THE PHENOMENON *ŠILTĀQĀT* AND ITS REFLECTIONS IN THE ARMENIAN HISTORICAL MILIEU[*]

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Abstract

Since the end of the XIV century, in official documents and written sources on the history of the Ilkhanate, the term *šiltāqāt* is often found, the meaning of which is still not fully understood. The interpretation of the term was often given without regard to the substantive characteristics of the word: *šiltāqāt* is interpreted partially, sometimes conflicting, and approximately meaningful comments are given. *Šiltāqāt* has been interpreted as an illegal tax, a tax levied under various pretexts, a pretext or extraordinary tax, generally as a collective name for lawless taxes, etc. Moreover, what was the meaning and application of *šiltāqāt*? If it was a tax, in what amount, where, how, and under what circumstances was it levied?

Surely, since the Ilkhanid period *šiltāqāt* was levied on the subject peoples, and hence the term should have been reflected in the reports of the economic life of those same peoples. In particular, the article deals with the mention of *šiltāqāt* in the Armenian sources, the use and semantic meanings of the term or phenomenon. Interestingly, during the post-Ilkhanid period until the early 16th century, the term does not occur in Armenian sources at all. However, later on, begining from the 16th century in Armenian historical sources, and interestingly, also in various Armenian dialects, the term (sometimes in a distorted form) is often found, as well as a description of the phenomenon. The purpose of this article is to collect all the information and references to *šiltāqāt* in the Armenian sources, and on the basis of this as additional historical material, try to make clarifications of *šiltāqāt*, its application, meaning, etc. by means of source analysis.

Keywords: Šiltāqāt; šiltağ, etymology; Ilkhanid; tax system, illegal taxing; Armenian sources; Nakhčiwānī.

Šiltāqāt: meaning and etymology

The word *šiltāqāt* is formed from the Turkic-Mongolian *šiltāq* and the Arabic plural suffix *-āt*. Contrary to the common misconception that it is a Mongolian word, it must be said that *šiltāq* (and hence *'šiltāqāt'*) comes from the Uighur **tilta:ğ**, which means cause or preposition. It later was loaned into Mongolian, becoming *šiltağ* [6: 494]. One of the earliest definitions of the term was given by F. Meninsky in the last quarter of the 17th century, interpreting the term *šiltāq* as a far-fetched dispute, gossip, harassment [21: 2852: 1701: 1912].

The root of *šiltağ* was likely **til/dil**- "tongue", which entirely explains the meanings gossip, dispute, and slander of *šiltağ*. "*šiltağ*" was common among Tur-

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kic and Mongolian peoples [19: 147-151]. The dictionaries of L. Budagow [35: 671], J. Vuller [15: 457], and A. Vámbéry [35: 365] published almost simultaneously in 1860-1870s show a remarkable interpretation of the word. In the dictionaries listed, the *šiltağ* is primarily interpreted in the sense of detection, lies and falsehoods, quarrels, enmities, bad reputations, and only in one case, a pretext, an opportunity. The definitions falsehood and gossip are interesting to see in Armenian examples with translations close to those meanings. V. Radloff also represents the meanings "lying, slander, and gossip" of the word, but he also mentions the meaning "'burglary and oppression'" which is especially visible in the derivative translation of *šiltāqçī*- a robber, plunderer [41: 1078-1079].

The origin of *šiltağ* was probably the stem **til/ dil** *(*language*)*, which fully explains the meaning of *šiltağ* (in the sense of slander, gossip and calumny) among the Turkic and Mongol peoples. In the dictionaries of L. Budagow, J. Vuller and A. Vambery, published almost at the same time, the interpretation of this word is remarkably interesting. In the mentioned dictionaries *šiltağ* is mostly interpreted in the sense of exposure, lies and falsity, quarrel, enmity, bad reputation, and only in one case - pretext. The primary meanings in the sense of lie and gossip are interesting to see in the Armenian examples with close translations. Radloff's explanation of the word is somewhat different. He also presents the meanings "lie, slander and gossip" of the word, but he also mentions the meaning robbery and oppression, which is especially evident in the derivative translation of the word *šiltāqçī* - brigand, robber. According to another explanation, the word comes from Turkic-Mongolian **siltan'an** - to make an excuse [13: 155].

