



Article

Hunting in Ganjabasar Region

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Abstract: This study examines the historical evolution and cultural significance of hunting in Azerbaijan's Ganjabasar region, an area steeped in tradition and vital to the local economy. Historically, hunting served as an auxiliary economic activity in the 19th century, driven by the region's diverse wildlife supported by abundant forests and fertile lands. Archaeological discoveries of hunting tools suggest ancient origins, highlighting both economic and social dimensions. However, while hunting has been central to the socio-economic fabric, limited research addresses its role as both livelihood and entertainment for affluent classes in the 19th century. This study aims to fill that gap, focusing on traditional hunting practices, collective and individual hunting methods, and the types of firearms and tools unique to the region. Employing ethnographic analysis and archaeological findings, this research underscores the role of hunting in the cultural and economic landscape of Ganjabasar, contributing to a broader understanding of traditional practices within Azerbaijan's historical context.

Keywords: Flora, Fauna, Climate, Animals, Hunting tools, Wild birds, Cage

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 19th and 20th centuries, the population of Ganjabasar region was more or less engaged in agriculture and cattle breeding, which are the main economic fields, as well as many auxiliary economic fields (hunting, fishing, beekeeping, etc.). As it is known, since ancient times, the flora and fauna of our homeland, which is called Azerbaijan, has been very rich, the favorable climatic conditions, forest areas, soil cover and abundant rivers, as well as the Caspian Sea have conditioned the settlement of a large number of animal and bird species that exist in the world, and played the role of food basis in the development of beekeeping in our territory. As can be seen from the statistical data, "currently there are more than a thousand animal species in Azerbaijan. Of these, only up to 98 are mammals, up to 343 are various birds, and up to 88 are fish species" [1].

If we specify a little more, we can say that "more than 50% of the bird species of hunting importance in the former USSR, and more than 26% of the animal species of hunting-industrial importance live in the territory of Azerbaijan" [2]. The paleontological findings obtained from the Azikh cave, the largest Paleolithic (ancient stone age) camp of Azerbaijan, once again confirm the existence of wild animals in the territory of our country, most of which are considered hunting objects [3]. Paintings of wild animals and hunting scenes in ancient Gobustan, Gamigaya images, Mingachevir, Ganja, Nakhchivan, Karabakh, Kalbajar-Lachin, etc. hunting tools, animal and bird bone remains discovered during archaeological excavations in the regions confirm the existence of hunting in the Ganjabasarregion as well as in the whole of Azerbaijan.

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Literature review

Referring to the results of archaeological excavations, ethnographer V. Ahmadova writes that arrowheads, hooks, hunting tools, animal and bird bones, a belt with images of animals and weapons, various clay pots and ground materials discovered during the archaeological excavations in the Ganja-Gazakh region of Azerbaijan prove that hunting in this region has developed since the Neolithic period. Academician T. Bunyadov shows that in the Neolithic period, hunting was widespread and developed, primitive people used the skins of the animals they hunted as clothing [4].

Hunting, which is considered an auxiliary economic field, has been both the entertainment and amateur occupation of the wealthy population throughout the Middle Ages, as well as the provider of the daily life of a part of the population (especially not sufficiently provided families and hunters), and was decisive in their food ration. In the mentioned period, in the Ganjabasar region there were more wild boars, hares, gazelles (gazelles lived in herds in Jeyranchol), mountain goats, wild ducks (crab ducks, green-headed ducks), wild geese, partridges, mountain partridge, turach, pheasants, woodcock, grouse, thrush, grouse, pike, crane, etc. was hunted. Hunting of roe deer, deer, bear, badger, wildcat, jackal, fox, wolf, and even tiger was also known in this region. Some of them were hunted for their meat, and others for their skins. If meat consumed by the hunter and his family, the skin was often sold [5].

2. Materials and Methods

The article's data came from a combination of textual analysis and case studies. In order to determine the subject, method, and means of hunting, textual analysis entails examining ethnographic materials such as literature, historical texts, and informants' reports. Studies conducted by scholars like Professor F. Valiev and Academician T. Bunyadov were additionally reviewed to show that hunting has evolved into an auxiliary, recreational, and amateur vocation in the Ganjabasar region [6].

3. Results and Discussion

During the given period, mainly the representatives of the wealthy class favored collective hunting and regarded it as a form of entertainment and a useful way of spending their free time. "The beys and khans, grantees of Azerbaijan, who went hunting with horse teams, were proud of the fact that they shot many animals and birds during the hunt. These hunting parties, attended by the lords and grantees, resulted in the killing of a large number of animals and birds. These hunts, which lasted for weeks and months, consisted of horse teams [7]. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, individual lords and landlords seized areas rich in game animals and birds and used these areas only for themselves.

Ethnographic data confirm that the beys of Samukhdistrict (Shirin bey, Kahraman kokha, etc.) often hunted gazelles and rabbits in Jeyranchol. During the conversation, informant Emrah Rustam said that he heard many times from his father Rustam that the men of Samukh and Eldar districts often went to Eldar plain, Samukh forest and Jeyranchol for hunting. Sometimes ordinary village hunters, who were engaged in hunting, preferred to hunt collectively [8]. They used this method mostly for wild boar hunting. Ethnographic literature gives all the details of wild boar hunting: "Usually, a large group of hunters was organized for wild hog (boar - V.V.) hunting.

So, there would be up to 20-30 hunters and 15-20 hunting dogs in a group. Such joint hunting was carried out in reed and forest areas. A few skilled hunters made an ambush at the edge of the forest, and ten to fifteen people entered the forest from the fore-part of the forest with rifles and hunting dogs and "shuffled" the forest after the dogs, walking 15-20 m away from each other towards the end of the forest [9]. Thus, the animals in the forest were forced to flee because of the noise and ran away from the forest [10]. At the same time, several animals were shot as a result of the precise fire of the hunters standing in

ambush. Such a hunting method was called "yerge". Sometimes hunters went alone to hunt pigs. For this, the hunter first determined the place where the animals would sleep, cross, or the area where they would come out for food. A hunter standing in ambush could shoot when the animal came to that place or crossed the path [11]. Similarly, the method of boar hunting was also known in Ganjabasar region. However, here such collective hunting method is called "battue". Sometimes the villagers, who did not have firearms, dug long, narrow and deep wells in their paths to prevent wild boars from destroying their melon and vegetable crops. Ethnographer F. Valiyev says that "in the forests along the banks of the Iori (Gibirri) river in the Eldar region of the former Samukh land, the local population used to plant watermelons and melons and provide for their livelihood [12].

During the melon ripening period (in August-September), boar herds living in the Vashlovan Forest Reserve of neighboring Georgia, feeding on juniper cones, but often coming to the Ghabirri River to drink water due to the scarcity of drinking water, caused great damage to the melons in these areas. In order to avoid this, gardeners and amateur hunters used to mark the paths where the herds of wild boars passed, dug a narrow, long and deep well there, and lightly covered the top with branches and tree leaves [13]. My grandfather Jamil (Jamil Khalilov), a competent horticulturist who has been engaged in forest horticulture for years, once said that we dug a well on the boar trail during the day and waited for the herd of boars to come at night.

I have seen with my own eyes that such herds are usually preceded by a big male boar who leads the herd. At some point in the night, it seemed to fall into the forest. Knowing that the "leader" of the herd fell into the well, the other boars ran away from the forest. When he came near the well in the morning, we saw there a boar weighing about 80-100 kg. Our hunter friend shot him and neutralized him [14]. We peeled the boar and cut up it out just in the well. Although some time has passed since this event, the boars did not come close to the border of our melon".

Boar and rabbit hunting was widespread not only in Eldar villages (Poylu, Karabagli, Salahli, Kasaman, Burungovag villages), but also in all the villages of Sarigamish, Topalhasanli, Toganali Shamkir district, Irmashli, Duyarli, Bayramli, Ayrim land of Samukh district. In the 80s of the 19th century, N.A. Abelov wrote that cattle herders wintering on the banks of the Sangar, Ishkenuy and Kura Rivers of the region were engaged in wild boar hunting. They sold the shot boars to merchants of Armenian descent from the city of Sighnag [15].

The amateur hunters living in the region hunt wolves, jackals, foxes, bear cubs and other wild animals often caught by setting traps. "Traps were made of iron by local craftsmen. They consisted of a hearth tongue, a bow, scissors and a chain. There were three hooks at the end of the chain. The traps which were usually fixed to the ground or tied to a tree placed on animal trails. In order to hide the trap, they were covered with grass and a piece of meat was placed over them. An animal trying to take the meat from the trap would fall into the trap by its legs and arms. Fur-bearing animals were often caught with a trap (so that their skin would not be damaged)" [16].

Badger, fox, mole and jackal were sometimes hunted by smoke. The hunters, who determined the location of the nests dug by these animals in the ground, lit a fire in the mouth of its mouth and gave smoke to the nest [17]. When the animal suffocated from the smoke came out, the hunters hit it with a stick and killed it [18]. There were many well-known hunting methods for hunting wild birds in the Ganjabasar region. Although there are many methods of bird hunting in Azerbaijan such as is bait, trap, net, clap-net, niga, domcha-chirag, hunting with sweat, woodchuck, dovla, cage, mount, etc. [19,20] hunting with rifles, decoys, spears, doulas, partly with nets, traps and cages were widespread here mainly. Hunting of birds (turaj, partridge) was mainly done by the population of the villages around the forest.

The obtained game birds (turaj, partridge, wild duck, etc.) were sold to the merchants of Tbilisi and Yelizavetpol (Ganja - V.V.) [21]. Yelizavetpol art school teacher Y.

Yemelyanov wrote in 1895 in his article "The ornithological situation of Yelizavetpol and its surroundings and the sayings of the local population about birds" that "among the birds that are the main hunting object of amateur hunters and suppliers of hunting products here, quail is the most common in late April-May in the beginning, they flew to the area, laid eggs and hatched [22]. Depending on the year, they sometimes come more and sometimes less they went Their beauty fascinated hunters. During the summer they mate, build nests and sing. They did not hunt quail at that time. Quail hunting is allowed only from July 15 on the eve of the state, and the hunt continued until October. Sometimes quail could be found in the area in winter." Autumn was considered the best time for hunting. At this time, a large flock of birds left their nests, and the newly hatched chicks were seen everywhere under the supervision of their parents [23].

Birds from the family of chickens were the hunting object that hunters were most interested in. Firstly, it was easy to shoot and shoot them, and secondly, it was more profitable to hunt large birds, unlike other small hunting objects (why do they need to waste gunpowder in the air and on the ground?), hunters said. Common and Colchis pheasants were mostly hunted among large birds [24]. They were the pride of the places where they lived. Whether flying or walking on the ground, these birds were considered the crown and the most beautiful of all birds. The best time for pheasant hunting was considered to be 1-2 hours after sunrise: at that time, they would come out of the reeds and fill the nearby meadows and wheat fields.

During the day, these birds hid in impenetrable thickets and reeds, so that even the best-trained hunter could not drive them to prey. Around 5-6 in the evening, they could be seen again in the nearby fields and fields. Gray quail – hazel hen and partridge also belonged to the family of chickens. Each of them was bigger than a quail, and filled the mountains and hills here with their songs" [25]. The author considers the turaj, which is one of the hunting objects, a bird belonging to the Ganjabasarregion, and provides some detailed information about it. "Turaj is bigger than mountain partridge in size. The light oak color is complemented by the white spots on the tips of the black feathers. The chest of the male is dark oak-colored, and there is a dark oak-colored ring on the neck. They are sedentary birds and usually live in families.

Turajs live in fields and meadows, in bushy and rushy areas near reservoirs. They walk away from the thick forest and do not sit on trees. When they are scared, they appear in the fields rare, they try to hide in a safer place. In the cold and snowy winter, turajs come closer to villages and haystacks to find food, where it is not difficult to catch them at this time. These birds are very delicate and do not tolerate cold, frosty weather at all. As an exception, they were spread in the territory of Yelizavetpolgovernorate and partly in Baku governorate (in the middle and lower reaches of the Kura). Our hunter-gatherers are implacable enemies of these birds, if no measures are taken to protect them, they will be completely eradicated in the near future. The local population interprets the song sung by the turaj as follows:

Turac always sings:
Dit-didi, dit-didi!
Oh they caught me
They smoked and fried.
Dit-didi, dit-didi!
They ate my flesh
They threw my bones
Dit-didi, dit-didi!"

The ethnographic data we have collected shows that in the past, in the Ganjabasar region, a bird called terlan(falcon) was widely used for partridge hunting, but hunting with dovla was usually considered superior in the mentioned period. In the region, hunters made dovla from a 1.5-1.5 m white cloth embroidered with different colored fabrics. On the reverse side of this hunting tool, which is visually decorated, a tree was

attached crosswise, and a handle was made there. In addition, a pair of holes was opened at the top for sighting through the barrel, and a hole was opened slightly below for aiming the barrel of the rifle at the hunting object. The hunter was hiding behind the dovla, waiting for the prey. The partridges, which reacted very sensitively to the bright colors, soon began to flock to the barn. At that time, the hunter shot the partridges. By frequently changing the location of the dovla, the hunter could shoot 60-70 partridges during the day.

In the method of hunting with a cage, the hunter once caught a partridge alive and kept it in a wooden box or a net cage and brought it with him to the hunting area and lay in wait outside. At the sound of the partridge singing in the cage, other partridges would come closer to it and thus be exposed to the hunter's fire. Sometimes they put a mirror next to the partridge in the cage so that it could continuously cluck. It is known that in partridge hunting, sometimes there is used a tool called humsu, which produces bird sounds. In the Ganjabasar region, it was also known to catch game birds with a javelin. "The very simple shawls were usually made of horsehair. The nets were placed in the places where the birds were fed and slept or at the mouth of their nests. Jales were widely used in autumn and winter. Birds caught in the trap would be taken out alive".

Sometimes they could catch waterfowl by deception. For this, trained domestic ducks are used, they lure wild ducks close to the hunters, so that the hunters who are lying in ambush in the lakes can hunt them at close range. Duck hunting with a net was the same as in other regions of Azerbaijan, but this method of hunting was rare in the region. B Yemelyanov, talking about the hunting of wild birds such as pigeons, ducks, coots, cranes, etc., wrote that "pigeon comes to these places very early. They also roam in flocks like hens. The smallest and most delicate type of pigeons is the alabakhta (rock pigeon). At the end of summer, hunters from villages near the forest and small thickets near the riverbanks mercilessly hunt doves and alabakhtas that come to the river for water at noon with guns in hand.

Although most of them fly to warm countries in winter, some of them winter on the coastal cliffs of Ganjachay. At the end of August-beginning of September, large numbers of flocks of different species fly to the lake and lake marshes of Ganjabasar. When they fly, several fly in a flock. It is very difficult to hunt them. For this, the hunter is required to shoot accurately. Their zigzagging flight is very beautiful. Although game birds, called forest grouse, arrive a little late - at the end of October, they are considered one of the most favorite hunting objects of hunters. Sometimes cranes are found in the area.

With the arrival of winter, the hunting of ducks and mallards begins. The latter arrive in late autumn. Sometimes swarms of locusts descend on the fields in large groups, stay here for a long time when the year is relatively warm, and fly to the far south when it is cold, and then return again, thus migrating from place to place all winter. Buzzards are very cautious birds, they roost in such a place that they can see the coming danger from a distance. The most favorable moment for hunting them is considered after heavy rains, because beavers whose wings are completely wet cannot fly far.

Simultaneously with the arrival of ducks, different species of field ducks also arrive in the swamps and small lakes of Ganjabasar. Some of them come into these places in order to rest and gather strength to fly away to the shores of the Caspian in the future, and some of them stay here until spring. In Ganjabasar duck hunting is done either in the morning at dusk or at sunset - when they come from the pastures to the water for the night".

4. Conclusion

The hunting profession, which has been greatly improved due to various empirical knowledge, professional habits, and tried-and-tested experiences, gained considerable fame in the Ganjabasar region at the beginning of the 19th-20th centuries, and many hunting methods and tools were introduced to the local population. As in many regions of Azerbaijan, in the Ganjabasarregion, it is usually preferred to hunt collectively or individually. Hunting and fishing with hunting tools such as fire guns, hunting dogs,

traps, nets, traps, trained birds, smoke, clubs, and fishing with nets, hooks, swinging baskets, rafts, dams in riverbeds, etc. were widespread among the population. Fire guns (previously a stand-off, and from the end of the 19th century a single-action rifle) were made by local craftsmen in Ganja. Sometimes rifles made by craftsmen from Baku, Darbend, Shamakhi, Sheki, Shusha, and Lahij, as well as factory rifles produced in Tula could be found in a wealthy bey, beyzade, kokha, etc. families.

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