, 2024

Publication date: May, 2024

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC

SITUATION IN NORTHERN AZERBAIJAN AFTER THE ISSUANCE OF THE TSAR'S DECREE IN 1846

**SITUACIÓN SOCIOECONÓMICA EN EL NORTE DE AZERBAIYÁN DESPUÉS DE LA EMISIÓN DEL DECRETO DEL ZAR EN 1846**

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Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Abdullayev, M. (2024). Socio-economic situation in Northern Azerbaijan after the issuance of the Tsar's decree in 1846. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 16(3), 306-314.

### ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Supreme Tsar's decree of December 6th, 1846, is considered a turning point in Russia's agrarian policy in Northern Azerbaijan. However, changes in the socio-economic situation of the upper Muslim class resulting from these measures have not been sufficiently studied in agrarian historiography, which is then the main goal of this research. The measures taken by the Russian government in Northern Azerbaijan, including the inspection of the land and social rights of beys, the recognition of some land ownership rights, and the deprivation of others of this right, and the activities of the Boundary Chamber and the Bey Commissions are analyzed based on primary sources, especially archival documents. As a result, it is shown that the decree of the Supreme Tsar of 1846 was implemented in an extremely slow, limited, and incomplete manner. The main reasons for this, the specific features of the policy of national and religious discrimination and Russification of the tsarist elite

**Keywords:** 1846 rescript, Beys and aghas, Boundary Chamber, Bey Commissions.

### RESUMEN

La implementación del decreto del Zar Supremo del 6 de diciembre de 1846 se considera un punto de inflexión en la política agraria de Rusia en el norte de Azerbaiyán. Sin embargo, los cambios en la situación socioeconómica de la clase alta musulmana resultantes de estas medidas no han sido suficientemente estudiados en la historiografía agraria, que es el objetivo principal de esta investigación. Se analizan con base en fuentes primarias, especialmente documentos de archivo las medidas adoptadas por el gobierno ruso en el norte de Azerbaiyán, incluida la inspección de la tierra y los derechos sociales de los beys, el reconocimiento de algunos derechos de propiedad de la tierra y la privación de otros de este derecho, y las actividades de la Cámara de Límites y las Comisiones Bey. Como resultado, se demuestra que el decreto del Zar Supremo de 1846 se implementó de manera extremadamente lenta, limitada e incompleta. Las principales razones de esto son las características específicas de la política de discriminación nacional y religiosa y de rusificación de la élite zarista.

**Palabras claves:** Rescripto de 1846, beys y aghas, cámara de límites, Comisiones Bey.

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, Azerbaijan has been an important nation with a significant geopolitical presence, standing as a pivotal country in the Caucasus region (Gasimov, 2017). Not only, it boasts the largest population in the area but also it is recognized for having one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. This rapid economic growth is largely fueled by its oil and gas sector, although the government recently has been trying to develop other sectors of the economy. Azerbaijan's cultural heritage is both rich and diverse, being mainly expressed through its lively dances, delicate miniature paintings, and exquisite handwoven carpets. Specifically, Azerbaijan's inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List (Mammadov, 2023) for sites like Icheri Sheher and the rock art of Gobustan, the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and the Maiden Tower located in the capital Baku, as well as its intangible cultural heritage, underscores its cultural significance (Dorfmann-Lazarev & Khatchadourian, 2023; Nevins, 2020). Azerbaijan's strategic importance has been marked by its role as a crucial energy producer but more as a transit nation for trade. Because of that, the nation's geopolitical identity is complex, with geographical, historical, religious, and cultural components (Moreno, 2005).

The territories of present-day Azerbaijan have a long history of being intertwined with the larger empires of the region. From the time of the Achaemenid Empire, the area has shared much of its history with Iran until the arrival of the Russians in the 19th century. Azerbaijan became part of the Russian Empire after the Russo-Persian Wars, with the treaties of Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmenchay in 1828 marking the cession of the region from Qajar Iran to Russia (Iskenderova, 2023). Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, Azerbaijan had a period of independence, but this was terminated by the arrival of the Red Army. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Azerbaijan regained its independence although as a nation it kept closer relations with Russia, particularly under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev (Bölükbaşı, 2014; Valiyev & Mamishova, 2019). The Karabakh region has also been a significant factor in Azerbaijan-Russia relations. Historically recognized as part of Azerbaijan, the region came under Armenian control in 1994 after the establishment of the Armenian-backed Karabakh Republic in 1991. The 2020 war changed the balance in the region, with Azerbaijan recapturing a large part of Karabakh. Russia's mediation role in securing a ceasefire has increased its influence in the region and shaped its relations with Azerbaijan (Çakmak & Cüneyt, 2023; Safiyev, 2024). Undoubtedly, the historic relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have been shaped by a complex interplay of empire-building, regional

conflicts, and strategic alliances. The evolution of these relations continues to have significant implications for regional stability and balance.

However, every time the relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia is discussed, it highlights, as in any colonial relationship, the advances that the conquerors introduced in the conquered country, without highlighting some conflicts and disagreements. This dominant view often overlooks the moments of tension and challenges that characterized this historical relationship. In the specific case of Azerbaijan, a country that was part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, there are a series of events and circumstances that have left a deep mark on its history. Considering this, the objective of this work is to specifically analyze the socio-economic situation of these relations in northern Azerbaijan.

For example, from the beginning of the 19th century, when the occupation of Northern Azerbaijan by Russia began, until the mid-1840s, the agrarian policy pursued by tsarism consisted of the physical and political destruction of the upper class, most of which was hostile to Russia, and the restriction of economic, social and political rights and privileges of Beys and Aghas, especially their land rights. The actions taken in the occupied territories occupied a leading place. The steps taken by the Russian state in the field of agrarian legislation in Northern Azerbaijan were often not of a general nature; the measures were limited to individual districts. The Instruction of 1812, the Decree of 1817, the Statute of the Guba Governorate of 1824 (Department of Civil and Religious Affairs, n.d., pp. 103–105), the Statute of 1818 on the rights and obligations of Gazakh, Shamshadil, and Borchali-Agas, provided for the regulation of land rights of feudal aghas only in Guba and Derbent. The provincial government deliberately considered the local Beys and Agas to be the “managers” of the state-owned villages, and not the owners of the land, thus inflicting a heavy blow on their right to own land (Office of the Head of Civil Affairs of the Chief Judge of the Caucasus, n.d., p. 5).

In 1824, when the Russian government checked the land rights of Azerbaijani Beys and Aghas in the Guba and Karabakh provinces, the thesis of “management” was put on the basis. Their land property rights were called into question, and the lands and villages of representatives of the upper class who did not want to obey the Russian government were confiscated (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-k, pp. 10–13; Office of the head of civil affairs of the Chief Judge of the Caucasus, n.d., pp. 1–12). In 1828–1829, as a result of harsh measures implemented in the Irevan and Nakhchivan regions of Azerbaijan, the rights of the upper Muslim class, especially Tiyul, were

strongly limited regarding land ownership (Office of the Head of Civil Affairs of the Chief Judge of the Caucasus, n.d., pp. 6, 483–484).

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, the tsarist government in Northern Azerbaijan concentrated its efforts on the complete elimination of the upper Muslim class and the creation of a “natural Russian nobility” in its place. In 1841, the government launched a total attack on the land rights of Azerbaijan’s Beys and Aghas. According to a special document prepared by the Central Administrative Council of the Caucasus and approved by the “Committee for the Establishment of the Transcaucasian Land” on April 25th, 1841, all the villages owned by the Aghas of Gazakh, Shamshaddil, and Borchali were confiscated according to the law signed by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I on May 23rd of that year, and instead, a lifelong pension was assigned to the Aghas at the expense of the peasants.