One of the first experiments in the interpretation of *šiltāqāt* in the special literature was V. Minorsky's analysis of the *soyurghal* of Qasim b. Jahangir Aq-Qoyunlu. According to the author, *šiltāqāt* is derived from the Mongolian words *šiltaghan* and *siltaq* and had the meaning "pretext". Minorsky, referring to N. Poppé's Mongolian dictionary, explains the word with the synonym for the Persian word *bahāne* as a pretext or reason. [40: 333]. later gained the meanings oppression and persecution and clearly states that it was a tax obligation [22: 930; 947]. It should be noted that Minorsky's explanation was later borrowed and used by many other scholars. E. Ashtor interprets *šiltāqāt* as extraordinary taxes in the fiscal system of Iraq during the post-Iranian period [9: 250]. P. Luft considers *šiltāqāt* as an unapproved and illegal tax according to the Shariah, but an established and existing tax imposed by the authorities [28: 92-95]. It is difficult to agree with the opinion of the famous Soviet Orientalist I. Petrushevsky that *šiltāqāt* had the meaning of collective taxes and was similar to *ikhrajat* [37: 277-278]. The author contradicts his observation that *šiltāqāt* was a tax obligation when he stresses that Ahmed Gövde's reform [0: 19&9; 39: 28-37] was necessary in order to "not disturb anyone with [the taxes] *šiltāqāt* and *ikhrajāt*" [37: 273], and if they are the same thing, why both names are mentioned in the firman?

The illegal taxing mechanism and phenomenon of *šiltāqāt* should be sought in the Mongolian "environment", that is during the Mongol Empire. The possible an-

swer to the question can be found in the work of Rashid ad-din, who describes an interesting system of illegal taxation. According to history, the administrative territories of the Ilkhanate were given to hākims with cabāla to tax. Tax collectors and messengers were sent from the royal court to levy the collected taxes, whose living and other expenses had to be taken care of by hākims through a tax. The hākims were spending 4/6 of the taxed money on them, and they owned the remaining money by distributing the bitikchis[1], nāibs[2], and viziers. As a result, tax collection was needed again and hākims justified the collection of new taxes in front of rayats by pointing to the fact that messengers were sent for the mission of taxation. Again, taxes were imposed on those who were sent, for example, victualling - *ulūfe*, as important tasks-*muhimmāt*, as extraordinary expenses, and requirements-*ikhrajāt*, etc. Naturally, the tax collected again did not reach the royal court either. The viziers entering into a deal with hākims allocated berats to collect taxes, with which the messengers were directed to the hākims and returned empty-handed. According to Rashid ad-Din, the court or treasury was receiving a maximum of 2 dinars instead of 10. As a result, to the surprise of rayats[3] and Rashid ad-Din, some of the taxes were spent extravagantly on messengers, then those expenses have increased and thereby validated the need for double taxation and not sending the money collected from taxes to court [42: 247-256]. That is, there was a phenomenon of double or extra taxing.

According to Rashid ad-Din, Ghazan Khan used his reforms to put an end to this practice. However, it is safe to say that the reforms of Ghazan Khan did not have a long life. This is evidenced by the following. In the record of Armenian manuscripts, one of the authors similarly describes the above phenomenon, writing that during the reign of Muhammad *Öljaitü* Khodabande Khan (1304-1316) "they came in spring and taxed, then the khan died in autumn (1316) and Aghlaghu, Sin-Tamur? and HasanTamur? with 1300 people came and taxed again" (*կրկին հարկ առին*) [47: 341]. It can be assumed that the above-described incidents of the late XIII - early XIV century describe *šiltāqāt*, the method of its levying and characterize it as additional taxation (often for far-fetched reasons). In our opinion, *šiltāqāt* as the term for illegal taxation, appeared because the collection of other taxes was done under false, artificial pretexts, which is evidenced by the inscription of Abu

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[1] Bitikchi-a scribe, secretary (also bichechi), or an officer in the Mongol administrative apparatus [27: 45].

[2] The Arabic word "*Naib*" signifying simply a deputy, mainly meant provincial governor, e.g. naib of a castle, naib of a province [24: 79; 145-148], and under the Mongols it meant a deputy ruler or viceroy and so on [12: 270]. There are also various forms and meanings such as *naib ul-imam* (or a deputy of the Hidden Imam) [11: 81], *naib ul-sultanat* (regent) [16: 302], *malik naib* (deputy of regent) [4: 96]. In Sunni Islamic law, it refers to the authorized representative of a *qadi* (judge) [10: 228].

