

accorded him a special political prestige. In return for the services he rendered to the state, which included tithe collection, redistribution of the land and preparing men for conscription, the Head of the Hamula was often remunerated by the state. He was usually assigned an extra parcel of land as his own property or exempted from paying the tithe on his land. In fact, as the main and often the only appropriator of surplus, the head of the Hamula became the absolute authority in the village. In addition to his official functions, he was also the director of the village's vital internal affairs. He functioned as the legal body of the village, conducting marriages and divorces and settling familial conflicts (8).

The inheritance system functioned as a major factor in maintaining and reproducing the Hamula structure. Although the Sharia or the Moslem Law considered women as legal heirs, the law of tradition or custom (which did not) was overwhelmingly practiced. In big Hamulas endogamous marriage was employed as a mechanism to keep property within the Hamula. With a preference in marriage usually accorded to the cousin on the father's side, the head of the Hamula ensured that land remained under the control of the same family and did not pass to an outsider. In cases where the cousin himself was an owner, endogamous marriage could also ensure the expansion of the Hamula's property (9).

The process of concentration of power in the hands of the oldest male of the Hamula led to the emergence of economic and political differences among Hamula members. The immediate family of the head of the Hamula, and particularly his eldest son, usually received the lion's share, since he was expected to inherit his father's position. This structure left other relatives, including younger sons, in a less