



The Economic Functions of Robes and the Act of Granting Robes in the Qajar Era (According to the Reports of Foreign Travelers)

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Extended Abstract

Throughout various periods of Iranian history, diverse gifts played an important role in both internal governmental relations and diplomatic exchanges. These gifts, which varied based on their nature, were exchanged between higher-ranking and lower-ranking officials, as well as among officials of equal rank (specifically referring to the king in this context). During the Qajar dynasty, as the government became more solidified and stable, various gifts were exchanged in ceremonies and on special occasions, both in domestic and foreign relations. One of the most significant gifts of this period was the *khal'at*, which held special political, social, cultural, and economic significance. The *khal'at* referred to any gift granted by higher-ranking officials to lower-ranking ones. According to reports from historical texts and travelogues from the Qajar era, this type of gift was typically bestowed by the king on lower-ranking officials and held particular economic importance for the king, the court, and other state officials.

The *khal'at* refers to any gift granted by higher-ranking officials, including the king, to lower-ranking officials. Considering the ancient origins of the *khal'at* and the long-standing tradition of gifting in Iranian history, along with the detailed accounts left by foreign travelers, diplomats, and ambassadors during the Qajar era, a clearer understanding of the relationships and the exchange of *khal'at* among different levels of power emerges, offering valuable insights from their writings. During this period, the gifts bestowed by the king on his subordinates varied depending on the occasion, court ceremonies, and government services, with their value fluctuating based on the rank of the officials and government servants. Additionally, the granting of these gifts in foreign relations followed specific ceremonial protocols and included various types. The *khal'at* granted was of significant importance in the court's financial mechanisms. From the moment the king granted a *khal'at* until it reached the intended recipient, individuals involved in this cycle—ranging from the highest to the lowest ranks—exploited it financially in various ways. In fact, the Qajar kings used the practice of granting *khal'at* as a means to generate income and replenish the treasury. Conversely, the significance of this gift for the recipients also played a critical role in their financial strategies, particularly in terms of exploiting the subjects under their authority. Despite its economic function within the power structure, this practice had destructive and sometimes devastating consequences in various regions.



This research, based on European travelogues from the Qajar era, uses a descriptive-analytical approach to answer the question of what financial functions and consequences were associated with *khal'at* and the practice of gifting during the Qajar period.

The practice of granting and receiving *khal'at* during the Qajar era was an ancient custom with significant financial and economic importance. This study, focused on the financial and economic functions of the practice, revealed considerable differences across various levels of power. During this period, the Qajar kings employed multiple methods to fill the treasury, including granting *khal'at* to their subordinates. In this practice, the Qajar kings would grant and send *khal'at* to officials both in the capital and in the provinces on different occasions. Although this practice became a traditional and ceremonial act over time, the manner of its granting had a direct relationship with its financial function for the king and the court. Officials in different regions were expected to present annual tributes to the court based on their rank. However, *khal'at* also had political and economic consequences, including the influx of revenue into the treasury. While governors and officials throughout the country were required to present tributes, receiving *khal'at* from the king during special ceremonies, such as Nowruz (the Persian New Year), the largest gathering in the country, held particular significance. Gift-givers, ranging from the highest governmental officials to the lowest ranks, competed to attract the king's attention by offering increasingly valuable tributes in hopes of receiving *khal'at*. On the other hand, officials sought to gain political legitimacy through various means and, therefore, spent considerable amounts to achieve their goals. This practice, which often involved bribery, benefited even the lowest-ranking officials in the hierarchy.

In fact, government officials, especially governors, hierarchically incurred costs to gain the king's favor in exchange for receiving *khal'at*, contributing to filling the royal treasury. It is important to note that the practice of granting and receiving *khal'at* involved significant expenses for both the giver and the recipient. At times, the king would bestow highly valuable *khal'at* upon his subordinates, and granting *khal'at* to foreign ambassadors also increased the court's expenses. Although this practice involved exorbitant costs for the governors, the political significance of receiving royal *khal'at* was considerable. It made the governors in their respective regions more independent, powerful, and authoritarian, with no one capable of opposing them due to their royal gifts. However, the exchange of *khal'at*, in addition to generating financial resources and political legitimacy, had destructive consequences in various provinces and regions. After receiving *khal'at*, governors often resorted to exploiting their subjects to recoup their expenses, sometimes extracting taxes, tributes, and dues multiple times from them. This exploitation led to some areas becoming devastated and depopulated. The cycle of economic strain on the local populace, driven by the need to satisfy the royal demands and the governors' financial burdens, resulted in severe social and economic consequences for many regions, ultimately undermining the stability and welfare of these communities.

Keywords: Khal'at, offerings, Qajar kings, government positions, ceremonies.

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