[3] The term rayat, which denoted the subject population, came from an Arabic word which originally meant a flock of sheep. In Iran it meant peasant, peasantry [25: 235]. **Rayat** was a somewhat derogatory **Arabic** term used throughout the Middle East and by the Ottoman administration for the **peasantry** [18: 257].

Said in Ani: "Let nothing else be collected from any person under the pretext [of taxes] kalan, nemeri, and tarkh" [52: 318].

One of the first testimonies of *šiltāq* and *šiltāqāt* is found in medieval written sources in the work of the Jalayirid royal official Muhammad Hindushah Nakhjivani: "The mentioned inspectors (the police) should not seek cling and delay the needs of those in need because of any spurious pretext or dispute." (That is, for no reason they should do anything illegal [should not extort?]) [38: 300]. Next, Nakhjivani also mentions an Arabicized plural version of *šiltāqāt*, with -**āt.** particle-*šiltāqāt*, which was apparently one of the first testimonies found in written sources. Here, the author uses the term to refer to illegal taxation. The text reveals that in the 14th century, **šiltāqāt** was already a big problem, damaging the economic and social life of the Ilkhanate. Nakhjivani writes, "and if it's because of what claim kadkhudās[4], then hākims, mutasarrifs[5], nökärs[6] and their appointers, what they have taken from the people with the **šiltāqāt** and *šanāqiś* have to return to the people, hand them over, and never consider the apology to be generosity" [26: 434].

The *šiltāqāt* in the Armenian historical milieu.
It is interesting that **šiltāq** or **šiltāqāt** is never mentioned in the Armenian sources of the 13th-15th centuries, neither as a tax or duty, nor in other forms. However, it is obvious that the term was used and began to appear in sources from the 16th-18th century. L. Khachikyan suggests that during the preceding period, without the use of the word **šiltāqāt**, but in the same sense, Armenian manuscripts contain references to the fine and oppressio [49: 79]. In Armenian sources, since the 16th century, the word has been found in the form *š(ə)lt'ağ(kh)* (շ(ը)լթաղ(խ)), *šilt'ağ* (շիլթաղ), *šlt'akh* (շլթախ), *š(ə)rt'ākh* (շ(ը)րթախ). One of the first testimonies is found among the Armenian written sources, in Simeon Lehatsi's work, where **the term** is used in the sense of illegality, oppression, and calumny [52: 86; 272], in the *form šəlt'akh* and conjunction with the synonym *iftirā'* (slander)[7].

In one of the pastoral letters of the Catholicos Alexandr Jułayec'i (1706-1714), in the 14th certificate, applied the form *šəlt'ağ*, which contains the meaning of deception [47: 456-461].

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[4]Kadkhudā- The village headman, known as "Kadkhoda" (God of the Village) [8: 498], who acted as the representative of the village in its relations with the administration [17: 13]. It also means the **head** of a city or a **district** [33: 529].

[5] The *hākim* (governor) and *mutasarrif* are often mentioned in sources as civil officials who were concerned with fiscal affairs [31: 204].

[6]Nökär, noukär, nawkar - bodyguard of a ruler, comrade, **servant**, dependent, soldier [20: 174; 7: 161].

[7]**Iftirā'** - calumny, inventing a lie, falsehood, imposition, **Iftirā' kardan**- to defame, invent lies [32: 80].