According to another decree signed by the tsar on May 28th, 1841, the tiyul lands of the Khazar province Beys were taken from their hands, and a pension was assigned to them instead of the land. These two decisions, which dealt a heavy blow to the land rights of Azerbaijani Aghas and Beys, caused great discontent not only among the upper class but also among the peasants. Because the pension expenses of Aghas and Beys were imposed on the peasants, who were burdened with heavy taxes and obligations, the upper class and the peasants united on one front and started revolts and speeches against the government. Alarmed by this, the Russian government sent a special commission to the South Caucasus. Minister of War A. I. Chernyshev, who headed the Special Commission, got acquainted with the situation in 1842 and assessed the government’s confiscation measures as a “wrong step.” Taking advantage of the great authority given to him, the military minister signed a special order in 1842 with the following content: “The ownership rights of the Beys and Aghas over the landed property will be kept as they were in their previous state until this issue is completely resolved in the country” (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-b, p. 47). Based on this order of the Minister of War, the Chief Magistrate of the Caucasus stopped the confiscation measures.

All this indicates that under the conditions of Russian colonialism, no serious step was taken towards the recognition and regulation of land ownership rights of the landowners of Northern Azerbaijan as a whole. In general, until the mid-1940s, Azerbaijani beys and aghas had to face great obstacles and difficulties in the way of recognition by the state of their legal rights to land and natural names and privileges. By intentionally creating such unbearable

conditions for the Azerbaijani Aghas, the Russian government openly demonstrated its hostile attitude towards them.

The evidence of the authenticity and legality of certificates and other similar documents from the Safavids, ruling khans, and Russian state bodies from the time of the Azerbaijani beys and aghas, confirming their rights to lands, villages, and peasants in their possession and certifying the titles of khan, bey, and agha they held, had to go through very complex and lengthy procedures. The tsarist government bodies, which were extremely interested in reducing the number of the upper echelon and limiting its composition to include only beys whose loyalty to the government was unquestionable, deeply analyzed and studied the submitted documents in various institutions and were often in no hurry to make a final decision (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-e, pp. 41–45). As has been seen, the situation was complex, but let us go deeper into it.

## DEVELOPMENT

Since the beginning of the Russian invasions, the supreme tsar’s decree of 1846 has been evaluated as a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan in the life of the high Muslim class, which was subjected to the policy of national and religious discrimination, whose land, property, and social rights were constantly violated, and whose villages and villagers were taken from their hands. With the decree (rescript) of December 6th, 1846, signed by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I and sent to the Caucasian viceroy M.S. Vorontsov as a guideline, the Russian government made a serious change in its policy regarding the upper Muslim class, denying the socio-economic rights of the Azerbaijani nobles and making them illegal. It withdrew from the line of putting them in a certain situation and announced that it had moved to the line of recognizing their rights. This decree, which is a really important step in the field of regulating the rights of the upper Muslim class over land and peasants, was prepared as a result of more than four years of activity of the administrative bodies of Russia in the Caucasus, the Caucasian Viceroyalty, and the Caucasian Committee. How and under what conditions this decree was implemented in North Azerbaijan, and what changes occurred in the status and socio-economic status of the upper Muslim class after the decree have not been thoroughly investigated in our agrarian historiography.

First of all, let us consider the main articles of the supreme tsar’s decree of December 16th, 1846, which consists of 12 articles: To definitively decide the fate of the khans,

beys, aghas, and other persons of the high Muslim lineage of the Transcaucasian country, we order:

1. In addition to the lands we gave to the Khans, beys, and Armenian princes due to their special services and generosity, all the lands owned by their descendants during the period of the unification of the Muslim provinces to Russia and still in their undisputed possession should be confirmed as their hereditary property.
2. The inhabited and uninhabited lands, which were confiscated administratively from some landowners after 1840 due to their crimes or not by the court, should be returned to them or their heirs and should be considered their property according to the first article.
3. To the aghas of the former Tatar (Azerbaijani) territories of Georgia and their heirs, the inhabited and uninhabited lands that were previously used and confiscated in 1841 should be returned as our special favor to them and confirmed as their property by the first article.
4. Lands that have been taken over by the treasury due to the crime of their owners will not be returned to them or their heirs without our special permission.
5. Peasants living on lands approved as the property of individual persons should be included in the category of state peasants. Instead of various names such as raiyat, ranjbar, khalisa, servant, and ilakhir, the peasants should be given a common name - the title of landlord's subordinate.
6. The landowner is given the right to control law among the villagers and police ruling over them.
7. According to this decree, all the lands and farms where the hereditary rights of landowners are confirmed constitute their full ownership. Those lands can be inherited, gifted, sold, or traded in any way. But with one condition: the new owner of the manor must belong to the highest Muslim class of the Transcaucasia region... and the villagers must maintain the same relations with the new owner as they had with the old owner.

At the end of the supreme tsar's decree, Tsar Nikolai specifically instructed the Caucasian viceroy to determine the personal rights of the supreme Muslim silk, taking into account the rights of the noble Russian nobility as far as possible (Aliyarli et al., 2007, pp. 343–347; Petrushevskiy, 1937, pp. 105–107).

Agrarian historian Ismayil Hasanov, having analyzed the provisions of the supreme tsar's decree, evaluated this important government measure as an alliance of tsarism with Azerbaijani feudal aghas in chapter III of his book (Gasanov, 1957, p. 146). In our opinion, this measure by the Russian government was not an alliance between

tsarism and the Muslim elite, but rather a concession step taken by the colonial state, which was interested in creating some stability and calmness in the Azerbaijani countryside. As can be seen from the content of the supreme decree, the government officially confirmed the ownership rights of Azerbaijani landlords over property and tiyul lands without any distinction, yet referred to the peasants, who previously held titles such as raiyat, ranjbar, khalisa, servant, and other different names, as "subordinates of landlords", without any justification. It classified the landowner peasants into the category of state peasants. This contradictory situation deliberately created by the government did not reflect the real picture of existing social relations in North Azerbaijan. The aristocracy's right to have complete ownership over the peasants was officially questioned. It should be noted that the question of how and under what conditions the supreme tsar's decree of December 6, 1846, was implemented in the Azerbaijani village has been episodically analyzed in our agrarian historiography and has not been investigated deeply and comprehensively so far. Prince M.S. Vorontsov, the viceroy of the Caucasus, started the implementation of the supreme tsar's decree of 1846 at the end of 1847. By his order, the Special Commission established to solve the issue of land supply for the aghas of Gazakh, Shamshaddil, and Borchali districts started its work on December 23rd, 1847 (Petrushevskiy, 1937, p. 149).

The Special Commission, having studied the Regulations of A.P. Yermolov, who was the chief judge of the Caucasus, regarding the aghas of the three districts in 1818, and having prepared the draft of the supreme tsar's decree of 1846 based on the notes of P.A. Ladinsky, the head of civil affairs of the Caucasus, especially his opinion regarding point 3 of the decree, completed the settlement of the land issue of the aghas of Gazakh, Shamshaddil, and Borchali on April 13th, 1849, and presented the final version of the list of aghas whose ownership rights were secured to the viceroy M.S. Vorontsov. According to the final opinion of the commission, the natural brothers of the descendants of the aghas were to enjoy the same privileges as a general rule; if not specified more precisely, the lands were to be divided equally among them. Other relatives of the aghas, as well as tax-paying officials who were not aghas and maliks, were included in another category and were allotted less land (Petrushevskiy, 1937, pp. 150–151). Thus, the issue of securing the ownership rights of the aghas of Gazakh, Shamshaddil, and Borchali was resolved in a shorter period compared to other regions. However, it should be taken into account that this region was not a very large part of the territory of Azerbaijan. By returning the lands to the aghas, the government fulfilled

the provisions of the supreme tsar's decree concerning only their land ownership rights. Matters related to other, especially personal, rights of the aghas were neglected.

In general, many difficulties and controversial issues arose in the process of implementing agrarian reform in Azerbaijan. To implement the main articles of the supreme tsar's decree of December 6th, 1846, the government had put forward the "verification of the right of land ownership of beys" (Petrushevskiy, 1937, p. 189) in the Muslim-inhabited regions of the South Caucasus as a first-class position. The Commission on Land Rights of Shamakhi Beys, established in April 1848 for the implementation of agrarian laws in the Shamakhi Governorate, focused on this issue in its activities until 1851 (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-g). The Russian government was in no hurry to definitively resolve the issues arising from the decree of December 6th, 1846. The process of verifying the rights over the lands owned and used by the highest class was carried out by the commission (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-c). The analysis of the document shows that the work carried out in the field of implementation of the supreme tsar's decree did not go beyond inspection measures for two years. It should also be noted that after the decree of December 6th, 1846, the expectations that the land, personal rights, and privileges of the representatives of the Muslim elite would be provided by the government in a very short time did not come true. The elite as a whole were condemned by the colonial authorities to go through a very difficult, painful, and long "verification procedure." As a result of the inspections carried out by the commission on the Shamakhi district, it was found that 66 noble families (365 men, 197 women, a total of 562 people) living in the district had different sizes of arable land, gardens, winter gardens, mills, serfs, and serfs in 25 villages and villages, and they had submitted documents confirming their ownership rights to the government authorities with their seals (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-h).

To solve the very difficult and complex task of verifying the documents of the upper caste in the five districts of the Shamakhi Governorate (Shamakhi, Shusha, Sheki, Baku, and Lankaran), the Commission appointed assistants of district chiefs, district prosecutors, and local beys to determine the rights of this district to land and other properties based on those documents. It created a staff consisting of representatives to address this very difficult and complex task (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-d). The first step taken by the administrative bodies, which began in 1848 to implement the decree of 1846 in the Lankaran district, was to collect documents confirming their land rights from representatives of the highest class. Based on these documents, certain steps were taken to determine the size of the lands in the hands of the aghas. In this regard, let's pay attention to the Table 1.

Table 1: Lands belonging to beys and aghas in Lankaran district in 1848.

	<b>Plot of land Total (taghar)</b>	<b>Disputed plot of land (taghar)</b>	<b>Undisputed plot of land (taghar)</b>
Paddy 70.23%	418,504 100%	285.317 68.17%	133.187 31.83%
Grain 8.5%	50.614 100%	15.152 29.9%	35.462 70.1%
Not sown free 21.27%	126.754 100%	1.5 1.35%	125.254 98.65%
All lands (taghar) Total	595.872	301.969	293.903
The undisputed ownership of Mir Abulfat Bey is the total area of rice, grain, and wasteland with the addition of 84,125 tagars.	184.125 100%	50.67%	49.33%
Grand Total (Tagar) One taghar was equal to 3 desyats in fertile lands, and 3.6 desyats in infertile lands	779.997		

Source: (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-f.).

In the course of our calculations based on the table compiled as a result of the inspections carried out in 1848 by the commission on the land rights of the beys of the Lankaran region, it was found that only 780 tagars of land were in the hands of the families of 40 nobles, aghas, and clerics, who were representatives of the highest class of the region. Since the specific area of the uncultivated land reserved for paddy and grain crops owned by Mir Abulfat Bey is not specified without causing any controversy after deducting the 84,125 tagar plots belonging to him in 4 villages, 418,504 tagars (70.23%) of the remaining 595,872 tagar plots of land were under rice cultivation, and 50,614 tagars (8.5%) were under grain cultivation. The size of uncultivated or vacant land owned by the upper class was equal to 126,754 tagars (21.27%) (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-f).

From the table we compiled, it is clear that most of the 418,504 tagars (68.17%) of rice plantations claimed by 32 high-ranking representatives in the Lankaran district were disputed, i.e., the ownership was considered questionable by the government authorities, and a smaller part - 133,187 tagars (31.83%) had unquestionable ownership rights of the beys confirmed. Of the 50,614 tagars of grain crops, 15,152 tagars (29.9%) were considered disputed, while five beys and masters were confirmed to own 35,462 tagars (70.1%) of grain crops. The beys and agas whose ownership of grain crops was questionable consisted of 16 families.

Regarding vacant or non-cultivable land, it should be noted that the Russian government authorities did not pay as much attention to such land as they did to the rice crops that were the majority in the region, as the vacant land did not bring in income. Only 1.5 tagars (1.35%) of the registered uncultivable land size of 126,754 tagars were considered disputed, and the vast majority - 125,254 tagars (98.65%) - were considered undisputed lands of 3 noble families.

It should also be noted that 1,595 males over the age of 15 lived in the villages where Lankaran Beys', Aghas', and clergymen's farmlands were located, and 1,246 males over the age of 15 lived in the villages where the ownership of rice and grain crops was not disputed, totaling 2,841 males over the age of 15 (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-f). Of course, the agricultural lands belonging to the landlords were planted and cultivated by those peasants.

The state was more profitable than checking the land rights of the upper class on a single Lankaran incident. The ownership of almost half of the registered arable land was considered doubtful. As a rule, such lands were

transferred to the ownership of the state treasury. The number of peasants who cultivated those lands was more than the number of peasants who were kept under the ownership of the upper class and was equal to 56%.

After the supreme tsar's decree was issued on December 6, 1846, in a situation where a large part of the claims made by some of the beys and aghas of Shamakhi, Lankaran, and other districts for the ownership of the villages and the arable land in those villages, which they had managed for 15-20 years, were rejected, the rights of a part of the representative of the upper class were ensured. The violation of the decree of December 6th, 1846, at every step of its implementation based on the personal judgment of local judges, led to the aggravation of the socio-economic situation of Azerbaijani nobles and the uncertainty of their land and land rights.

In the 1840s of the 19th century, we tried to clarify an issue that made us think about the regulation of the socio-economic rights and privileges of the upper class in Azerbaijan, which had been formed over the centuries. This is the question of how the Russian government regulated the rights of Armenian-born dignitaries, who attracted attention due to their minority in the region. When the Russian government issued its Supreme Decree on December 6th, 1846, it did not forget the people of Armenian descent, whom it brought from the Qajar and Ottoman states, selected and raised from among the Armenian population, which had caused trouble to the Turkish people of Azerbaijan, and gave them the titles of "malik" and "bey." In the 6th article of the supreme decree, the order of confirmation of the hereditary property rights of the Armenian owners who received lifetime and temporary land grants for their special services during the Russian government was discussed, and the authority to raise this issue before the central government was entrusted to the Viceroy of the Caucasus (Aliyev, 2024, p. 106).

When Article 6 is reconciled with Article 1, it becomes clear that the Russian government clearly realized that the Muslim lords and lords were really the hereditary owners of the land when Azerbaijan was occupied by Russia and expressed this reality in the first article. The very interesting archival document that we have obtained clearly indicates that the persons of Armenian origin who wanted to receive the title of bey or malik from the Russian government were not deep-rooted residents of the region and were brought to Karabakh from the Qajar state. According to the document, in 1846, two residents of Argunesh village, Varanda district of Shusha district - Garaman and his nephew Garakhan, applied to the Shamakhi Governorate Department and the Shamakhi State Property Office with a letter, requesting to be allowed to bear the title of bey with



the surname of Malik Gasparov, to confirm this name and remove them from the tax list.

As a result of the investigations conducted by the authorities until January 20th, 1849, it was determined that 1) all the residents of the village of Argunesh had moved to Karabakh from Persia (the state of the Qajars); 2) since the end of the six-year privilege given to refugees and displaced persons by the Russian government, a tax of three silver manats was imposed on each of them by the Chamber from the beginning of 1847; 3) The claim that they were not listed as a tax-paying class in the chamber census document by the persons who applied and wanted to get the surname was not confirmed. Because such a census was carried out long before their relocation from the Qajar state, and after the relocation, no cameral census was conducted in the Shusha district (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-b). This claim, based on lies, was not even confirmed by the Armenian-loving Russian government. The most interesting thing is not that these two Armenians were taken by the fake Malik Gasparov family, but that their names Karakhan and Garaman were expressed in Turkish, and the title of bey, which they wanted to have, was historically carried by Turkish nobles.

Even though five years had passed since the issuance of the supreme tsar's decree on December 6th, 1846, and three years had passed since the creation of commissions on land rights of the upper class, the rights and privileges of the nobles over real estates, farmlands, and inhabited lands in the Shamakhi and Derbent governorates, which included the majority of the lands of Northern Azerbaijan, remained in an uncertain state and had not completely resolved themselves. The commissions operating in the districts of both governorates did not approach their work responsibly and did not complete the work of collecting the necessary documents required to issue a final decision on the land rights of the upper class. In 1851, when the commissions in the governorates of Shamakhi and Derbent reported to the Viceroy of the Caucasus about the completion of their activities, it became clear that the information they had collected was not enough to make a final decision. The commissions did not completely fulfill their main tasks, such as determining the land rights of the upper echelon and the land ownership of each landowner. In September 1851, to clarify some issues in the districts and collect additional information, College adviser Chilyayev was sent to the regions by the deputy. In March 1852, Chilyayev's instructional notes and information about the personal and property rights of the Muslim elite were presented to the General Administrative Council (Aliyev, 2024).

Based on many years of experience, a special court-zoning rule was prepared by adapting the General Zoning Charter of the Russian Empire to the socio-economic characteristics of Transcaucasia. From January 1st, 1862, the Transcaucasian Regional Chamber began its work. The Chamber had very few surveyors on its staff, only 36 (Central State Historical Archive of Russia & Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.). There is no doubt that with such a small number of workers, it was impossible to cope with the large-scale marking works in the country in a short time. The main task of the Regional Chamber was to complete the land demarcation work in the entire Transcaucasian region for several decades. However, this work was carried out so slowly that from 1862 to 1870, a total of 796 thousand 587 desyatins of land were demarcated throughout Transcaucasia (Knyaz & Dondukov, n.d.). In general, from 1862 to 1889, 2 million 261 thousand 334 desyatins of the three million 520 thousand 680 desyatins of land in the Baku governorate were demarcated (Central State Historical Archive of Russia & Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.). This slow progress of demarcation prevented the determination of land and personal rights of the upper Muslim caste.

In the middle of the 1860s of the 19th century, the authorities, who clearly understood that the right of the upper Muslim class to own the lands and properties inhabited by the people since the Khan period was the only, factual, and undeniable evidence for the representatives of this class to bear the title of nobles even during the time of the Russian government, decided to accelerate the determination of personal and land rights. In September 1865, Prince G.D. Orbeliani, who was the viceroy of the Caucasus, informed the chairman of the Caucasus Committee, Prince P.P. Gagarin, that "Bey commissions were created to determine the persons belonging to the upper class in the parts of Tbilisi, Kutais, and Iravan provinces where Muslims live" (Aliyev, 2024). Representatives of the Muslim elite were also involved in the Bey commissions working under the chairmanship of Russian government officials (Mahmudov, 2000). On July 6th, 1865, the Tiflis Bey Commission, which would cover Yelizavetpol, Akhalsikh Districts, and the Borchali, Gazakh, and Shamshaddil districts of the Tbilisi District, and on September 1st, the Iravan Bey Commission for the Iravan Governorate, began to operate (Central State Archives of Georgia, n.d.).

The Shusha Bey Commission, established in April 1869, began to address the determination of the personal rights of the upper class in Shusha, Zangezour, Nukha Districts, and Aresh Districts of Yelizavetpol Governorate (Aliyev, 2024). It should be noted that the Russian government

gave special instructions to all the bey commissions that when determining the personal and other rights of the upper class, the rules existing in the country should be taken as the basis. Additionally, this class should not be considered equal to the Russian nobles under any circumstances. Thus, the upper Muslim class was not officially considered the full-fledged hereditary nobility of Russia. During its operation, the Shusha Bey Commission issued certificates recognizing the titles of bey, malik, sultan, and khan to the representatives of the highest class (Aliyev, 2024).

The analysis of numerous documents related to the activities of Bey commissions allows us to reveal new and very interesting facts about the issue of confirming the rights of the highest class. Making decisions about confirming or revoking the titles of khan, bey, and agha carried by representatives of the highest rank in the commission went through a very difficult and complicated process. Firstly, there was the verification of the authenticity of the decrees on land ownership given to them by the Safavid Shahs, Khans, and the Russian government, regarding the fact that representatives of the upper class have this right by generation or inheritance. For example, the list submitted to the Shusha Bey Commission by the 30 families of former Karabakh judge Mehdi Gulu Khan included the names of 237 family members (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-a, pp. 32–36). Secondly, there was the task of checking and clarifying the list of family members and relatives of persons belonging to the lineage of the bey and agha. Thirdly, in the absence of the necessary supporting documents, the verification of a document signed and sealed by at least 14 authoritative persons, confirming that the person holds the title of bey or agha, was required (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-i, n.d.-h). Fourthly, the commission checked whether they, their family members, and their relatives were mentioned as bey or agha in the chamber censuses held in the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s, and 1860s of the 19th century (Azerbaijan Central State Archive, n.d.-j)

It should be noted that the Russian government's decision to recognize the title of bey held by representatives of the upper class was more based on the information in the chamber census materials than the documents belonging to the Safavid and Khan periods. This was considered a more reliable document. On the other hand, our analysis, based on the documents related to the activities of the bey commissions in Shamakhi, Shusha, Baku, Zangezur, Shaki, Lankaran, and other districts in the late 1860s and early 1870s of the XIX century, shows that up to this time, at least 3, and at most 4 times in the region, the censuses held had information about the social status of the

persons who applied to the commission to confirm their name. This information was distinguished by being different and contradictory in many cases.

The first attempts to implement agrarian laws in Yelizavetpol and Ayrim districts of Yelizavetpol governorate date back to the beginning of the 1850s. Already in April 1849, the request of the officials and beys of Yelizavetpol district to settle their land rights in the same manner as the lords of Gazakh and Shamshaddil was sent to the Caucasian Committee by the Viceroy of the Caucasus in 1851 (Central State Historical Archive of Russia, n.d.).

## CONCLUSIONS

Our historical research, based on document sources, allows us to conclude that most of the articles of the decree of the Supreme Tsar of December 6th, 1846, were either not followed or only partially implemented. The task of the Russian Emperor Nicholas I to decisively decide the fate of the supreme Muslim clans of the Transcaucasian country remained unresolved. The process of implementing the first article of the decree, which envisioned the confirmation of all lands in the possession of the upper class as their hereditary property, was not completed until the beginning of the 1870s. During the implementation of the Supreme Decree, Article 8 was amended, and its scope was limited. As the issues related to the alienation of land remained unresolved, the representatives of the upper Muslim class could not fully exercise the rights given to them by Article 9 of the decree regarding the transfer or sale of their mansions. It should be noted that only with the Decree of May 14th, 1870, did the tsarist government officially recognize the private property rights of the upper Muslim class over land.

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