At the same time, ***šilt'akh*** is used in the sense of slanderous oppression from 1717 to 1724, representative of the British East India Company in Tabriz, in Armenian Catholic merchant Ellias Mushelian's (Ełia Karnets'is) letter addressed to his French colleague Porécar (Policarpe, Polycarde?) [51: 61-74; 45: 103-114]. In a letter written in 1715, he asks Porécar to obtain a guarantee in Isfahan so that there are no obstacles to bringing his tambaku (tobacco) load because he has been warned that "they are ***doing šilt'ağ*** there", that is, slanderously and on various pretexts, trying to take away the goods, or at least to extort a fine or a bribe [46: 68]. The term is also found in Armenian fables and folk tales (again signifying pretext, calumny) [1: 763]. For example, in one of the fables of Ełia Karnets'is, were "the wolf makes a ***šlt'ağ*** to the lamb" («*գելը գառին շլթաղ անելով*»), that is, he accuses the lamb of dirtying the water of the spring from which the wolf was drinking, so that he can make the lamb guilty and eat it on a false pretext [5: 187]. In the same sense, one application was found to the form "***šilt'akh***" in Simeon Yerevantsi's **works,** where the term should also be understood in the sense of extorting money by calumny, especially that here has been "***šilt'akh***"-ed with "revenge" and "for hunger" [43: 349-350 Interestingly, the meaningful application of the ***šilt'akh*** dialectic word "**šar**" (*շառ* - spurious accusation) is also reflected in F. Meninsky's modern dictionary. Catholicos Abraham Kretatsi (1734-1737) uses the ***šiltāq*** in his history in the sense of tax terror: "And the Khans of Gendje (Gandzak) and other zabits always do "***šamata-šltāğ***" and do not allow the people to stay calm, but they always oppress and rob" [43: 74]. It is likely that in the 17th and 18th centuries, this term also penetrated Armenian dialects, with the meaning of being/doing something illegal, also obscene, and shameless. For example, "that's good that there's no ***šiltāğ*** (expression) between us'' (*էրված լավա, վեր մեր մաշին մին շլթաղ չի կա*) or "his wife is an ***šəltākh*** (shameless)'' (*աստո կրնիկը շլթախին մեկն է*) [50: 247]. In the Armenian dialects of Dersim [3: 157] and Kharberd [34: 267-269], the term is found slightly corrupted in the form ***š(ə)rt'ākh.***

Another good example of ***šiltāgh*** is found in the ethnographic notes about the Armenian community of Karadagh (Iran) of the early 20th century. The eyewitness and the author, who was from Karadagh itself, explains the essence of ***šiltāgh*** with a vivid example. When a peasant was hurrying on his donkey in the morning to work in the fields, border guard soldiers approached him and demanded his donkey (or demanded that he take them somewhere on the donkey). The peasant could not leave the case and give up the donkey, and then he would take money out of his pocket prepared in advance, give it to the soldiers, and they would let him go, and the latter would go to work quietly. This was ***šiltāgh***, i.e. the lawless taking of money, because the soldier could not leave his service, especially under the pretext of demanding money [14: 529; 570].

In conclusion, we can say that ***šiltāqāt*** as a fixed tax obligation clearly appears after the second half of the fifteenth century. This is evidenced by the decrees of the Aq-Qoyunlu and the Safavids, as well as written sources of the time. The

term *šiltāq* or *šiltāqāt* had different meanings depending on historical reality and era, as an illegal, unlawful tax (but only from the point of view of Shariah) or extra taxing, as illegality, pretext, calumny, robbery and oppression.

The mentions of the term and the definitions of the phenomenon in the Armenian sources attest to all the above-mentioned significations, and as for the dialects, the meanings "fictitious pretext" and "something illegal, illegitimate" or making an excuse were especially prevalent there. In the Armenian historical sources, the term is found in the 16th century, and in Armenian dialects the word was in use up to the 20th century.

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ՇԻԼԹԱՂԱԹԻ ԱՐՏԱՀԱՅՏՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ՊԱՏՄԱԿԱՆ ԻՐՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐՈՒՄ

Գոռ Մարգարյան

Բանալի բառեր՝ Շիլթաղաթ, շիլթաղ, ստուգաբանություն, իլխանական, հարկային համակարգ, անօրինական հարկում, հայկական աղբյուրներ, Նախջիվանի:

Հոդվածում փորձ է կատարվել ներկայացնել որպես հարկային եզրույթ, չարաշահում, ապօրինի հարկահանություն, տուգանք և տարբեր այլ նշանակություններով հայտնի շիլթաղաթ եզևույթի՝ հայկական ուշմիջնադարյան իրականության մեջ արտահայտումներն ու կիրառության դեպքերը, ընկալումներն ու դրա վերաբերյալ մեկնաբանությունները: Բացի այդ քննվում է հայկական աղբյուրներում և բարբառներում տեղ գտած եզրույթի նշանակությունը, հայտնվելու պատճառներն ու ժամանակաշրջանը և նրան հարիր իմաստային նրբերանգները: