

The Tsar's Abolitionists

Eurasian Studies Library

Historical, Political and Social Studies of Slavic
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VOLUME 2

The Tsar's Abolitionists

The Slave Trade in the Caucasus and Its Suppression

By

Liubov Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2010

Cover illustration: Stanislas von Chlebowski, *Purchasing a Slave*, Constantinople; oil on canvas, signed and dated 1879; (93×72 cm). Archives Berko Fine Paintings, Knokke-le-Zoute.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan, Liubov.

The Tsar's abolitionists : the slave trade in the Caucasus and its suppression / by Liubov Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan.

p. cm. – (Eurasian studies library ; v. 2)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-18344-5 (hbk. : alk. paper)

1. Slave trade–Caucasus–History–19th century. 2. Slavery–Caucasus–History–19th century. 3. Slavery–Russia–History–19th century. 4. Caucasus–Economic I. Title. II. Series.

HT1315.C28K87 2010

326'.809475–dc22

2009053516

ISSN 1877-9484

ISBN 978 90 04 18344 5

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

*To Professor Mikhail S. Meier
with gratitude and love*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

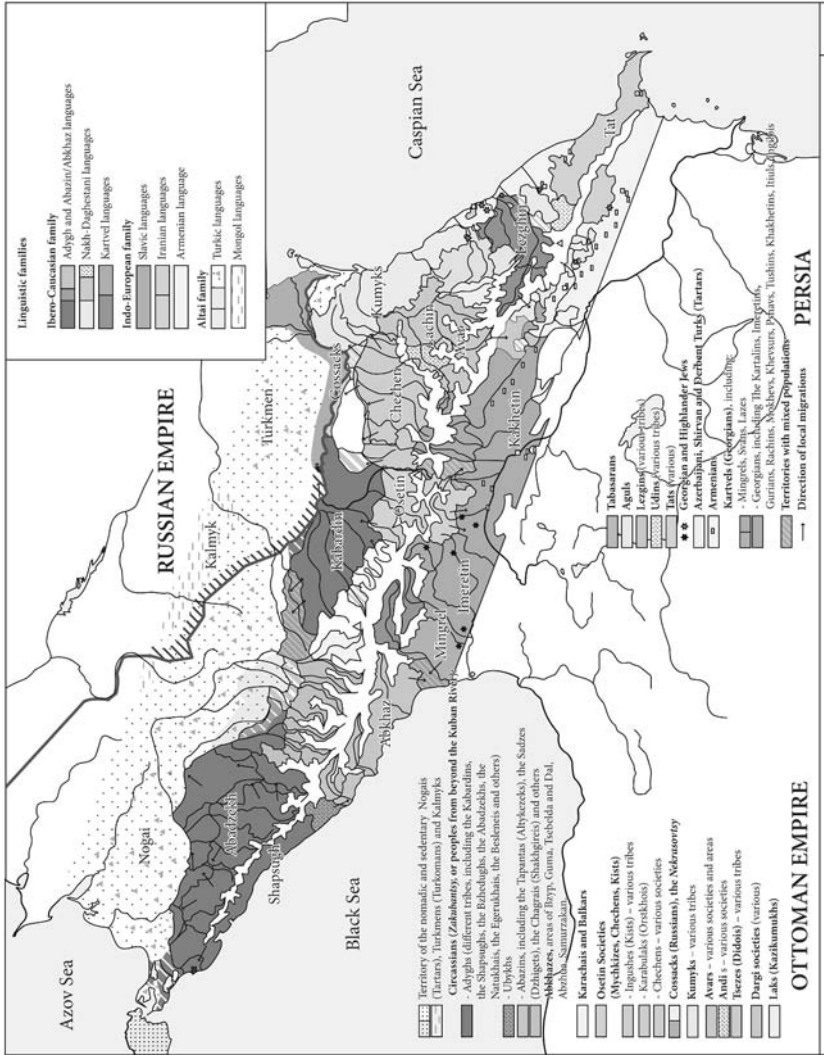
This book turned out to be a long-term project. Much longer than I bargained for when I started working on my Ph.D. thesis on the abolition of slave trade in the Caucasus when at Binghamton University in a breathtakingly beautiful corner of Upstate New York. I would not have been able to stay the course and finally finish it if not for the support of many people, who helped me along the way with their advice, staunch belief that I could do it and encouragement when I needed it. I am expressing my gratitude, which is much greater than I could possibly put into words, to everybody who helped me stay on track, and I am doing it in more or less the order of their appearance in my academic life, so as not to forget anybody to whom I am indebted. First and foremost, my profound gratitude goes to Mikhail Serafimovich Meier, my first academic adviser at the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Moscow State University and to his wife Rufina Rudol'fovna Viatkina, who believed in my success in spite of all the proof to the contrary. Also, I would like to thank all my professors and teachers at the Institute of Asian and African Studies, especially my teachers of Turkish language and Middle Eastern and Turkish history. I am also indebted to my professors at Binghamton University, who helped me through the first years of life in the US and encouraged my ambition of an academic career. My profound thanks go to Immanuel Wallerstein and his wife Beatrice, to William Haver, Kenneth Strauss and Mark Kulikowski. I am extremely grateful to Artur Tsutsiev for his most generous offer to use a few of the maps from his incredible *Atlas of the Ethno-political History of the Caucasus, 1774–2004*. I hope this atlas is published in English as soon as possible—it's a real treasure for every scholar working in the field of the Caucasian history. In the course of my work on this book many people helped me with their advice, by expressing their opinions, sharing their experience and sometimes simply by supporting me through a rough patch. I would like to thank Anatolii Khazanov, Sergei Arutiunov, Michael Khodarkovskii, Anatol Lieven and his wife Sasha, Andrei Illarionov, Alexander Knysh, William Reno, Andrei Korotaev, Galina Khizrieva, Ilya Kutik, Andrew Wachtel and all my other colleagues who contributed to my ability to finish this project. My particular gratitude goes to those who read the manuscript at different stages of its completion and made suggestions for its improvement. I

simply can't thank enough John Bushnell, Arthur Stinchcombe and Timothy Earle for all they have done for me. Without their advice this book would not be possible. I am also profoundly thankful to the anonymous assessors at Brill Publishers, who have done a marvelous job at analyzing the manuscript and recommending ways of making it better. I am grateful for their good opinion and only wish I could implement all the changes they proposed. I am sure, however, that their advice will be invaluable to me in the future. Speaking of Brill Publishers, I am very grateful to my editors Ivo Romein and Brigitta Poelmans, who have been most patient with me and supportive throughout the whole publishing process. It goes without saying that all the mistakes and shortcomings of the book are mine alone.

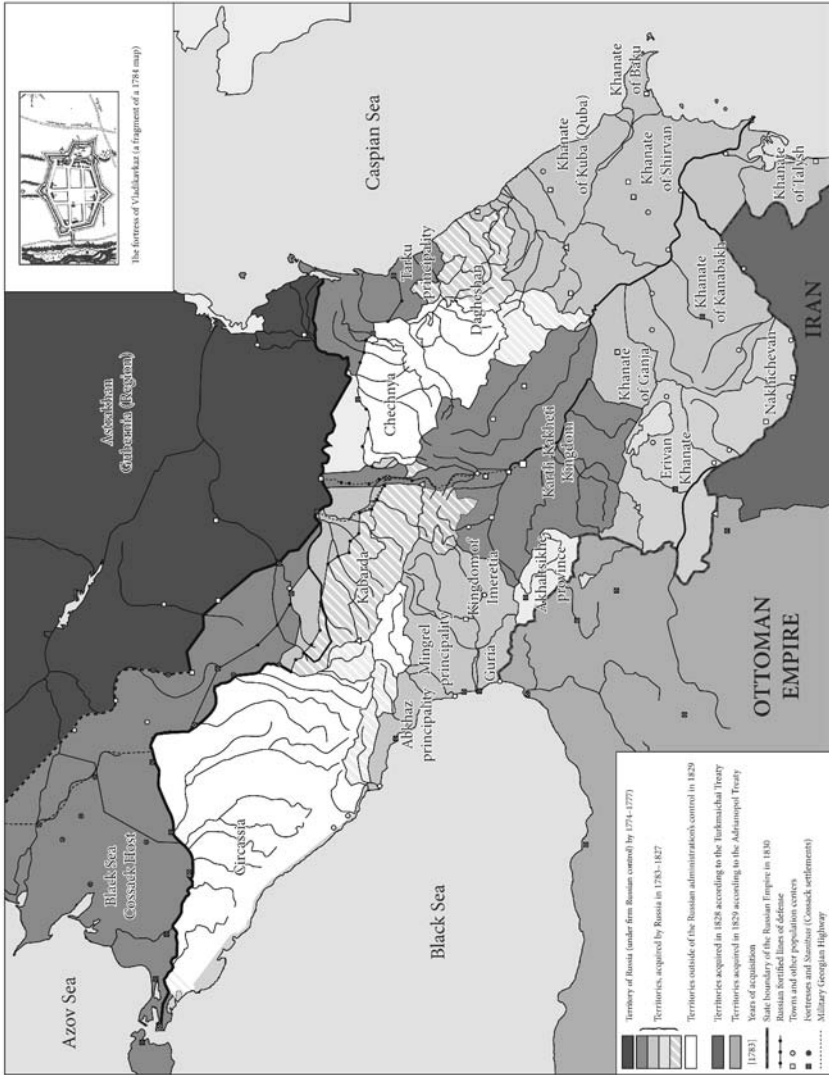
I could not have accomplished anything in my life, let alone write this book, without the everyday support from my friends, who have been helping in many different ways throughout my life. My deepest gratitude to my friend Olga Fedosova, who sacrificed a few months of her life in order to come to my side and help me take care of my children when I needed it most. My thanks to Rita and Igor Kuznetsov, who shared a lot of my burdens and thus made them easier to carry. I am forever indebted to my old friends Elena Ermolaeva and Elena Shlezinger for their unwavering support and for staying with me through thick and thin even with all the distance separating us. My thanks to all my friends in Russia: Andrei Grafov and his parents, Georgii Krylov, Vladimir and Marina Vsevolozhskiis and their son Kirill, Iuliia Shirokova and Masha Markevich, Natasha Tiukina and Maksim Artamonov for everything they've done for me. My deepest gratitude to my friends in the US: Rita Koryan, Michael Bogdasarian, Carol Bogdasarian, Pamela O'Shaughnessy, Tatiana Tulchinsky, David Rubman, Kristina Bushnell, Scott Greer, Arkadii Shemiakin and his wife Zhenia, Elena and Evgenii Petrov, Vladimir Naumov and his family, Margaret and Marek Malko, Joanne Blumberg, Sara Gordon and Reg Fendick. I am grateful to Ekaterina Kondrat'evna and Matvei Matveevich Derluguian, Irina and Vladimir Tiukin for being the most wonderful in-laws anybody could wish for. I would like to thank my family for being there for me: my brother Zhenia, his wife Elena and their children, my uncle Vladislav and aunt Liusia.

Finally and most importantly I would like to thank my sons Martin and Stephen for inspiring me to do my best and to aspire for higher goals in life not only for my sake, but for theirs as well. I hope this book contributes to this task a little.

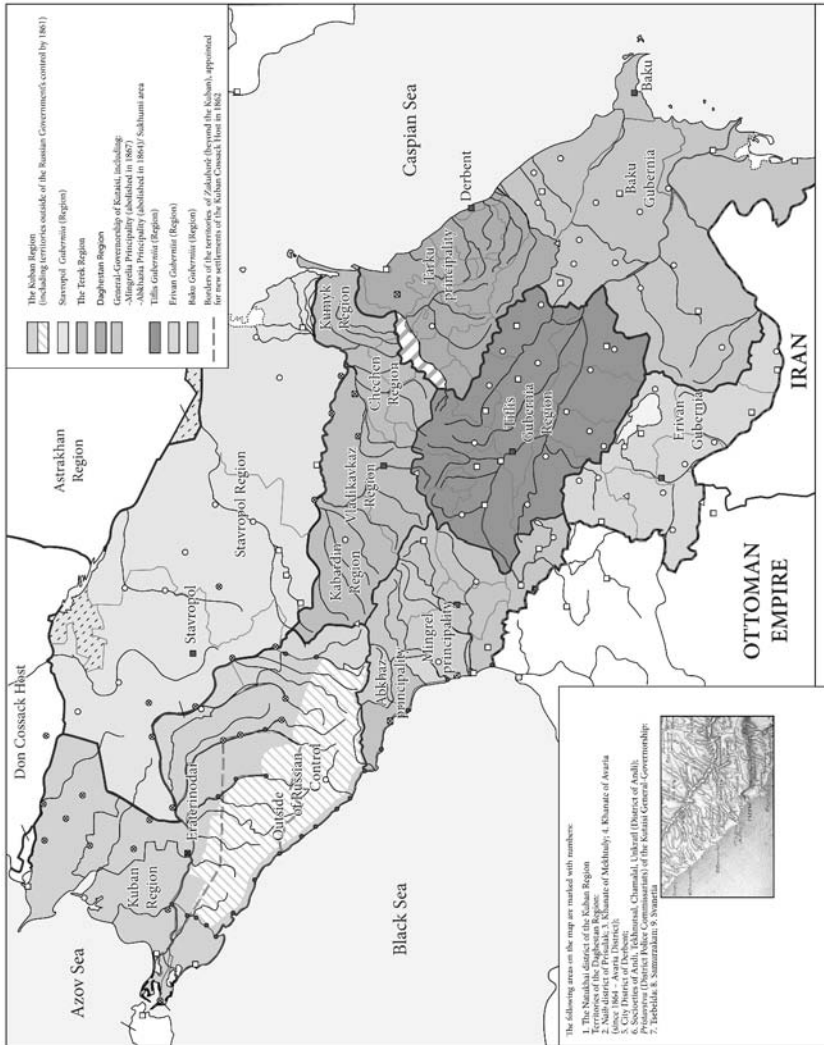
MAPS



Map 1. Ethno-linguistic Map of the Greater Caucasus



Map 2. Russia's Territorial Acquisitions in 1774–1829



Map 3. Administrative and Territorial Division by 1861-1864

INTRODUCTION

Sine Ira et Studio

An American tourist stood on top of a hill, looking down on the valley before him. He was already used to the breathtaking landscapes of the Northern Caucasus. He had seen the foothills of the mountains that fell abruptly into the Black Sea from dizzying heights, the narrow gorges, cut by the swift mountain creeks and the rare but beautiful valleys, overgrown with luxurious vegetation. This valley was different, however. Neither its beauty nor its fruitfulness attracted people here. This had been the final destination of a great many of trade caravans coming from all over the Northern Caucasus. Traders covered long distances by difficult and dangerous mountain roads in order to bring their merchandize to this market. For a long time, they had to be careful of a new threat, apart from the usual hazards of the mountainous terrain. The Russian Imperial troops intercepted these caravans whenever they could and confiscated the goods. If the merchant was not lucky enough to escape, he stood a good chance of being publicly hanged in one of the Russian-occupied towns . . . But if all went well, the merchant could expect fabulous returns on his investment. The Ottoman market simply could not have enough of Circassian slaves and a lot of them used to come to the markets of Istanbul or Izmir from here, from the port of Anapa.

To how many thousands of Circassian maidens has this been the bright surveying point of a brilliant destiny! To how many, at least, has it appeared so, when, after traversing the long, ragged ravines of the Caucasus they have reached the summit of these neighboring heights, and gazed with throbbing hearts on the fair city below them! The vision of their childhood, the dreams of their girlish days, the aspirations of their riper years, were here about to assume a form, a tangibility, a reality;—they were to pass from a state of servitude, dependence, and, perhaps, poverty, to a life of splendid ease, of enviable independence, luxury and love.¹

There is a certain wistfulness and romantic regret in this admiring description. By the time the author of these lines visited the Caucasus

¹ George Leighton Ditson, *Circassia; A Tour to the Caucasus* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1850), 174–175, 177.

Anapa had long ceased to be a thriving slave-market. It had become a fortified town ruled by the Russian military administration, a center from which the Russian Imperial authority was extending its power over the local peoples and territories. The Black Sea coastal line was of particular concern for the Russians—although Anapa was no longer a slave-market town, the slave trade itself was far from being discontinued. It was now riskier than ever before, and was conducted in secret coves on the shore under the cover of darkness (circumstance highly appreciated by romantic writers, especially tourists), but it was just as brisk as usual. Slaves of Circassian origin were still in high demand in the Ottoman Empire; the demand for them seemed to be growing even as the procurement became more dangerous,

Admiring descriptions of the brilliant career awaiting Caucasian slaves at their final destination were, at the time, quite popular among the Western travelers in the region. This was, after all, the time of the “Great Game”, a period of bitter geopolitical political contest between the West (with Great Britain as its unquestionable leader) and the new military superpower—the Russian Empire. The spread of the Russian political influence in Asia and in the Caucasus was watched in Europe with suspicion and apprehension. Likewise, when the Russian authorities declared the suppression of slave trade in the Russian Empire and its neighboring territories as their goal, it was seen as no more than a pretext for territorial expansion. A British journalist of a widespread, if somewhat scandalous fame, James S. Bell, in the Introduction to his travelogue openly accuses “one person alone: the Emperor of Russia with his insatiable desire for power and conquest” of all the horrors of the Caucasian War.²

Even for the tourists such as Mr. Ditson who admired many Russians personally and much in Russia in general, and especially for the politically engaged journalists such as Mr. Bell, the anti-slavery campaign in the Caucasus was nothing but a veil drawn over the Imperial expansion. Only once in his detailed three-year journal does Mr. Bell mention slave trade off the Circassian coast (“These two girls ardently desired to go to Istanbul in search of their fortunes, which means in our terms being sold as slaves (...) which fills us with terror and moral suffering mixed

² James Stanislaus Bell, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia during the Years 1837, 1838 and 1839*; London, Edward Moxon, MDCCCXL Introduction.

together”),³ and even then he never refers to the Russian effort in the abolition of the phenomenon which caused him such moral suffering and terror.

It is doubtful whether either of these travelers ever heard of an episode, which shows the abolitionist policy of the Russians in a very different and dramatic light.⁴ In January 1829 Alexander Griboedov, aged 33, a distinguished Russian diplomat, brilliant writer and musician of considerable talent, was the Ambassador of the Russian Empire in Persia.⁵ Three slaves belonging to the household of the Shah and his family sought asylum in the Russian Mission in Teheran. They were not lowly menial servants, but each of them could be seen as the very epitome of the glories of a “career slave”: two young women belonged to the harem of the Shah’s son-in-law and the man (a eunuch, as was the custom for such highly-placed male slaves in Persia) was one of the top administrators of the Shahs’ government—a *vazir* (vizier) in charge of the Shah’s privy purse. All three slaves were of Armenian origin, born and captured in the territory, which had become part of the Russian Empire according to the Turkmanchai Treaty of 1828, and, by the same Treaty, they had a right to return to their native land under the protection of the Russian Ambassador. Thousands of other people in the same condition followed this route, but they did not attract so much attention because their owners were not, for the most part, prominent people. This case was very different, however: all three slaves were property of the Shah and his immediate family, and, therefore, as the popular opinion in Teheran put it, the Russian Ambassador insulted their Sovereign by extending his protection to these ungrateful slaves. High Persian officials applied a lot of pressure to persuade the slaves to return to their owners. Griboedov was warned

³ James Stanislaus Bell, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia during the Years 1837, 1838 and 1839*; London, Edward Moxon, MDCCCXL, p. 43.

⁴ Mr. Bell might have known about this episode, being, after all, very much involved in the British politics in the Caucasus, but nothing in his writings indicates that he did.

⁵ This story is to any educated Russian what the story of George Washington and the cherry tree is to any American: it is common knowledge from secondary school. Therefore, I will tell it here without further footnotes because in my mind it is impossible to trace the origins of the information. However, to preserve academic integrity of the present work, I refer those of my readers who can read in Russian to a great (and, unfortunately, thoroughly ignored in the West) novel by Iurii Tynianov “*Smert’ Vazir-Mukhtara*” (*The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar*), any edition will do. Those who do not read in Russian will have to be content with a monograph by Laurence Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran* (I.B. Tauris Publishers: London-New York, 2002). This is not as thrilling a read as *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar*, but overall it follows the novel with a tenacity, rather surprising for an academic monograph.

that the anti-Russian sentiment of the populace of Teheran was growing fast and presented real danger for himself and for the Mission. However, he refused to withdraw his protection from the people who trusted him and decided to defend the principles he believed in. As the tension grew, a mob instigated by the Shi'a clergy, stormed the Russian Mission and butchered the runaway slaves as well as every Russian they could lay their hands on, including grooms in the stables. Griboedov was literally torn to pieces by the mob: his head was on display at a butcher's stall for days, while his body, after having been dragged all over Teheran by the feet, was thrown on a garbage heap.⁶

This story puts the admiring accounts of Caucasian maidens eagerly awaiting their destiny as slaves in the foreign harems in a totally different prospective (not to speak of the fate of Caucasian boys whose career as slaves as likely as not included emasculation). After all, here we have evidence that people as highly placed as the Shah's private purser and the ladies of a prince's harem were willing to stake their lives in their quest for freedom. At the same time, there were Russian officials (and highly placed, at that) for whom an opportunity to free three people from slavery was important enough to die for it. Granted, Griboedov was far from being a "typical" Russian bureaucrat, but neither was he unique in his attitude towards slavery. Chapter 2 of this book will discuss the reasons for such special attitude of Russians towards slaves and their hatred of slave traders, but in the meantime let's have a look at the anti-slavery policy in Russia in general.

The Russian abolitionist effort in the Caucasus is arguably one of the least known aspects of Russia's modern history. The very expression "Russian abolitionism" may seem exotic to many people, including area specialists, if it isn't considered to be an outright oxymoron. Wasn't Russia a serfdom-based autocratic empire until very late in its history, indeed, the epitome of unfreedom in the Western abolitionist discourse of the nineteenth century? Didn't Abraham Lincoln rhetorically equate

⁶ The rest of the story does not have any direct bearing on the subject of this book, so I am putting it into a footnote. However, for the sake of completing the story, it must be said, that the Shah's government, fearful of the retribution from the Russian Empire, presented its most humble regrets to Nicholas I. Griboedov's body (or what was supposed to be his body) was recovered and sent to Russia for burial with honors. The Shah's son and heir was sent to St. Petersburg to apologize to the Tsar in the Shah's name. As token of the Shah's profound regret, the prince presented the Tsar with a 90-carat diamond of extraordinary clarity, which constituted, for all practical purposes, Griboedov's blood money. This diamond is now known as The Shah Diamond and is on display in the Kremlin in Moscow as one of the Historical Jems of Russia.

the American ante-bellum South to Russia, or, didn't the very Russian democrats and their major non-censored voice, Alexander Herzen, call the Russian serf peasants "our white Negroes"?⁷

Slave studies specialists have traditionally focused on the British, American and French abolitionism, adding Russia to the anti-slave trade bloc of the European nations as an afterthought, if at all. "In the British, French, Dutch and Russian empires—in that order—general abolition had been imposed by the imperial authorities"⁸ With this kind of established attitude it may indeed come as a surprise that the order, in which slavery and slave trade was abolished in the Western states was almost exactly the opposite to the just mentioned quote. In fact, Russia was second after Denmark to pass anti-slavery legislation (or the third if the abortive abolitionist experience of the revolutionary France is to be counted). Denmark banned slavery and slave trade within its possessions as early as 1792,⁹ Russia—in 1805. In this year Tsar Alexander I formally committed his government to the suppression of slavery and of the slave trade in the newly conquered borderlands, for the relic Medieval forms of slavery within the Russian hinterland (*kholops* and similar domestic bonded estates) had been abolished by Peter the Great almost a century earlier.

The United States of America and Great Britain passed their first anti-slavery laws in 1807.¹⁰ However, Russia was not a major player in the Atlantic, the main arena of modern slave trade and the nineteenth-century abolitionism. It was dealing with a much more ancient slave trade network with the center on the northern shores of the Black Sea and spreading all over the eastern Mediterranean. This system of demand and supply

⁷ Irena Grudzinska-Gross offers an erudite and sophisticated account of the Romantic construction of Russia and America as, respectively, the despotic and the democratic extremes of the West in her monograph *The Scar of Revolution: Custine, Tocqueville and the Romantic Imagination*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991). Another valuable insight is provided by Peter Hopkirk, who explicitly shows how the process of the ideological construction of the Russian Empire was influenced and fed by the geopolitical concerns of the architects of *Pax Britannica*. (Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game. The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*. (New York, Tokyo, London: Kodansha International, 1990), especially pp. 57–69.)

⁸ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East. An Historical Enquiry* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 79.

⁹ *An Exposition of the African slave Trade from the Year 1840 to 1850, Inclusive. Prepared from official documents and published by direction of the representatives of the religious Society of Friends in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware*. (Philadelphia: J. Rakestraw, 1851), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 6–7.

operated continuously and successfully throughout hundreds and hundreds of years and can be traced to the times of the first Greek colonies on the Northern coast of the Black Sea and in Asia Minor. "Slave trade was widespread in the Caucasus and off the shores of the Black Sea (as well as in the Mediterranean) in every period of human history".¹¹ The means of procurement for this trade also remained unchanged throughout history and could be described as taking prisoners by institutionalized mutual raiding. As a well-known source comments upon this situation, "Indeed, the right to enslave the prisoners of war established the foundation of modern slavery, so it is no wonder that this custom has been preserved in the Caucasus, since Greece, Rome and the whole of Europe used to do likewise in the past."¹²

Even though the states and peoples in the region came and went with the passage of time, the system of slave trade survived and was passed down from one state structure to another. In the nineteenth century all the slave-trading routes of the region led to the Ottoman Empire, heir to the Byzantine, Roman and ancient Greek infrastructure of slave trade.

The role of slaves in the Ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine societies lies outside the scope of this book and has been subject of much attention from historians and anthropologists.¹³ What is important in case of these slavery systems in their relation to the Caucasian region is the fact that in the course of thousands of years they produced a well-developed system of procurement, established trade routes and created local societies, the very existence of which depended on slave trade. As we will see later, for many Caucasian societies slave trade became the only means of obtaining such essential products as salt and iron and, as a result of such economic dependency, social structures became also heavily dependent on slave trade as means of establishing and maintaining social status.

It is important, however, to devote a brief discussion to the role of the Caucasian slaves in the Ottoman society, for otherwise it becomes unclear why it was so important and why the abolition of the Caucasian

¹¹ S.Kh. Khotko, *Ocherki istorii cherkosov ot epokhi kimmeritsev do Kavkazskoi voiny* (St Petersburg: Izd-vo St. Petersburgskogo universiteta) 2001, 122.

¹² S.M. Bronevskii, *Noveishiia izvestiia o Kavkaze, sobrannia I popolnennia Semenom Bronevskim*. (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie) 2004, 43. (Republication of a work, finished in 1810 and first published in 1822).

¹³ Good sources of information on this subject are numerous, for example, *Slave Systems Ancient and Modern*, Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari, Eds. Cambridge University Press, 2008; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge, MA, 1982; David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, New York, 1984.

slave trade met with particularly staunch opposition of the Ottoman state, general public and even liberal-minded intellectuals. This problem has been thoroughly researched before,¹⁴ so I will only give a brief overview of the most pertinent historical data. As Ehud R. Toledano correctly points out, the dynastic rule of the House of Osman (the Ottoman ruling dynasty) depended to a large extent on two institutions of servile labor: the *kul* and the *harem* slaves. The former, serving in the military and administrative capacity, constituted the backbone of the Ottoman civil and military administration, the latter, in the capacity of concubines or wives of the Ottoman elite, eventually became mothers of the future rulers of the Empire, its highest officials and military commanders. Both the *kul* and the *harem* slaves were seen as essential for the successful functioning and reproduction of the Ottoman governing class, and they were definitely distinct from the rest of the slave population of the Empire—agricultural or domestic slaves. They were perceived as truly the elite of slaves and differed from other slaves not only in their perceived position, but also in many other respects: race, ways of procurement and—most importantly for the slave traders—price.

Unlike the vast majority of the Ottoman slaves who came from Africa and were black, the *kul* and *harem* slaves were predominantly white and came from the European provinces of the Empire. Until the 17th century slaves of this kind were procured through the so-called “blood levy”, or *devshirme*. In the course of this practice young children of Christian Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire (mostly Balkan peasants) were periodically collected, reduced to slavery and converted to Islam. Afterwards they were educated in the Palace school and trained for various high-status roles in the government or in the harems of the highest officials or of the Sultan himself. They were totally dependent on the Sultan for their very existence and, therefore, were considered to be absolutely trustworthy and dependable, unlike freeborn Muslims, who could be suspected of conducting political intrigue behind the Sultan’s back.

The Ottoman elite continued to be dependent on the *kul* and *harem* slaves for its successful functioning and reproduction well into the 19th

¹⁴ The most prominent researcher of this topic is without doubt Ehud R. Toledano, for example, see the following works: *The Ottoman slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840–1890*, Princeton, 1982; *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, University of Washington Press, 1998; *As If Silent And Absent. Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East*; Yale University Press, 2007.

century. After the *devshirme* system had been abolished, the procurement of the elite slaves became entirely a slave-trading business. If anything, the demand for the *kul/harem* slaves in the nineteenth century was becoming greater, since now not only the Sultan's palace was acquiring young children for the purpose of their education and bringing them up as future loyal servants, but other members of the Ottoman elite (many of them former *kul* slaves themselves) were doing the same in hopes of acquiring young men who would one day be placed in positions of power, but would remain bound to their owner in the patron-client relationship and would, therefore, promote his interests. The example of Husrev Pasha (1756?–1855) illustrates this system extremely well.¹⁵ Brought to Istanbul at an early age as a slave, Husrev Pasha made a brilliant career in the palace service as a protégé of Kuchuk Huseyn Pasha, commander of the Ottoman navy. Husrev Pasha rose to the highest posts of the Ottoman administration, including the position of the Grand Vizier and, in his turn, he acted as a patron for a large number of young slaves, whom he purchased, educated and socialized for service in the Ottoman administrative hierarchy. According to his biographers, Husrev Pasha brought up more than fifty young slaves in this manner, of whom more than thirty eventually made it to the rank of a pasha (general). Two of his slaves eventually became Grand Viziers, one became a war minister and four became cabinet ministers. Husrev Pasha was also instrumental in marrying his protégés to young women from the harems of other influential personages of the Ottoman elite, thus securing their position further. All these slaves, brought up and educated in the household of Husrev Pasha, remained bonded to him for the rest of his life, promoting his interests, acting on his behalf and serving as his agents. It is impossible to calculate exactly how many high-level Ottoman officials were slaves by their origin at any given time, but it was certainly a majority, as is attested not only by the Ottomans themselves, but also by European travelers.¹⁶ This type of slavery was not confined to the central administration of the Ottoman Empire, but was also widespread in its provinces, such as Egypt

¹⁵ For a more detailed biography of Husrev Pasha see Halil Inalcik, Husrev Pasha in: *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 1950, vol. 5, p. 623; also Mehmet Sureyya, *Sicill-i Osmai*, Istanbul, 1308–1315/1890–1898, vol. 2, pp. 276–277 in: Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Slade, A., *Records of Travels in Turkey, Greece etc. and of a Cruise in the Black Sea. With the Capitan Pasha, in the Years 1829, 1830, and 1831*, London: Saunders and Otley, 1832, vol. 2, p. 215; also White, Charles, *Three Years in Constantinople*, London, H. Colburn, 1845, vol. 2, pp. 306–307.

or Tunis, where it was represented by the well-known phenomenon of the *mamluks* elite military detachments and high-placed civilian bureaucrats of slave origin, loyal personally to their owner, the semi-independent ruler of the province.

But no matter how dependent the Ottoman elite were on the *kul*-type slavery, this dependence was immeasurably greater in case of *harem*-type slavery. The *harem* slaves were the women, destined to become members of the household of the “great men” of the Ottoman state, or even of the Sultan himself. Obviously, these women were held to a high standard and were selected according to their race (predominantly, with rare exceptions, white), their appearance and grace, their ability to learn good manners and/or useful skills, such as playing instruments, dancing, fine embroidery, sewing, etc. Most of these women became servants in great Ottoman households, while the most beautiful ones could end up being concubines or even wives of some dignitaries. Since this practice was adopted quite early in the Ottoman history, it would not be an exaggeration to say, that by the 19th century most of the members of the Ottoman ruling class had mothers, grandmothers and, quite possibly, great-grandmothers of the slave origin, not to speak of having children with their own concubines or wives of the same origin as well. Obviously, a situation like that changed the attitude of the Ottoman society towards the *harem* slavery and contributed to its prolonged existence.

After the independence of Greece and with the growing anti-Ottoman sentiment in the other Balkan provinces, the source base of the elite white slaves was quickly narrowing down to the Caucasus, which was becoming the only remaining supply base for the slave markets of Istanbul, Cairo and other Ottoman big cities. It would not be an excessive simplification to further qualify the phenomenon that I am investigating in this book as the Russian attempts to abolish Ottoman slave trade off the Caucasian shores.

The effort was considerable and was subject to much scrutiny and debate at the time both in Russia and abroad, yet it has avoided the attention of scholars up to this time. Even works that purport to deal specifically with the abolition of slave trade in the Middle East ignore the Russian abolitionist campaigns altogether, attributing the eventual reduction in supply of Circassian (Caucasian) slaves to the Ottoman markets simply to the “Russian conquest”.¹⁷ Such brilliant works as Ehud

¹⁷ Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East. An Historical Enquiry*, 79.

Toledano's¹⁸ and W.G. Clarence-Smith's,¹⁹ although adding much to our understanding of the "internal works" of slavery in Islam do not pay much attention to the Russian role in the process, placing the main emphasis of their work (especially Clarence-Smith) on the inner debate in Islam concerning slavery and its abolition.

No scholarly works exist on the subject even in Russian. Quite understandably, the topic was so delicate and politically charged that general historical problems of the Caucasian War seemed much easier to handle in comparison. Indeed, the much contested role of Imam Shamil, for example, could be discussed from many different angles—as that of a leader of the movement for national liberation, or that of a staunch opponent of progress and civilization, but throw into this discussion a question whether Shamil benefited from slave trade—and all scholarly debate dissolves into emotional mayhem . . . The trend of avoidance of all unpleasantness, which a mere mention of the Caucasian slave trade is sure to involve, continues well to this day. An extremely thorough and admirably well-rounded monograph, published as recently as 2007²⁰ manages to discuss such issues as the economic development of the Caucasian region, issues of trade and contraband and the attempts of the Russian administration to put an end to all "illicit" trade operations without ever mentioning the slave trade. Such a discreet approach, although understandable, makes things rather confusing, since the reader is left to wonder what, after all, was there to be sold off the Caucasian coast that made the smugglers and other "illicit traders" with their wares of salt, iron and other necessities so unrelenting in their attempts to brave the naval blockade and take the risk of severe punishment at the hands of the Russians.

The slave trade has been persistently treated like a shameful secret or a nasty disease, the mere mention of which in public (or in academic press) is seen as a serious breach of etiquette. It is true that this topic remains highly controversial. It is quite likely to be used for their own ends both

¹⁸ Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression*; Princeton University Press, 1982; *The Imperial Eunuchs of Istanbul: from Africa to the Heart of Islam*; *Middle Eastern Studies*, 3:379–390, 1984; *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*; University of Washington Press, 1998.

¹⁹ William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*; Oxford University Press, 2006.

²⁰ *Severnyi Kavkaz v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, ed. by V.O. Bobrovnikov and I.L. Babich; M.: NLO; 2007.

by various nationalist activists of the Caucasus (usually accusing the neighboring peoples of introducing the practice of slaving to the region) and by the supporters of the latest Caucasian war among the engaged Russian writers (the phenomenon now not unknown in the West as well, what with the anti-Islamic wave due to the 9/11 and the “embedded” war journalism in Iraq). It is all the more important, therefore, to see this phenomenon not as a emotional hotbed of conflict and mutual resentment, but as a legitimate subject for research, not much different in its essence from similar subjects in ancient Greece, Rome, or, for that matter, in the nineteenth-century US. If it was possible to overcome the tremendous barrier of shame and racial prejudice and make the study of slavery and its abolition in the US a well-established and flourishing branch of history, so it should be possible for the slave trade in the Caucasus. So far the easiest way to deal with the Caucasian slave trade has been either to ignore or to roundly condemn it, but no attempt ever has been made either to explain or to understand it. This book is the first.

This book will analyze the origins and peculiarities of the Caucasian slave trade, discuss the reasons for its tenacity under the Russian military and bureaucratic pressure and compare the Russian abolitionist effort with its Western counterparts. It will also argue that the abolitionist campaign in the Caucasus was one of the crucial features of the Russian Empire-building process, which had its roots in the Russian national psyche, its historical mythology and in the self-perception of the Russian ruling elite. It will also discuss the methods employed by the Russian military and civil administration to abolish the Caucasian slave trade and the reasons for their success or failure.

The question of scholarly literature or the absence of such, as it may be in the case of the Caucasian slave trade is closely related to the question of sources, and here I encountered another peculiar problem. Even though the question of slave trade and its suppression has never been in the center of scholarly attention, the Caucasus itself and its many other historical and social enigmas have. After all, this was the locale of Russia’s most prolonged and troubled war, the problems of which came back to haunt the country more than a hundred years later. Public interest in this problem was great, especially at the peak of the conflict, and attempts to (once and for all) establish the “historical truth” about it were numerous. As a result of this—rather unique—situation, the overwhelming majority of Caucasus-related documents were published (for the most part in the 19th century) and re-published in the 1990s

and 2000s for the edification of the general public.²¹ Such willingness to profit from the lessons of History was definitely worthy of much praise and support, but it put me in a rather strange situation: it rendered my visits to the central Russian archives practically useless. However, being published and being “researched” in this case were very far from being one and the same. Most documents, even when used by scholars, were “questioned” for political and military facts: who did what, where and when.²² From this point of view, it is true, the published documents have been rather exhausted and, if any new facts are to be discovered about movements of Russian troops, planning of military operations or about the highlanders’ raids, such facts would have to be mined from the depths of the Military Historical Archive (it does not seem to be a promising labor, however). The questions of “why” and “how” were, up to now, never applied to this documents, although such an approach seems to yield very interesting and—hopefully—enlightening results. Therefore, my first goal in working with the mass of published sources was re-questioning them and approaching them from an angle of research never tried before.

My other, and also rather unusual, goal was to read some of the published sources for the first time, no matter how strange it may appear. The problem in this case is in sheer volume of material—The Acts of the Caucasian Archeographical Commission (*Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Komissieiu*),²³ published in the second half of the 19th- beginning of the 20th century, constitute 12 volumes of documents *in folio*, more than 1500 pages each. True, they have been published and are now readily available on microfilm even in some US university libraries, but it does not mean this bulk of material has been all thoroughly read, researched and exhausted. That was definitely not the case, especially as far as my topic of interest was concerned. The same was true in regards to other large collections of documents, such as Archive of

²¹ The willingness of the Tsarist government to publish such documents is by no means usual. Russian bureaucracy could be as close and impenetrable in the 19th century as it was during the Soviet times. Such attitude towards the “Caucasian knot” rather serves as an indirect indication that in this case the government felt “the historical Truth” on its side. There could be not much doubt in the “*mission civilisatrice*” in the 19th century, no matter what the cost . . .

²² A book by Moshe Gammer *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar* (Frank Cass & Co, London; 1994) is an excellent example of research in this genre.

²³ *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Komissieiu*, Tiflis: V. Tip. Glav. Upr. Namestnika Kavkazskago, 1866–1904.

Prince Vorontsov (*Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova*)²⁴ and Archive of the Family of Raevskii (*Arkhiv Raevskikh*).²⁵ To sum up, my goal in dealing with the massive volume of the Caucasus-related published documents was to ask questions that have never been asked before, and extract information that nobody looked for until now. In doing so, my work did not differ much from the more traditional archival research except that I spoiled my eyes rather more by reading the microfilms but, looking on the bright side, I had to deal with much less dust and did not suffer from serious allergies.

I did work in the archives in Moscow and in Krasnodar (if only to confirm my suspicion that everything important had already been published) and found a few documents pertaining to the object of my interest, but I would be the first to admit that these finds were not pivotal to my work even if they serve as interesting illustrations to my argument. This is not to say, of course, that the archival depths may be considered exhausted—far from it. The most promising locales for heretofore unseen and unpublished documents are, of course, the archives in the Caucasus proper. Unfortunately, the war in Chechnya in the 1990s, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict at the same time and the general political instability in the area, still continuing since then, made research in these areas extremely dangerous to say the least.²⁶ Even now, travel to Dagestan and Chechnya remains extremely risky for anyone who does not enjoy a personal protection of the local power elites. Therefore, such documents as may be found in the provincial collections will have to be studied at some later and more auspicious time.

A few words need to be said about the use of the Ottoman sources in this book. In this respect I've been fortunate enough to follow in the footsteps of Ehud R. Toledano, a brilliant scholar, who has devoted more than twenty five years of his life to the study of slave trade related sources in the Ottoman archives. It was an enormous work, which produced a number of brilliant articles and monographs on the subject of the slave

²⁴ *Arkhiv Kniazia Vorontsova*, M. Tip. A.I. Mamontova, 1870–1895.

²⁵ *Arkhiv Raevskikh*, Modzalevski, B.L., ed.; Petrograd, 1908–1915.

²⁶ The archive in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, which could be one of the most promising places for future research was destroyed during the war of 1994–1996, when the city was subject to prolonged fighting between the Russian Federal Armed forces and the Chechens. The same happened to another archive, potentially important for the research of slave trade in the Caucasus—the one in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia. The Sukhumi archive burned under mysterious circumstances during the Georgian occupation of the city in 1995.

trade and its abolition in the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ Such abundance of research material in regards to the abolition of slave trade on the Ottoman end of the Caucasian slave trading chain allowed me to concentrate my efforts entirely on the Russian side of it, which was my original intention, without the feeling that an important part of the picture was sliding out of focus. Anybody who is interested in the abolition of the Ottoman slave trade in the Empire proper can refer to the works of Ehud R. Toledano and find a wealth of information, just as I have done.

Since nothing about the Caucasus seems to be simple, even geographical names may present a difficulty. Apart from the problem of remembering complex local names and figuring out what is located where, there is also a question of “correct” and “incorrect” terms. I have tried to help the potential reader with the first difficulty by adding good maps—importance of geography simply could not be overestimated in the Caucasus.

As far as the second problem is concerned, it mostly relates to the now widely disputed name of “Transcaucasia”. In this book it will be used randomly as a full synonym for the term “Southern Caucasus” for two reasons: first, I consider the term of Transcaucasia no more demeaning to its inhabitants, than that of Transylvania or Transvaal to the populations of those areas. The fact that Transcaucasia was named so from the European point of view is not, in my opinion, a valid argument. It was done as a simple statement of a geographical fact—in order to get there a European traveler had to get to the other side of the Caucasus, which was a no mean feat in any time. The Caucasian ridge is such a formidable landmark, that it was impossible to ignore. My second reason for keeping the term Transcaucasia in circulation was purely stylistic: my sources use this term extensively, so its presence in the text seemed logical. Besides, how often does an author have an opportunity to vary geographical terms, and how can one pass such an opportunity to avoid boring repetitions?

²⁷ See Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840–1890*; Princeton University Press, 1982; “Slave Dealers, Women, Pregnancy and Abortion: The Story of a Circassian slave-Girl in Mid-Nineteenth Century Cairo.” In *Slavery and Abolition*, London, Frank Cass, 1981; “The Imperial Eunuchs of Istanbul: From Africa to the Heart of Islam”. In *Middle Eastern Studies*, London, Frank Cass, 1984; “Ottoman concepts of Slavery in the Period of Reform (1830s–1880s) in *Breaking the Chains: slavery, Bondage and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia*”, Martin A. Klein, ed., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993; *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998; *As If silent and Absent. Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Having said that, I hope that this book, if not fully exhausting the subject of the Caucasian slave trade and its suppression by the Russian Imperial administration, at least begins to answer the questions which I considered the most important while doing the research: why was the Caucasian slave trade so tenacious and how was it abolished (or was it?) If this book does not present the world with a ready solution to these problems, at least it makes the first step towards finding it.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CAUCASUS: GEOGRAPHY AND PEOPLE

*OMNIA GALLIA IN TRES PARTES DIVISA EST,
which means, we will need all of our gall in devising
means to tree them parties.*

(O'Henry, *Cabbages and Kings*)¹

In spite of having been written about, researched and studied by generations of scholars, the Caucasus remains poorly researched and little studied. It has always inspired artistic imagination and successfully defied attempts at its neat scholarly classification. To use a poetic expression, it remains enigmatic to this day, not to mention the fact that large numbers of people even within the academic community still need their memories refreshed as to where exactly this area is located and what kind of people live there.

Thus, it seems almost inevitable that I should follow in the footsteps of travelers, journalists and scholars before me and begin the story of the Caucasian slave trade with the description of the various and exotic landscapes and even more diverse and exotic peoples of the area. The Caucasus is a region where geology, geography and landscape play such an important role that they become almost animated characters in the history of the land and its population. As Alexandre Dumas-*pere* put it in his Caucasian travelogue in a distinctly romantic manner,

All through Caucasia's history the gigantic chain of mountains has offered its valleys as a refuge to men fleeing from lost causes and vanquished nations. As each succeeding tribe of barbarian hordes surged around it—the Huns, Goths, Avars, Kashgars, Persians, Mongols, Turks—a human wave mounted the outer slopes of the Caucasus and made its way down into some gorge or other, where it settled, a new race merging with the countless other races already dwelling there.²

The impressionable Frenchman, famous for his inaccuracies and wild exaggerations, painted—in this case—a wonderful illustration to the true

¹ O. Henry, *Cabbages and Kings*; Penguin Books: New York; 1993; 72.

² Dumas, A., *Adventures in the Caucasus* (1858); Philadelphia & New York, 1962; XII.

interaction of the Caucasian geography with its history in the course of millennia. To better understand how this interaction worked, it is necessary to have a clear mental picture of the physical geography of the region, and to keep a map handy at all times, when reading about it.³

The Caucasian region is neatly defined at its western and eastern extremities by the Black and the Caspian Seas, respectively. Along the center of this area, more or less strictly from the West to the East, runs a high mountain range of the same name, which, geographically, serves as an official divide between Europe and Asia in this part of the world. These are truly magnificent and formidable mountains, which form an insurmountable barrier between the northern and the southern parts of the region. It is enough to say that the highest peak of the Caucasus, Mt. Elbrus, is 18,481 Ft. high. It is surrounded by a suitable retinue of lesser, but quite adequate snow tops. Unlike the Alps in Europe, these mountains are truly forbidding, offering no passes from the South to the North, except one, the strategically priceless Dar'ial Pass. No Hannibal (or Suvorov, for that matter) would be able to force his way across the Caucasus Ridge the way they did it in the Alps, elephants or no elephants.

The same mountain ridge, as well as serving as a great divide between the peoples to its north and south, forms hundreds of nooks and crannies—gorges, valleys, small plateaus and passes. It is a gigantic natural labyrinth, inhabited by hundreds of different peoples, which have lived and developed in semi-isolation for hundreds and thousands of years. The climate, soils and natural resources of the Caucasus are just as varied as its landscape. Location here is a crucial factor even for a very sketchy description of an area. The vertical dimension of the mountainous landscape complicates the matter even further, so the variety of local conditions can be at times almost overwhelming.

However, for the purposes of a general description, the Caucasian region has long been divided into two large parts: the Northern and the Southern Caucasus (or Transcaucasia). The Northern Caucasus, in its turn, can be divided into its Western and Eastern parts, which differ substantially in altitudes, climate, soils and other conditions. These three parts will be the most basic geographic anchors that will, hopefully, prevent potential readers from feeling completely at sea, so now let's have a closer look at each of them.

³ See enclosed maps.

The Southern Caucasus, or Transcaucasia, sheltered from most of the cold northern air masses, is an area of predominantly hot, subtropical or continental climate (depending on the altitude and the proximity to the sea), with comparatively large areas suitable for agriculture. In spite of numerous legends, surrounding this region (of which the myth of the Golden Fleece is just the most famous), this territory is rather poor in natural resources and certainly does not hold any meaningful deposits of gold or precious gems. Even necessities, such as salt and iron, have always been scarce. In some territories, such as modern Armenia and parts of Azerbaijan, even wood is precious and for this reason has never been used as fuel or building material.

The territory of modern Georgia offers more opportunities for successful agriculture than those of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan. It possesses several valleys with fertile soils and beneficial microclimate. This area appears to be the birthplace of the wine culture in the world,⁴ and the population of the region in general has been engaged in sedentary agriculture for many thousands of years. These territories are accessible from the South and bordered directly on Persia and the Byzantine Empire (and their successor states). The proximity of such geopolitical giants shaped the destiny of the Transcaucasian societies for centuries and had numerous consequences—both positive and negative—for the development of this region.

The Northern Caucasus, on the other hand, is open to the North, to the Great Steppe with its wide expanses and frequent migrations of nomadic peoples. Although the soils of the steppe are among the most fertile not only in Europe, but also in the world (comparable to the American Midwest both in the land's quality and its quantity), agriculture there was all but impossible because of the constant threat of the nomads, who claimed the territory as their pastures. Agriculture was practiced closer to the foothills of the Lesser Caucasian Ridge (a chain of mountains immediately to the North of the Main Caucasian Ridge). But even in these foothills sedentary peasants were always at risk of raids and ruin at the hands of their nomadic neighbors.

Most of the territory of the Northern Caucasus is mountainous: somewhat lower in its Western part, extremely rocky and practically devoid of fertile land in its Eastern part (approximately coinciding with the territory of the modern Daghestan). However, even in the North-Western

⁴ Source—S.A. Arutiunov, Professor, Chair of the Caucasus Department of the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography of RAN, in private interview, February 23, 2005.

part of the Caucasus arable land was scarce, and soils poor. All of the Northern Caucasus is very densely forested even now, and was totally covered with forbidding thick woods until mid-nineteenth century. Clearly, the Northern Caucasus was even poorer in natural resources, both agricultural and mineral, than the southern part of the region. There was, however, a clear difference between the North-Eastern (Daghestan) and the North-Western parts due to their geopolitical and geo-economic placement.

The North-Eastern Caucasus, with its Caspian shore and an ancient and prosperous port of Derbent, has always been located at an intersection of important trade routes: one of them connected the states of Central Asia with such important religious and trade centers of Islamic world as Teheran, Baghdad, Damascus, Mecca and Medina. Another, less intense, but still significant route, linked Russia (and through it, Europe) with Persia, and, further away, Central Asia and China. It was a lesser-traveled fork of the Great Silk Road, which played an immense part in shaping the development of local societies and cultures. Apart from Derbent, which was the most prominent center of trade and Islamic culture of the North-Eastern Caucasus, the region had a number of smaller market towns, which served as stops on the trade routes and channeled local trade. Quite naturally, the economic, social and political structures of the numerous Daghestani peoples were also heavily influenced by this system of trade and, to a large extent, dependent on it.

The situation of the North-Western Caucasus was, from the geo-economic viewpoint, the least favorable of the three regions we've been discussing. Apart from extreme scarcity of arable land, the local population had no access to salt or iron, which made local societies practically completely dependent in this respect on imports from other regions. Moreover, in some areas even fresh water was in limited supply, while on the Black Sea coast the land turned into marshes, where malaria and other diseases made life almost impossible (there was no permanent population there until the Russian expansion reached these areas). Unlike Daghestan, however, this territory lay far from popular trade routes, had few locations suitable for market places, and its Black Sea coastline did not offer harbors for sizable ships. Besides, there was little that could be offered as export merchandise, apart from slaves, of course. No wonder this territory avoided being incorporated into any large state until mid-nineteenth century, in spite of all the migrations, wars and conquests it witnessed in the course of its long history. No state could be bothered to

conquer and incorporate it. It remained a refuge for the displaced peoples, remnants of former nomads and other populations, being driven away from the Great Steppe's plains.

Peoples and Languages

The sociolinguistic diversity of the Caucasian region is even more dazzling than the geographic one. The Caucasus is an ethnological preserve, the variety of which far surpasses the Balkans and approaches that of India, although on a much smaller territory. This is home to about fifty languages, at least 44 of which are endemic, or specifically Caucasian and far removed from all other linguistic families.⁵ There are also many more distinct dialects, often so far removed from the original language, that the two are no longer mutually understandable. The Caucasus is also home to the peoples, speaking Indo-European and Turkic languages.

This diversity is due to a unique combination of the complex natural environment with the rich history of the region. It is an outcome of thousands of years of migrations, violent conquests and more gradual interpenetration by different peoples. Here, in the Caucasus, some "ancient peoples" (i.e. those, who arrived there earlier) have for hundreds and thousands of years lived side by side with more recent arrivals. In the end, by the time the European travelers reached and described the region, it seemed like every valley contained a people with a quite distinct social organization and a language, incomprehensible even to the people in the next valley.

To complicate matters even further, the socio-cultural landscape of the Caucasus has never been static. Historical change seems to be no less a Caucasian feature than its ethno-linguistic diversity and the endurance of its basic social structures. At the same time, the Caucasus is one of those rare places on Earth, where the past never becomes petrified. Here, archaeology often survives to become live ethnology. The same trading grounds and settlements sometimes have been continuously occupied for more than two thousand years. Material culture, after long periods of incremental evolution, punctuated by momentous change, still displays recognizable basic features and attributes.

⁵ Arutiunov, S.A., "Jazyki narodov Kavkaza", in: *Narody Kavkaza*; M.: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAN; 1994; 93.

A good example of such transformation is presented by the North Caucasian epic *Narty*, which George Dumézil considered likely to be the best-preserved relic of an extremely archaic proto-Indo-European mythology. This oral tradition is common to most people of the region, but is best preserved, incidentally, among the Adyghs and the Abkhas, whose languages are totally unrelated to the Indo-European family.⁶ Also, gods and goddesses from the Chechen and Ingush pre-Islamic pantheon can be traced to the Bronze Age statuettes, found in the archaeological excavations.⁷ So, as it turns out, often the most ancient layers of the Indo-European cultures are best preserved by the people who have nothing in common with it in language or anthropological type. In short, the Caucasus offers a cross-section of multiple layers of languages, physical anthropological types and cultures that, having once appeared, never vanish altogether, but either survive in their entirety among other ethnic groups, or remain as a recognizable substrata in inherently eclectic modern cultures and peoples.

The peoples, who speak the endemic, or specifically Caucasian, languages, have been living in the area for as long as any meaningful archaeological history goes, at least since the Neolithic period.⁸ The most recent archaeological discoveries in Dmanisi (Georgia) move the time of the human population of the region even further—to the early Pleistocene, or 1.7 million years ago.⁹ Although discussions about ethnicity and language of the early hominids make absolutely no sense (and, apparently, like most early hominids, this branch of the human evolution tree dried and did not leave any modern descendants), it is obvious that some of the population of the Caucasus is as autochthonous as it can conceivably be.

The endemic Caucasian languages are traditionally divided into four branches, although this scheme has come under increasing criticism recently. For the purposes of this book, however, linguistic classificatory debates are only remotely significant, so I will follow the traditional system. The four branches of these family of languages are: the Kartvelian languages (Eastern Georgian, Mingrel, Laz and Swan—all spoken in the Southern Caucasus); and the three groups of North Caucasian languages:

⁶ Dumézil, G., *Le livre des heros: legendes sur le Nartes*; Paris: Gallimard; 1965.

⁷ Dumézil, G., *Les dieux souverains des Indo-Europeens*; Paris: Gallimard; 1977.

⁸ Abdusheshvili, M.G., “Antropologiya drevnikh i sovremennykh narodov Kavkaza”, in: *Narody Kavkaza*; M.: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAN; 1994; 13–51.

⁹ Gabunia, L., Vekua, A., *Nature* 373, 509 (1995).

Western (Adygh and Abkhaz—as follows from the name, spoken in the North-west of the Caucasus), Eastern (the Daghestani languages: Avar, Batzbi, Lezghian, Dargo (or Dargwa), and about thirty others) and the Nakh group (Chechen, Ingush)—spoken in the North-east of the Caucasus.¹⁰ The people speaking the autochthonous languages live on both sides of the Caucasian Ridge: they are predominant in the North-Eastern part of the Caucasus (the Mountainous Daghestan), in its North-Western part (Chechnya, Adygheia, Kabardino-Balkariia); and in Georgia in the Southern Caucasus.

The first Indo-Europeans in the recorded history of the Caucasus were the Armenians, whose arrival to the Southern Caucasus is dated at about the mid-first millennium BC. Armenians supplanted the earlier Caucasian population of the kingdom of Urartu, which spoke a completely different language. Armenians most likely acquired their Indo-European language while migrating from the territory of the Ancient Mesopotamia. Other Indo-Europeans (linguistically of a different, Iranian, branch) settled in the Northern Caucasus at about the 9th century AD. These were the Alans, the likely medieval descendants of the Scythians. Alans provided the linguistic stem, on which the modern Osetin language evolved. Some Caucasologists have romantically seen the contemporary highlander Osetins as the latest link in the ethno-linguistic and cultural lineage, rising from the Scythian nomads and semi-nomads of Antiquity to the roving Alans of the European Middle Ages.¹¹ Since the demise of the USSR in 1991 this obsolete vision has been upheld as the official ideology of the Osetin nationalism. Archaeological evidence, however, shows dramatic discontinuities in culture and physical anthropology between the Medieval Caucasian Alans and modern Osetins.¹² The continuous feature here is the language. Besides, the Osetins are the only ethnic group in the Northern Caucasus, which still preserves relics of Medieval Alanian Christianity, although in thoroughly adulterated forms, mixed with Islam and local paganism. Otherwise, Osetins are North Caucasian highlanders like most their neighbors. The Alanian culture of the ancient Indo-European steppe nomads left few traces—perhaps the best-known

¹⁰ Arutiunov, S.A., “*Iazyki narodov Kavkaza*”, 110–115.

¹¹ Abdusheshvili, M.G., “Antropologiya drevnikh i sovremennykh narodov Kavkaza,” in: *Narody Kavkaza* (M.: Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAN); 1994, 13–51.

¹² *Arkhgeologicheskie i etnograficheskie issledovaniia Severnogo Kavkaza*; Krasnodar; 1994; 30–56.

exception is the Osetin tradition of beer brewing, which certainly dates back to the Scythians and sets them apart among the ancient wine cultures of the Caucasus.

Finally, Turkic-speaking peoples made their appearance in the Caucasus at different points in history: first, the Huns swept through the lowlands of the Northern Caucasus in the 5th century AD. The Khazars settled in the plains of Daghestan and Azerbaijan, on both sides of the mountains perhaps as early as the 7th–8th centuries AD. The Seljuks went through the area, partially settling in the territory of modern Azerbaijan, in the 10th–11th centuries; the Kypchaks (Qypçaq), known to the Russians as Polovtsy and to the Latin-speaking West as the Cumans, were pushed out of the Great Steppe by the Mongol invasions of the 13th century and gave rise to three Caucasian groups of people: the Kumyks of Daghestan (North-Eastern Caucasus) and the Karachai and the Balkars in the North-Western Caucasus. The two latter groups formed enclaves among the Adyghs, who, in their turn, squeezed them even further into the mountains, into the highest Alpine meadows.¹³

The latest arrivals among the Turkic-speaking peoples were the Nogai Tartars, who were leading a nomadic way of life in the Great Steppe between the Tartar Khanates of Astrakhan and the Crimea in the 16th–17th centuries. Towards the end of this period, however, the early Russian expansion in the South and the attendant reordering of North Caucasian geopolitics forced them to become sedentary, at least partially (i.e. the elderly, women and children and lower estates now lived in permanent settlements) under the protection tutelage of the Adygh princely tribes, especially that of the Kabardins. The Nogais eventually found an occupation that best suited their semi-nomadic life-style: they became specialized in breeding prestigious battle horses for the Caucasian elites, and, much later, for the Russian imperial cavalry and the Cossacks.

The Slavic-speaking people, primarily the Cossacks, were the most recent settlers in the Caucasus region. The Terek, or *Grebenskie* Cossacks, whose arrival dates back to the mid-sixteenth century, experienced the strongest influence of the local peoples. It was done mostly through intermarriage (especially with the Chechens) and through borrowing of the mechanisms of cultural and economic adaptation to the North Caucasian environment. The local influence proved to be very strong

¹³ Arutiunov, S.A., “Glottogenez i etnogenez na Kavkaze” in *Narody Kavkaza*; M.: Nauka; 1994; 128–131.

even for the Ukrainian-speaking Black Sea, or the Kuban Cossacks, who came to the Northern Caucasus only around 1793. Only a generation later, they shed their *Zaporozie* Ukrainian dress in favor of the local traditional styles of clothing. Quite soon they became similar in their appearance, manners and customs to their Circassian neighbors, friends and foes. Such frontier phenomena are quite common, and can be seen elsewhere in the world, for example, in the American West.

Religions of the Caucasian Region

At first sight it seems that at least the situation with local religions must be straightforward and uncomplicated. With just a few exotic exceptions, such as the Tats—a Daghestani people, professing Judaism; or the tiny nation of the Udins, also in Daghestan, who are Armenian Christians and speak a dialect of early medieval Albanian—the two religions, sharing dominance in the region are, and have been for more than a thousand years, Christianity and Islam. After all, did not the people of the Caucasus resist the Imperial Russia under the banner of *Jihad* (the Holy War of Islam)? And did not the Christians of the Caucasus seek protection from the Persian threat with their co-religionists in Russia? It would not have been Caucasus, if the answers to these seemingly simple questions could be just as simple as a “yes” or a “no”. In the Caucasus, there is always a “but” to follow.

1. *Christianity*

According to a widespread legend (confirmed, in a way, by the *Lives of the Apostles*), it was St. Andrew himself, who brought the Gospel to this remote region, and was martyred there by the local idolaters. Historically, however, the arrival of Christianity to the Caucasian region has an exact date: 301 AD, when the Armenian kingdom adopted it as a state religion. To the enduring pride of the Armenians, this happened a generation earlier than in Rome.¹⁴ In the succeeding centuries, the Armenian rulers mostly found themselves detached from the immediate sphere of influence of the Byzantine Empire. Most of the territories populated by

¹⁴ Bournoutian, G.A., *A History of the Armenian People*; Costa Meza, CA: Mazda Publishers; 1995; 61–64.

Armenians in the first millennium AD belonged to successive Persian empires and to the Arab caliphate. Such early separation from the centers of Greek Orthodoxy was, apparently, chiefly responsible for the early emergence of an independent Armenian Apostolic Church with slight, but theologically significant specifics in its doctrine and liturgy. Most importantly, between 400 and 406 AD a monk by the name of Mesrop Mashtots invented the Armenian alphabet, remotely derivative from the Aramaic script. From that time Ancient Armenian (*Grabar*) became a literary and liturgical language. In this way Armenians were bound together as a separate ethno-religious community at an early time.

Another—and a very peculiar—center of ancient Christianity in the Caucasus was located in the Caucasian Albania with its historical center in modern Karabagh. The Holy See of this Albanian Christian Church eventually became the center of several Armenian principalities which, after the further Turkic expansion in the mid-eighteenth century, were in disarray but still enthusiastically welcomed the idea of the Russian conquest of the region. The question of whether these Karabagh Christians were “truly” Armenians, or “merely” descendants of the Albanians who acquired Armenian language and identity through baptism—is an extremely difficult one. As it so often happens in the Caucasus, local history is rather short on sources and dreadfully long on some of the most rabid nationalist ideology.

Unlike Armenia, there is no fixed date for the introduction of Christianity into Georgia. However, by the 7th century the realm of the medieval Georgian kings was firmly associated with Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. The geopolitical factor of the Byzantine influence seems to have been the decisive one in making Georgia the center of Greek Orthodoxy in the Caucasus, which it remained ever since, and which made this state a logical choice for a potential ally, when Russia turned its attention to the affairs of the Caucasian region.

Other centers of Christianity could be found in the North-Western Caucasus. Two eparchies, directly administered by the Byzantine priests existed on its Black Sea coast in the 8th–12th centuries. Their influence, however limited, extended to the Abkhaz and Adygh tribes of the area. We know little about this missionary effort, because hardly any written sources survived. Unlike Georgia or Armenia, the Byzantine baptism of Circassia (then called Zikhia and Kasoghia), left few legacies. The native societies had neither the need for it, nor a social class interested and capable of maintaining organized religion. This is what an Italian traveler Giorgio Interiano wrote about the Adyghs in 1551:

They call themselves Christian and have Greek priests, but they do not baptize their children until they are more than eight years old [...] Their nobles do not enter a church until they reach sixty years of age. Since they all live by brigandage, they are apprehensive of offending the church. But once they reach the age, when they can no longer rob and pillage, they take advantage of the holy services, which they could only hear before from the church yard, while sitting on their horses.¹⁵

Two hundred years later, a perceptive traveler of the 17th century, Sir John Chardin, remarked on this point:

They are a People altogether Savage: formerly Christians; but now of no Religion, not having as much as the light of Nature amongstem. For I look upon their Superstitious Customs as nothing: which seem to be a Mixture borrow'd from the Christians and Mahometans their Neighbours.¹⁶

Later still, in the early nineteenth century, Russian missionaries found out that in a Circassian tribe of Shapsugh, for instance, people were still marking the graves of their dead with crosses, although the meaning of this custom had been forgotten long ago. By that time the people of the North-Western Caucasus had, for the most part, returned to the cults of local deities and could be most accurately described as pagans with traces of Christianity and Islam. For example, some local pantheons included a goddess called Maria, or Mariam. There were reports of the local cults of ancient bronze bells, although the churches, where they used to hang, had long since collapsed, etc.¹⁷

Before Russian missionaries could revive these Byzantine relics, the sweeping Islamization of the area put an end to all such intentions.

2. Islam

Islam was first introduced to the Southern Caucasian region in the 7th century AD, when the territory of modern Azerbaijan fell under the influence of the Arab caliphate.¹⁸ This early Islam was, most likely,

¹⁵ Veselovskii, M.V., "Neskol'ko geograficheskikh i etnograficheskikh svedenii o drevnei Rossii iz rasskazov italiantssev", *Zapiski Russkogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva*, po otdelu etnografii, vyp. II; St. Petersburg: 1869; 731.

¹⁶ Sir Johannes Chardin Miles, *Travels*; 76.

¹⁷ Imam Shamil later had to use all his power in order to put an end to such practices. See, Khan-Girei, *Cherkesskie predaniia* (reprint: Nalchik; 1989); 151–152, or *Noveishiia geograficheskiia izvestiia o Kavkaze, Sobrannia i popolnennia Semenom Bronevskim*; 28–29.

¹⁸ Abduraghimov, G.A., *Kavkazskaia Albaniia—Lezgistan: istoriia i sovremennost'*; St. Petersburg: 1995; 97.

confined to the ruling dynasties, their retinues and courtiers, and to the merchant estate. Azerbaijan became predominantly Muslim, as it also became predominantly Turkic, in a later epoch, in the 10th–11th century. In the 16th century Persia became officially Shiite, and its tributary Turkic principalities of Azerbaijan followed suit. By the 19th century, when the Russians arrived in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan was predominantly Shi'a Muslim.

Another stronghold of Islam in the Caucasus was located in its North-Eastern part. There, the strategically important towns, such as Derbent, which sat on the trade and invasion routes between the Great Steppe and the Middle East, unsurprisingly became Muslim at the time of the first Arab expansion of the 8th century AD. The Arab caliphate was constantly worried about keeping the Khazar raiders out of Transcaucasia, so Derbent remained a prominent outpost of the Muslim world in the area. This geopolitical concern endured into later periods of Persian imperial glory, helping maintain the Muslim character of the Dagestan's borderland towns. They became centers of Islamic scholarship and learning of worldwide fame long before Islam took root among their immediate neighbors, who lived just above these towns. The poor highlands of Daghestan possessed neither military capability, nor trading potential, which could be of any interest to the Arab and Persian empires. As a consequence, Islam was not introduced into these parts until much later, in the 15th–16th centuries. Even then it remained, as usual in the peripheries of a world religion, the practice of the princely court and of the merchants. Commoners continued to perform their ancestral rituals under the thin veneer of the newly imposed religion.

It took the tremendous social upheaval, caused by the Russian invasion for a sweeping and profound Islamization to take place all over the Northern Caucasus. After that, all resistance to the Imperial Russia was centered round the banner of Holy Jihad. Once this happened, there emerged the Islam of pristine original fervor, which strove to resemble the austere and heroic beliefs of Mohammed and his followers.

Social Structures and Patterns of Power

The structures of power in the Caucasus are so complex, varied and, in some instances, so unresearched, that it would have given me a great pleasure to be able to skip their description altogether. Unfortunately, I cannot take this easy way out, because these structures play an extremely

important, and, sometimes, crucial role in the way the abolition of slave trade was conducted in different parts of the region. The Russians were feeling their way around the local societies in search of some support for their policies, and whether or not they were able to find such support depended on the kind of society they were dealing with in each particular case. In the end, the imperial policies in the abolition of slave trade and their eventual success was determined by the nature of the native society to which these policies were applied. Which brings us back to the complexities, variety and the yet unexplained features of the Caucasian social organization.

All power structures in the region could be roughly divided into two groups, which differed in the socio-spatial organization of political authority. The first group consisted of political territorial units, with mostly vertical patterns of power, which formed relatively clear pyramidal structures, controlled by the dominant families, or, especially in the frequent times of turmoil, by single warlords. This pattern of power is usually called feudal. Some of these Caucasian vertically organized “feudal” units looked quite familiar to the European contemporaries: kingdoms, principalities, khanates and similar state formations with more exotic names, derived from the local hereditary titles.¹⁹ Among these political organizations there were many fragments of earlier—and more extensive—medieval statehood. Such were the Georgian kingdoms of Kartli-Kakheti and Imeretia; or the tributary extensions of external empires, like the mostly Turkic khanates of Transcaucasia. Some of the vertical patterns of power existed in societies that by a considerable stretch of imagination could be called proto-states, or simply chiefdoms. These were the numerous tribes of the North-Western Caucasus, ruled by their aristocratic elites, and the Turkic nomads of the Steppe.

The second group, that of the horizontal patterns of power, is much harder to define in terms usually used by modern historians in conjunction with the societies of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the European contemporaries, unrestricted in their use of terminology and well-schooled in Classics, had no such problem. They compared these societies to the Ancient Sparta, or Rome before the time of the kings, or—even more broadly—to the Ancient Greek city-states in general. Of course, there were few towns in the Caucasus, so the idea of a city-state, or a *polis*, was applied to these organizations rather loosely. Yet, the

¹⁹ Such as, for example, *Shamkhal'stvo Tarkovskoe* (from *shamkhal*—more or less equal to a prince), which will be mentioned quite frequently in this book.

Northern Caucasus in the period immediately predating the Russian conquest produced several examples of well-articulated horizontal patterns of rule, which strongly resembled archaic Greco-Roman democracy. These communities were located in the North-Western part of the Caucasus (in Chechnya and between the isthmus of the Kuban and the Black Sea) and in the Mountainous Daghestan in the North-Eastern Caucasus, intermingled with “aristocratic” or “princely” societies.

Since the social and political make-up of the Caucasian societies played such a crucial role in the outcome of the Russian anti-slave trade effort as well as in the outcome of the Caucasian War, I offer here a brief survey of the most prominent power units that the Russian military administration encountered in the Caucasus.

1. *Vertical power structures*

South Caucasus. Georgia. By the end of the 18th century, the territory of the present-day Georgian Republic was divided between two kingdoms: the larger Kartli-Kakheti and the smaller Imeretia. There were also smaller principalities, tributaries of the two kingdoms. The Bagratid dynasty, which ruled in Kartli-Kakheti, gravitated towards Russia, while the kings of Imeretia were known for their pro-Iranian sympathies. These two Georgian states had similar social structures based on land ownership, since arable land was a considerable source of wealth in this region. These social structures included, in downward order, the ruling family, hereditary nobility (the landowners), merchants, various groups of bonded peasants working on the land and slaves of different origin (hereditary slaves, debtors, prisoners of war etc.)

The nobility constituted a strictly hierarchical and a relatively large group of the population, about 5%.²⁰ At the top of the social pyramid stood the royal clan of the Bagratids, the descendants of the kings of Kartli-Kakheti, or of the royal clan of Imeretia. Immediately below were situated princes, also organized by clans. Below those were placed the ordinary nobles (*aznaurni*), who could be the vassals of the King, of the princes or of the Church.²¹ Many of the *aznaurni* were quite poor and did not differ from the peasants in their economic status. In fact, they did have a lot in common with peasants, for they were not personally free,

²⁰ Suny, R.G., *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 65.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

they were, in a way, bonded people of the more highly placed aristocrats or of the Church. They could not change their lord at their will or forfeit the land allotted to them, for any reason.

The system of bondage was extremely extensive and broad in the Georgian feudal structure. Members of the clergy could be bonded people in noble households as well. Most of the city-dwellers were serfs of the King, of the Church or of the great princely clans. According to the traditional law (the Code of Vakhtang VI), everything a serf had, except his soul, belonged to his master.²² At the end of the 18th century, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population of Tiflis (77.3 %) was comprised of bonded people,²³ including many wealthy merchants and craftsmen (*mokalake*), who could be leaders of their guilds and even members of the city government.²⁴ Moreover, peasants and city dwellers, even those who were serfs, could, if they could afford it, own slaves and serfs. It was a common practice for a wealthy peasant to send his slave or serf to the lord, instead of paying the traditional dues in person. No wonder the Russians found it difficult to determine adequate equivalents for the social status of all these various and quite alien strata of the Georgian society.

The Moslem Khanates of the Southern Caucasus By the end of the 18th century, the territory of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan was divided into a number of Khanates (Nukha, Kub'a, Derbent, Erivan, Talysh, etc.) These principalities were ruled by local Muslim dynasties of Turkic origins and were the tributaries of Persia. The population of the area was mixed: Turkic-speaking peoples, Kurds, Persian-speaking Talyshes and Tats, also Armenians.²⁵ The Transcaucasian Turkic Khanates had a social and political structure, common to the contemporary Middle Eastern states, but not found anywhere else in the Caucasus. They were

²² Megrelishvili, g., *Gruzinskaia obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl' vtoroi poloviny XIX veka I nachala XX veka*; Tbilisi: 1960; 195–196.

²³ Suny, R.G., *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 87.

²⁴ This situation did have a parallel in Russian history, namely, the *posad*, a neighborhood in a city, the inhabitants of which belonged either to the Tsar (most often) or to a powerful aristocrat. The air of the city never made anybody free in Russia. However, the *posad* ceased to exist as a result of the reforms of Peter the Great (beginning of the 18th century), and was thoroughly forgotten as a social phenomenon by the time the Russian administration encountered this peculiar Georgian arrangement. Existence of a historical precedent did not help the Russians in Transcaucasia in any way.

²⁵ For a more detailed account see: Bournoutian, G., *The Khanate of Erivan Under Qajar Rule, 1795–1828*; Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publications; 1992.

the vassal states of Persia and, as such, were heavily influenced by the Persian culture and social customs. Although, as in Persia, slavery was widespread in these territories before the Russian conquest, slave trade there ceased to be a major problem for the Russian authorities quite soon afterwards. The reasons for such a peculiar state of affairs, especially in comparison to the rest of the Caucasus, will be considered in the chapter devoted to the Southern Caucasus. In the meantime it is sufficient to state, that the population of the area underwent significant changes as a result of the Russian expansion. Before the incorporation into the Russian Empire the local population was predominantly Moslem and nomadic, since the agricultural land was scarce and required artificial irrigation. Arable land, where it was available, was held according to the traditional Muslim system of land tenure.²⁶ The majority of local peasants were Muslim commoners (*reai'a*), who owned their house and tools, but worked on somebody else's land as tenants or sharecroppers. In some cases the land was cultivated by the individually free commoners or—on the contrary—by agricultural slaves and other categories of bonded people.²⁷

After the Russian conquest the ethnic composition of the region's population was changed rather drastically. It was a consistent policy of the Russian authorities to ensure the safety of the border with Persia by settling Christians there. Most of the Christians who were allocated land for settlement in the former Transcaucasian Khanates were brought there from Persia as a result of the Treaty of Turkmanchai (1828). According to the Treaty, every person born in the territories now belonging to the Russian Empire (that included all of the Southern Caucasus) had a right to leave Persia and become a Russian subject. This included people born before any Russian presence in the Caucasus was even contemplated, such as the survivors of the sack of Tiflis of 1795 who were at that time taken to Persia by Agha Mohammed Khan and became slaves. Most of these people were ethnic Armenians and Georgians, and the Russian government could rely on their loyalty to the state that liberated them and their families from captivity. Having established a significant Christian minority in the former Moslem khanates, the Russian administration significantly strengthened its control over these lands and further secured the border with Persia.

²⁶ *Prisoedinenie Azerbaidzhan k Rossii i ego progressivnye posledstviia v oblasti ekonomiki i kul'tury*; Baku: 1955; 9–11.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

“Aristocratic” and “Princely” societies of Daghestan. The territory of Daghestan, which is situated in the North-Eastern part of the Caucasus and immediately to the north of the relatively homogenous modern Azerbaijan, baffled its 19th-century Russian administrators, as well as modern scholars, with its multitude of small and miniscule principalities and village republics. The vertically organized state formations were, for the most part, located in the zones of Persian influence and active trade: along the Caspian Sea coast and in the steppes of Northern Daghestan, occupied by the semi-nomadic Turkic peoples (*Kумыks, Nogai, Turkomans*). There were three Kumyk chiefdoms of the Terek and Sulak Valley; the already mentioned principality of Tarki (or Tarqu);²⁸ the Khanates of Avaria, Kazikumukh, Mekhtuly, and other, smaller domains of local potentates. The relatively larger states, such as the principalities of Tarki, Avaria or Kazikumukh, were subdivided into lesser holdings of the local notables, who owed their allegiance to the Prince of the land.

The chiefdoms of Daghestan were ethnically extremely diverse, and their social structures matched this diversity. As a most general rule, the Prince was the elder of the most influential clan of the local elite. Lesser chiefs (usually called “princes” by the Russian administration) ruled their holdings on a hereditary basis, but accepted the ruling Prince as their sovereign.²⁹ The nobility of Daghestan was quite numerous and constituted at different periods 5 %–15 % of the population. It included the relatively few princely families, a vast number of middling nobles (beys, beks, biys), Muslim dignitaries (*mullahs, kadis (qadi)*) and a special category of the “Prince’s Slaves”, who were called differently in different languages. They belonged to the Prince, served as his bodyguards, formed his retinue and, quite often, were his most trusted and loyal servants. In spite of their dependent status, they belonged to the noble class, with all attendant privileges.³⁰

²⁸ The exotic *Shamkhal'stvo Tarkovskoe*, derived from the title of the local ruler: *shamkhal*. This almost unpronounceable name is rarely used in Western literature, so the synonymous term “principality” will be used everywhere in this book, except in quotes from the Russian sources.

²⁹ There exist quite a large number of different titles of the Daghestani nobles of different ranks, which beautifully illustrate the “quilt” of the microscopic chiefdoms of the region. Such were the *Utsmii* of Kaytag; *Maisum* and *Kadii (Cadi)* of Tabasaran, not to mention numerous *beys, beks* or *biys*. Although these titles and names do add some local flavor to the narrative, they can also easily create confusion, so they also will be used only in the translations of the Russian sources.

³⁰ *Istoriia Daghestana*; M.: 1967; 2:328.

Slavery was widespread in states and societies of Daghestan. In the 18th century the majority of slaves were prisoners of war or those, captured during raids. Slave trade was conducted on a large scale and was still on the rise in the first half of the 19th century.³¹

Aristocratic tribes of Central and North-Western Caucasus. A number of peoples of the Caucasus had never had fully articulated state formations, but still possessed tribal princely elites. This situation was stable until the arrival of the Russian administration, which counted such lands summarily among hereditary feudal domains.³² This arrangement can be compared to the oligarchy of Antiquity, and was quite common among the highlander tribes of the Caucasus: such were the Abkhaz and the Dzhezgutin on the Black Sea coast of the Southern Caucasus; and, in the Northern Caucasus, the Kabardins, the Temirgoi, the Egerukhai, the Bzhedugh, the Beslenei, the Makhosh, the Khatukai, the Mamkhegh.³³

The ruling elites of these chiefdoms were strictly stratified. At the top of the social order there were princes, who were followed by the first-rank nobles, then the second-rank nobles, third-rank and, finally, fourth-rank nobles. The nobility constituted approximately 5%–10% of the population.³⁴ There was no clear-cut difference between the princes and the first-rank nobility, especially in terms of material wealth and political influence. Some notables enjoyed as much power and influence in the matters of politics, as the princes. As the Russians saw it at the beginning of the 19th century, “There are plenty of petty tyrants in the Caucasus, but true autocracy is nowhere to be found”.³⁵

The upper classes of all these societies could be clearly distinguished from the rest of the population by the right (indeed, obligation) to bear arms and participate in warfare. This was the warrior caste, where a man’s worth was determined by his military prowess. Numerous sources and many researchers describe the main occupation of the “Caucasian aristocrats” as war, or, rather, raids:

³¹ *Istoriia Daghestana*, 319.

³² *Noveishiia geograficheskiia i istoricheskiia izvestiia o Kavkaze*, 38–39.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ Dzhimov, B.M., *Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe polozhenie adyghov v XIX veke*; Maikop; 1986; 31.

³⁵ *Noveishiia geograficheskiia i istoricheskiia izvestiia o Kavkaze*; 39.

These nobles spend their time in killing one another [...] They say that a noble's life [must be spent] in governing his subjects, in protecting them from raids, and in raiding the others, in hunting and in military exercise.³⁶

Such was the impression of a 15th century traveler, Giorgio Interiano. It was still correct some 400 years later. The "ideal" image of a Circassian noble was that of a lucky predator, who spent his life robbing and plundering his neighbors, but who was never caught. Being caught red-handed brought infinite shame on the guilty party, while successful raids served as proof of gallantry and virility. There is a testimony to that in the memoirs of a Russian officer, who wrote in 1842:

We were met by the five representatives of the Circassians, four of whom were elderly people, and one was quite a young man. When I asked, why was the youth honored so much, they replied something that I interpreted as, "His father has never stolen" ... However, Admiral Serebriakov, who spoke their language fluently, corrected me. "On the contrary, they say that his father has been a robber for 80 years now but was never caught."³⁷

It was through raids that the Circassian nobles created their fortunes, established their reputations and found means to ensure privileged status for their children as well. Considering the fact that the main export commodity of the region was slaves it is clear that they were also large-scale slave traders.

Commoners of these societies were divided into several categories. At the very bottom of the social order there were slaves (*unaut*), who could be prisoners of war, debtors or children of slaves. There were also full serfs with extremely limited property rights (*pshitl'*); serfs who had only limited obligations (mostly dues in kind) and full property rights (*og*) and free commoners, members of the commune (*tfokotl'*), who could own slaves and serfs, but, at the same time, had some customary obligations to the local lord. Apparently, this category of peasants constituted no less than 75 % of the population at the time of the Russian conquest.³⁸

North-West. Democratic tribes of the Caucasus These are the most talked-about, the most controversial and, certainly, the most described peoples of the region. They baffled modern scholars, who tried to fit them into the Procrustean bed of categories, classes or—in case of Marxist

³⁶ Veselovskii, "Neskol'ko geograficheskikh ..." 733.

³⁷ Filipson, G.I., "Vospominaniia", in *Russkii Arkhiv* (St. Petersburg, 1883) 3:172.

³⁸ Dzhimov, op.cit., 53.

social science—political formations. They unwittingly created a source of embarrassment for their own descendants, who refused to accept the fact that their ancestors lived in a “classless” and, therefore, presumably “primitive” society.

However, contemporary European observers (including Russian officers), who were well schooled in the Classics, had no problem whatsoever in describing these peoples the most accurate and expressive way. They compared their social organization to Ancient Sparta, or Archaic Rome (before the Kings). They also found that warriors of these tribes resembled the fabled heroes of Greco-Roman antiquity in their character, code of honor and military gallantry. These observations were dismissed by the 20th century scholars as romantic exaggerations or, even worse, as politically charged propaganda.³⁹

The question of the exact classification of the “democratic” societies of the Caucasus remains officially open and presents a fascinating topic for anthropological and historical research. For the purposes of this book, however, the social organization of these peoples is essential, but not central, so I will proceed in describing them without any claims at finding their perfect hole in the vast field of modern social science.

These societies were ruled by popular assemblies and elected magistrates. Free commoners constituted the bulk of the population. These were men of property, normally heads of households who owned land and had an obligation by the tribal law to possess and bear arms. Military prowess and fearlessness here were elevated to the status of civic virtue. The same set of values as in the “aristocratic” tribes of the region was applicable to the “democratic” ones, with one difference: here ALL men constituted the warrior caste. What was the privilege of the nobles in the “aristocratic” societies, i.e. raiding, warfare and slave trade, here was possible—and actively encouraged—for every commoner. The same values of gallantry and “robber’s luck” ruled their lives.

There were other estates in these tribes: some of them did have some patrician aristocrats, who often could not own land within communal property, nor had any civic rights in the commune. The lowest estates consisted of various bonded people, serfs and slaves.

³⁹ Propaganda of this kind did exist, of course, and it reached its peak during the Crimean War, when the English newspapers published scores of stories about gallant Circassians, who were fighting against the Russians the same way King Leonidas fought with the Persians. This created a lot of sympathy to the Circassian cause, and a lot of

For the sake of a comprehensive description of the democratic societies, it is necessary to mention the exotic peoples of the Pshavs, the Khevsurs and the Tushins, who lived in the inaccessible highlands, nominally included in the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Although officially governed by the Kings of Georgia, these highlanders could never be either feasibly taxed, or even indirectly governed by the state, so they governed themselves. Another Kartvelian group of highlanders, the Svans, were organized as essentially democratic tribes, although they had nominal Princes. Trade was of critical importance for these poor Alpine societies, and, since there was very little of value to be sold from there, slaves, captured during raids into the valleys, were the biggest export commodity for them. At the risk of spoiling the reader's pleasure of discovery I have to say that these societies were located in such inaccessible areas and were so far removed from all centers of power that neither slavery, nor slave trade were eliminated there until the 20th century, when modern means of communication made some feasible control of these places possible. I had to reveal this so early because this is all that could be said about these tribes, as far as slave trade is concerned. They were rarely mentioned in the sources, and no major activity was conducted there by any powers at any time of the 19th century.

The best-known democratic tribes of the Caucasus were situated in three separate regions: in the Mountainous Daghestan and Chechnya (both in the North-Eastern Caucasus) and in the area between the isthmus of the Kuban and the Black Sea, in the North-West. Why these particular areas became centers of democratic transformation in the Caucasus is not clear. Both are certainly among the poorest in terms of natural resources—both agricultural and mineral. The most amazing fact about them is that they had not always been democratic: all of these societies used to be ruled by Princes or some sort of elite class until a democratic “revolution” took place. Historically, these “revolutions” were quite recent: they happened in the 18th- beginning of the 19th century. The reasons for such transformation appear to be specific in each case.

In the Mountainous Daghestan it may have been the shortage of arable land and water that created the elaborate system of terrace agriculture with an attendant system of socio-political arrangements to manage the

resentment against the Russians in Europe. It goes to show that the best propaganda is the one that uses true facts, instead of inventing sensational falsehoods. It all depends on presentation.

scarcity.⁴⁰ In Chechnya it was, apparently, the need to mobilize manpower to its fullest in order to claim and defend the rich lands of the steppe adjacent to the Chechens' original mountainous homeland. In the course of their migration from the mountains, a strong clan system emerged, which was much weaker or did not exist at all in the earlier periods.⁴¹

As far as the Circassian democratic tribes are concerned, their geographic distribution is quite indicative, too. All four of them (the Shapsugs, the Abadzekh, the Natukhai and the ethnically related to the Circassians Ubykh) occupied the territory between the Kuban River and the Black Sea shore and controlled access to the coastal trading outlets. On the one hand, sheer poverty of these lands served as their most effective natural defense: shortage of fresh water, lack of suitable sea harbors and malaria in the coastal lowlands, total absence of roads plus the difficult mountainous terrain and dense forests created tremendous logistic problems for any possible invader. As Sir John Chardin put it in his travel account in 1643, it was the land, that

... Produces no Wheat, nor indeed does it afford anything that is rare and valuable; which is the reason that the Turks leave this vast Country to the Natives, not worth the Toyl of Conquering, nor the Charge of Keeping.⁴²

The growth of long-distance trade during the Ottoman period was probably the cause of increased wealth accumulation and conflicts over its control and distribution. The bleak picture painted by Sir John Chardin changed quite dramatically by the end of the eighteenth century, when there existed cash-crop production and plantation slavery in the Anapa region, on the lands of the democratic Natukhais.⁴³ The demand for staples and a monetized economy of some scale obviously developed in response to the demand of the Ottoman garrisons, which appeared on the Caucasian coast only late in the 18th century, as a reaction to the Russian thrust to the Black Sea, and, especially, to the fall of the Crimean Khanate to Russia in 1772.

⁴⁰ Aglarov, M., *Obshchina v Nagornom Dagestane*; M.: Nauka; 1989.

⁴¹ This argument is supported by one of the leading specialists in the Chechen historical anthropology, Ian Chesnov: "Chechentsem byt' trudno: teipy, istoriia, ikh rol' v sovremennosti"; *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 22 September 1994.

⁴² Sir John Chardin Miles, *Travels* . . . , 76.

⁴³ Pokrovskii, M.V., *Iz istorii Adygov v kontse XVIII—pervoi polovine XIX v.*; Krasnodar, 1989; 52.

Democratic revolutions in Circassia continued well into the 19th century, and were relatively well documented in the Russian sources. One such described event was the civil war in the Shapsugh tribe in 1796, which eventually led to the Russian intervention on the side of the Shapsugh patricians in the battle of Bziyuko.⁴⁴ This conflict was caused by a quarrel between armed *tfokotl'* commoners, escorting a trade caravan to the sea shore, and a group of angry Shapsugh aristocrats, who insisted on their exclusive right to offer protection to traders. The commoners killed the nobles, and a bloody conflict ensued.

The latest attempt of a Circassian democratic revolution was the violent confrontation between the commoners and the patricians of the aristocratic Bzhedugh tribe in 1856. This event entered history books under an explicit Adygh-language name *Pshi-ork zao*, which means War against Princes and Nobles.⁴⁵ Rights of long-distance trade, especially slave trade and arbitrary fines, imposed by the aristocrats were the causes of this conflict. Trade itself did not seem to have been a sufficient condition for democratic transformations, but the increase of wealth derived from slave trade and its spread beyond the aristocratic warrior caste apparently could cause enough social tension to foment already existing conflicts.

The proliferation of the firearms in the region at the end of the 18th-beginning of the 19th century may be also partially responsible for the social turmoil of the period. Unlike a sword, which required daily practice for years (and could be effectively used only if the swordsman was also a good rider), a gun could be fired after just a few days of getting acquainted with it, and, therefore, created opportunities to become a part-time warrior for people who could not devote their whole life to the mastery of the ancient art of war.

These explanations are mere theories, but, taken together, they offer a glimpse at what these societies were like at the time when the Russian Empire began to move in the direction of the Caucasus. After the Russian invasion, these tribes were the ones that held to their slave-trading activities most tenaciously and were prepared to sell their independence dearly. The Russian military administration had very little, if any, success in controlling their trade in captives until the very end of the Caucasian war. And even then the result was not what anybody could have predicted.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 147–154.

⁴⁵ Dzhimov, B.M., *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe i politicheskoe polozhenie adygov v XIX veke*; Maikov: Adygeiskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo; 1989; 147–154.

Some Conclusions

To sum up the survey of the social structures of the Caucasus, we can plausibly come to the conclusion, that they vary according to their environment, so as to make the best of what nature had dealt them in terms of natural resources:

In the kingdom of Georgia, where fertile land, even though not quite abundant, was available for cultivation and could be a significant source of wealth, the society was structured vertically, according to the rules of feudal land ownership and led to the formation of large (by the Caucasian measure) centralized states/kingdoms. The politics of these states had always been defined by the royal families and highest aristocracy, and it was with these uppermost elites that the Russians, for the most part, had to deal in their attempts to incorporate the area into the Empire. If the royal clan and the nobility closest to it could be persuaded (coaxed, bribed or forced) to follow a certain course favorable for the Russian interests, the rest of the country was almost sure to follow. Exceptions were possible, but they remained just that—exceptions.

In the North-East of the Caucasus arable land was scarce and agriculture was limited to animal husbandry (mostly sheep and goats) and subsistence-level growing of crops such as millet or fruit (apple-trees, hazelnuts). Land did not have any real value in this region, so the main source of wealth lay in the trade. Favorable position in the proximity of important trade centers and routes made it possible for the local chiefs to extract fees from merchants for “safe conduct” across the territory they controlled. The existence of various centers and routes of trade, as well as the high-mountainous terrain encouraged the development of multiple chiefdoms, none of which could achieve supreme control over others. With trade and protection racket as the main sources of wealth, the emphasis of all economic activity lay not on ownership of land (which could not produce any meaningful surplus), but on acquiring treasure in its most compact and transportable form: money and precious metals, jewelry and expensive armor, horses and captives for sale. The closer a chiefdom lay to an important trade center or port, the more income the ruler could derive by non-violent means simply by charging merchants for a right to conduct their business (or pass through) his land. In such a way, the chiefdoms on the Caspian shore (benefiting from the proximity of Derbent, the largest trade center of the Northern Caucasus) grew to be significantly larger, richer and politically more influential than the ones removed higher into the mountains. The ruling elites of these chiefdoms

were long established and stable. They were also interested in creating as favorable conditions for trade as possible, which required political stability. Just as in the Georgian kingdoms, an “understanding” between the Russians and the local elites (by enticement or by coercion), was all that mattered. This, however, did not make the goal of the Russians in the North-Eastern Caucasus any easier. One “oath of allegiance” to the Tsar created one ally and half-dozen enemies: former traditional enemies of the chiefdom now allied to Russia were joined by those opposed to the Russian advance, and this situation was re-created each time the Russians managed to acquire a supporter in the region.

The environment of the North-Western part of the Caucasus was the harshest of the three. The soils here were poor, areas suitable for cultivation—few, there were no mineral resources, significant trade routes, nor convenient harbors on the shore of the Black Sea. Moreover, the climate was notoriously bad, the lowlands were occupied by mosquito-breeding marshes but, at the same time, sources of drinking fresh water were scarce. The societies of the North-Western Caucasus were dependent on exports in most necessities: salt, iron, textiles, etc. There was, however, almost nothing that could be offered in exchange for these goods, and what there was (honey, wax, animal hides) could not possibly balance the demand for exports. Obviously, if there was any trade to be done, the goods for exchange had to be procured elsewhere (from “richer” neighboring societies), and, most likely, by force. In these conditions the local societies developed as military oligarchies (and—later—democracies), where each adult male was a warrior, contributing both to the decision-making and to the on-going raiding, which was practically the only means of survival in these parts.

And now, as we have a more or less clear image of the different environments of the Caucasian region and of the political and social structures that were created under its influence, let’s turn to the next and most momentous problem:

Why Was Slave Trade So Important For the Caucasian Societies?

Slavery was an ancient and a deeply embedded institution in most Caucasian societies. So was the slave trade. The first mentions of slaves, purchased off the Caucasian coast are found in the Ancient Greek sources, such as Xenophon and Herodotus. Throughout centuries the Caucasus remained a reliable source of slaves for the markets of the Greek colonies

on the Euxine, and, after their demise, to the succeeding state formations of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. The Asia Province of the Roman Empire relied on the slave supply from the Caucasus, as later did the Byzantine Empire, and, later still, the Ottomans. The Caucasian slaves were well known for their beauty and grace, and were a prized commodity on the world slave market. In the Middle Ages some of the slaves from the Caucasus were sold and re-sold until they made their way into the households of Genoa, Florence, and Venice.

Once again we find, that the most profound economic reason for such a persistent presence of slave trade and for its eventual “petrification” in the social structures of the region depend on the environment. In the North-West of the Caucasus this dependency was the most pronounced. This region was extremely poor in natural resources, including the most vital ones, such as salt and iron. This scarcity created an economy dependent on long-distance trade. If there was nothing to export, there were no staple commodities to be had. Since the area had so little to offer in terms of export goods (animal hides, wild honey and wax are mentioned in the earliest sources as well, as in the 16th–18th century ones), no commodity could even come close to the demand and price slaves fetched at all times in the international market. Eventually, the economic necessity led to the establishment of a peculiar system of procurement: a constant ritualized warfare and raiding activity closely linked to the slave trade. Also, it led to the eventual establishment of the democratic tribal organization, in which every adult male was a warrior and, therefore, could actively participate in all the economically vital activities.

In the North-East, the situation with the natural resources was similar to that of the North-West, with one important difference: the proximity to the major trade routes and centers made it easier to accumulate wealth for the local elites, which led to the creation of multiple chiefdoms, different in their size and political strength. In these societies slave trading became the privilege of the “warrior caste”: the chiefs and their retainues. Even though their relative numbers were quite large (up to 10% of the population, depending on the chiefdom and time),⁴⁶ still it meant that the slave-trading activity was not only an economic necessity, but also

⁴⁶ Most scholars agree that it's extremely difficult to determine the numbers of population in the Caucasus before the 19th century. Some approximations are possible, however. For example, according to some documents, there was 8500 households in Kabarda in 1729. According to the same documents, the number of armed horsemen (which means noblemen) this region could muster at the time was about 10 thousand. Households were considered “noble” or “common” according to the status of its head, so we don't really need

a status symbol. If in the North-West the success of the slave-trading raids was literally a matter of life or death of the community, in the North-East it allowed the local elites to acquire not only the staples (salt, iron, etc.), but also luxury items, otherwise inaccessible and unaffordable: expensive swords and handguns, richly decorated saddles, Persian carpets, Ottoman silks, etc. It was a way for the ruling elites to maintain and strengthen their status by accumulating wealth and passing it on to their children. Since land was of no real value in these parts, “portable wealth”, i.e. treasure, was the most important source of power in these societies.

In the Georgian kingdoms of the Southern Caucasus, where the feudal order was well-established and the status of nobility depended on land ownership, slave trade was the exclusive right of the uppermost elite: only princely families conducted slave trade. It was a status symbol as well as an important source of income, exclusive to the most privileged aristocratic families. In this region of the Caucasus, it was a luxury trade on both sides: local slaves were definitely a prized merchandise on the Ottoman markets (we’ll talk about that in more detail later), and the goods that were offered for them were items of luxury, as well as cash, which was otherwise hard to come by in those parts. The system of acquisition of slaves was as well established and ritualized as elsewhere in the Caucasus. It’s time now we looked more closely at how exactly it worked.

According to the Western ideas about “classical”—i.e. Roman or Greek—slavery, it seemed logical to presume that the majority of slaves on the market were sold by their masters to the trader or directly to the purchaser. The Ottoman authorities chose to imply the same in case of the Caucasian slave trade (an early version of the “don’t ask—don’t tell” policy). Since the Shari’a (legal code in Islam) strictly prohibited the enslavement of free-born Muslims, it was much to their advantage to tacitly imply that ALL (or, at least, the predominant majority) of the Caucasian slaves had been born in slavery and were sold by their lawful masters. Such an eminent scholar of Ottoman slavery and slave trade as Ehyd Toledano also subscribes to this point of view, making exception only for the tumultuous time of the 1870, when the sheer volume of

to know exact numbers of population to make an educated guess as to what proportion of the people constituted the nobility—it makes 9–10%. (Figures according to Kusheva, E.N., *Narody Severnogo Kavkaza I ikh sviazi s Rossiei*, 96).

Circassian refugees made it possible for all kinds of dishonest people to take advantage of their desperate condition and, indeed, “Free refugees were being traded regularly and without impediment like sacrificial lambs”⁴⁷ However, the Ottoman sources, on which E. Toledano based his research, clearly treated this situation as a regrettable exception and insisted that normally only bonded people could be sold on the Ottoman markets, and only with the knowledge of their lawful master (or parents, in case of young children).

Sources, based on the observation of the realities of the Caucasus seem to paint a completely different picture. A Russian survey of 1823 points out, that

... slave trade in the Caucasus is conducted mostly by the laws of war, i.e. it is the prisoners of war, who are sold. And, since the Caucasian peoples are constantly at war with each other, the supply of the merchandise is never short.⁴⁸

The same account explains it further:

Although the bonded people can be sold [...] it is generally regarded as a dishonor to the master and, since custom here is stronger than the law, it is rarely done. Such a humanitarian attitude may seem contradictory because slave trade is an ancient and a respected occupation in the Caucasus. It may be explained by saying that slaves for sale are taken as spoils of war and later they quickly change hands and are eventually sold [to traders]. Such are the customs not only of the highlanders, but also of the Mingrel Princes. When they make war with each other, their first goal is to take as many prisoners as possible. Later the prisoners are taken to Poti, to Anaklia, to Anapa or to other ports for sale. Therefore, everybody sells not his own bonded people, but **somebody else's** [my emphasis—L.K.].⁴⁹

The last sentence of this quote is quite insightful and very important. In a deeply patriarchal society, such as were all the societies of the Caucasus, slaves were considered part of the master's family, albeit a dependent and inferior one. All the societies of the region had a strong tendency to present all their social relations as, to use an anthropological term, fictive kinship. Arguably, this sort of representation was also, or even primarily, legitimizing the relations of dependency in the first place. As an 18th century traveler Dubois de Montpereux expressed it,

⁴⁷ Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, University of Washington Press, 1998, p. 90.

⁴⁸ *Noveishiia geograficheskiia i istoricheskiia izvestiia o Kavkaze*, 365.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 49–50.

The authority of the Princes and of the nobles over their subjects is [...] the authority of trust, of the patriarchal persuasion; all the authority is regulated by ancient custom.⁵⁰

In theory, a father could sell his own children as easily as slaves, but he was unlikely to do so, except in perceived dire need or in case of blatant disobedience. Such an action meant withdrawing the protection of the family and of the clan from the sold person, and this was never taken lightly. Let us remember that in the most ancient recorded code of law, the Babylonian Laws of Hammurabi, expulsion from the community was considered a form of capital punishment and, apparently, rightly so.⁵¹

In fact, it would have been all but impossible to satisfy the demand of the Ottoman slave market if only the bonded categories of the population were available for sale. A curious incident, related by Ehud Toledano seems to prove this point, albeit, indirectly.⁵²

In early 1890s, already after the tremendous influx of the Circassian refugees into the Empire, the Sultan's Palace administration requested the governor of Konya to procure young female Circassian slaves for the Sultan's *harem* from among the refugee families living in the Konya province. The girls were supposed to be attractive, healthy and, preferably, "uncorrupted" by the peasant Turkish manners. Most importantly, they had to come from slave families. The task proved to be extremely difficult. Girls of slave origins were deemed not to be attractive enough, so the governor of Konya tentatively offered a few freeborn Circassian girls under the pretext that if "sufficient amount" was paid for them they "could be considered" to be slaves.⁵³ Since the Palace was adamant about its requirements, however (the bureaucrats were not going to blatantly violate the Shari'a law, after all), the quest remained unsuccessful, even though the governor of Konya spared no effort in searching and even went beyond the borders of his province. No young Circassian girls of slave origins suitable for the Sultan's harem were to be found among the multitude of the Circassian refugees. Is it reasonable to suppose, then, that the luxury

⁵⁰ F. Dubois de Montpereux, *Voyage autour de Caucase*; 110–111.

⁵¹ Although in the Ancient Athens and Rome exile no longer meant certain death, it was still the ultimate penalty applicable to citizens. The Medieval Christian sanction of excommunication and, I am tempted to add here, the expulsion from the Communist Party in the Soviet practice, were clearly a later form of the same punishment.

⁵² Bab-I Ali Yildiz Collection, K 35/2027/44/109, 7 Muharrem, 1310; in: Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 36.

⁵³ Bab-I Ail Yildiz Collection, K 35/2027/44/109, 29 Augustos 1307/10.9.91 and 11 Testin-I sani 1307/23/11/91; in Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 37.

trade in Circassian slaves for the Ottoman market could be supported for hundreds of years, based strictly on the supply from the bonded estates of the Caucasus?

Coming back to the situation in the Caucasus, it is important to stress once again, that the condition of the slaves of the household and that of the slaves, intended for sale, differed in the contemporary perceptions and norms as much as the condition of “belonging” to a community differed from the condition of an almost complete alienation. “Belonging” meant having a status, however low, possessing an identity, being integrated into a community, and, therefore, being eligible for protection. Being alienated meant a near complete dispossession of one’s body and soul, the condition of virtually no status and no identity. It is important to keep in mind that the European abolitionists described all slaves as people, devoid of status and identity, which was an accurate enough thesis for the New World slavery. In the Caucasus, however, the line was drawn according to the traditional representations of the patriarchal societies: either a person enjoys the protection of the community (no matter, what his/her status), or this person is an alien, and therefore, a potential captive for sale. F. Dubois de Montpereux wrote on this account:

Any stranger who wanders into these lands and cannot [if asked] name his *konak* or his host,⁵⁴ can be enslaved.⁵⁵

And if, by any chance, a prisoner was not sold immediately and remained in the community for some time, he was eventually “accepted”. He was allowed to marry and to have a household of his own, which did not, however, alter his status as a slave.⁵⁶ If not sold at once, slaves were not likely to be sold at all.

⁵⁴ All Caucasian peoples regarded hospitality as a sacred custom, similar to the one of the Ancient Greeks. Anyone could enter a Caucasian’s house and ask for shelter and protection. From the moment the shelter was granted, he was accepted as a guest, and it became the host’s responsibility to see to his needs and to protect him, if need be, with his own life. A guest’s murder had to be avenged by his host, otherwise shame would befall the family and tribe of the host.

Konaks or *kunaks* were blood brothers or just very close friends, but not relatives.

⁵⁵ F. Dubois de Montpereux, *Voyage autour de Caucase*, 111.

⁵⁶ Many such stories were told by the Russian soldiers and officers, who were captured in action and kept for ransom (Leo Tolstoy’s *Kavkazskii plennik* is just one of the most famous examples). There were cases when Russian soldiers chose to stay with their new families even when given an opportunity to return to Russia. Such ex-prisoners eventually became free members of the commune. Such outcomes were possible, however, only

Even the words used by different peoples of the Caucasus for “slave” indicate quite clearly the customary way of procuring them. So, in Abkhaz the word *akhashavla* (slave) means literally “loot”.⁵⁷ Clearly, slavery and the slave trade were not one and the same in the Caucasus. These two institutions, in fact, belonged to separate spheres of social life. Slavery and slave trade formed two different and distinct institutions of the Caucasian societies, which, although it sounds like a paradox, were not directly related at all. Slave trade was directly related to the economy and to the traditional warfare and raiding activities. Slavery, on the other hand, was part of the patriarchal social order and patterns of kinship.

As long as there were no abrupt changes in the population, the system worked quite well: the number of people, shipped as slaves each year remained more or less constant, and the warfare itself was so ritualized and ruled by custom, that it was never a real threat to the survival of the society.

Slave trade was so widespread and so deeply rooted in the Caucasian societies that slaves were seen not only as a source of manpower or the most valuable export commodity—they became also a universal measure of exchange. The “Kavkas” newspaper wrote in 1866 about the Abkhaz legal system before the incorporation into the Russian Empire:

The decisions of the courts of law usually involved a customary penalty (according to the *Adats*⁵⁸), which was paid by the guilty party to the plaintiff. For example, the penalty for the murder of a Prince was 38 young boys, a horse with a saddle and a full set of a highlander’s armaments. Someone, who killed a nobleman, had to pay 16 young boys, a gun and a saber. The height of the above mentioned boys had to satisfy the requirements of the *adats*: they were measured by a certain number of palm lengths of the plaintiff. Sometimes, the boys could be substituted for cattle.⁵⁹

There are indications that the Russian administration was aware of the crucial difference between slave trade and the local systems of slavery,

for adult males, who were kept for ransom. Women and children were usually sold immediately, since they were in high demand and fetched much higher prices.

⁵⁷ Kharadze, R.L., Robakidze, A.I., “Kharakter soslovykh otnoshenii v Gornoi Ingushetii”, *Kavkazskii etnograficheskii sbornik, II. Ocherki etnografii gornoi Ingushetii*; Tbilisi: 1968; 134.

⁵⁸ *Adat*—the customary law codes of many Caucasian peoples, as opposed to the Islamic religious law (*Shari’ a*).

⁵⁹ Averkiev, I., “S severo-vostochnogo poberezh’ia Chernogo moria,” *Kavkaz*, Tiflis, 1866.

for the Russian abolitionist measures were explicitly directed against the slave trade only, not the institution of slavery in general. From the very beginning of the expansion in the Caucasus, no effort was spared to control and, eventually, abolish trade in captives, while the indigenous forms of slavery were left intact until the period of the Great Reforms in the 1870s.

The last quarter of the 18th- beginning of the 19th century was marked by a significant increase in feuds, vendettas, raids and general skirmishes in the Caucasus. It was also a time of social instability, revolts of commoners against their nobility, etc.⁶⁰ One of the possible explanations for this phenomenon may lie in the significant population growth in the 18th century. This population expansion was caused by the introduction of the culture of corn into the agriculture of the Caucasus. Corn was four or five times more productive than millet, the traditional staple food of the Caucasian peoples. All of a sudden it became possible to produce grain for the market on the very same lands that could barely sustain their population before the arrival of corn. Sure enough, the sharp rise in the agricultural production led to the growth of the birth rate.

No statistical data are available either to confirm, or to disprove this thesis. No sources provide any quantitative data in this respect, except indirect indications in the Russian surveys of the area. However, documents in regards of slave trade off the Caucasian coast are available, and they convincingly show a sharp increase in numbers of people bought from this source. Also, the effect of the introduction of the corn culture has been extensively studied in different regions of the world, and has always shown a sharp increase in the population shortly after corn became a staple culture. Therefore, my theory concerning the population growth is an educated guess.

Also, unlike many previous periods in history, the 18th century was relatively peaceful and calm for the Caucasian region, with the exception of the Persian invasion of Nadir-Shakh in the 1730s. Therefore, in the absence of major epidemics or wars, the demographic growth continued unabated for almost a century until it reached the new limits of subsistence and provoked a Malthusian crisis of overpopulation and demo-

⁶⁰ Pokrovskii, M.V., *Iz istorii adygov v kontse XVIII—pervoi polovine XIX v.*; 147–154; Gardanov, V.K., *Obshchestvennyi stroi adygskikh narodov XVIII—pervaia polovina XIX v.*; 179–180.

graphic adjustment. The system of the ritualized warfare and traditional raids could not fulfill its purpose under the new conditions.

The crisis was two-fold: even though the productivity of the agricultural land was now much higher due to the culture of corn, the sharp increase in population created an even greater demand for arable land; and, second, the swollen ranks of the already numerous Caucasian nobles needed means to maintain their privileged status and to pass it on to their children. Neither of the problems was easily solved. As we have already seen, like any mountainous environment on Earth, the Caucasus was notorious for scarcity of agricultural lands. This scarcity of land was least noticeable in the Southern Caucasus; it grew worse in the North-East and reached its peak in the North-West. It was often said, that a Circassian (a highlander from the North-East) could cover his whole "field" with his *burka* (a woolen cape). Therefore, every community/chieftdom was ready to wage war with its neighbors in order to obtain new lands (and captives for sale).

The problem of the status of the nobility also could be solved only by the means of war. With greater numbers of the nobles, the competition for privileged status became stiffer, and raiding became a constant occupation, rather than a seasonal and custom-regulated affair. Slaves taken during raids were the surest means to get it all—prestige and wealth. By the beginning of the 19th century, raiding became an on-going process. Whole villages were sacked, adult men mostly killed, women, children and cattle taken away. Such could be the destiny of any village. When the Russian administration finally got to the matter, slave trade in the Caucasus was the single most important factor influencing the social and economic life of the local societies.

Some Conclusions

In all Caucasian societies, slave trade played an important social and economic role. It provided a way of acquiring otherwise inaccessible imported goods and served as means of establishing and maintaining varied social structures. However, the degree of its importance was different in different areas of the Caucasian region.

In the Georgian kingdoms, slave trade was the privilege and status symbol of the highest nobility. By conducting slave trade, the princely houses asserted their exclusive rights to wage war and take captives, and by selling these captives they acquired the luxury items and sums in cash they would have never been able to get for the agricultural products of

their lands. At the same time, slave trade was for them only one of the many sources of their wealth and power, no matter how lucrative and traditional.

In the societies of the North-East, slave trade was conducted by (or in the name of) the noble elites of the local chiefdoms. Since the mineral and agricultural resources of this region were much more limited than those in the Southern Caucasus, the dependence of the local societies on the slave trade was much greater. Although the potentates and their retinues were as interested in the luxury items as their Georgian counterparts, they also depended on imports for such staples as salt and iron, which made a lot of difference in their attitude towards slave trade. Here, the supply of slaves for the merchants had to be constant in order to satisfy constant demand in staples, which could never be otherwise met by other local exports, such as products of animal husbandry. Therefore, raiding activity became one of the most important occupations of the local nobility and by far the most important source of its wealth. This warrior culture of ritualized warfare became also the most important way of maintaining one's social status: it was unthinkable for a young man of noble birth not to prove his worth by participating in raids for slaves and other valuables (horses, money, and precious metals). This way slave trade became the main privilege and obligation of the nobility of the North-Eastern Caucasus.

Much of what was just said about the North-East is applicable also to the North-West of the Caucasus, only on a broader base and in more dire circumstances. Here, as we have seen, the agricultural and mineral resources were almost nil; to such extent that even fresh water was scarce in some areas. The possibilities of profitable trade were significantly less than in the North-East, since there were no trade routes or trade centers close to this area. The coast was inhospitable, and only small sea craft could find a way to anchor there. All this made slave trade practically the only resource, available to the local population in order to satisfy the demand in the imported staples, such as salt, iron and textiles. Unlike the North-East, however, the societies of the North-West were "democratic", i.e. what was the privilege and obligation of the nobility in the North-East, was an expectation which every adult male here, in the North-West was supposed to meet. Therefore, slave trade here was the most important economic activity of all able-bodied males, who knew that the survival of their family and community depended on their ability to acquire slaves for exchange for salt and iron. These societies, precariously located in a place almost totally devoid of

anything humans need for life, were built upon the foundation of slave trade, since nature provided them with no other building material.

However, no matter what different roles slave trade played in the three different large regions of the Caucasus, there was one feature that was common to all of them: everywhere slave trade was strictly separated from the local systems of slavery/dependence. Nowhere did owners (except for rare exceptional cases) sell their own dependents into slavery, since such a practice contradicted the patriarchal nature of the Caucasian societies, no matter what their social particulars. Therefore, raiding was the only means of acquiring slaves for sale all over Caucasus, and that was what the Russians encountered when they arrived there.

CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTIANS IN HETERODOX CAPTIVITY: THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF RUSSIAN ABOLITIONISM IN THE CAUCASUS

“He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold,” replied the priest promptly with decision, “and in this striking, even showy costume he entered Himalaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down in the street again, carrying the dead body in his arms . . . unseen by anyone.”

(G.K. Chesterton, *The Invisible Man*)¹

The Case of an Invisible Slave Trade

For a long time the Caucasian slave trade escaped the attention of the European abolitionists in spite of its large volume and ancient roots. While the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans fueled prolonged and heated political debates in the European parliaments and in the press, Georgian, Circassian, Slavic and other Ottoman slaves purchased in the Caucasus were usually regarded just as another exotic detail of the mysterious Oriental life. Accounts of the traveling Europeans undoubtedly formed the foundation for such an outlook and later served to support it. This impression was further maintained by the fact that, for the most part, travelers encountered only the elite slaves, both white and black, who could, to a certain extent, be considered better off than many of the freeborn Muslim poor. A seventeenth-century traveler described the living conditions in the Sultan's *harem* the following way:

Now, in the Women's lodgings, they live as Nuns do in great Nunneries: for these virgins have very large rooms to live in, and their bedchambers will hold almost a hundred of them apiece [...]

¹ G.K. Chesterton, *The Complete Father Brown* (Penguin Books; n.d.), 77.

Now, those who are shut up for their beauties, are all young virgins taken and stolen from foreign Nations: who, after they have been instructed in good behaviour, and can play upon instruments, sing, dance and sew curiously; they are given to the Grand Signor as presents of great value: and the number of these increaseth daily, as they are sent, and presented by the Tartars, by the Bashawes² and the other great men to the King and the Queen.³

This Englishman saw no difference in the position of the palace slaves and the rest of the population of the Empire:

First then I say that all they, which are in the Seraglio, both men and women, are the Grand Signor's slaves (for so they stile themselves) and so are all they, which are subject to his Empire. For, besides that he is their Sovereign, they do all acknowledge that whatsoever they do, possesse or enjoy, proseedeth merely from his good will, and favour: and not onely their estates, but their lives also are at his dispose, not having respect either to the cause, or manner.⁴

Most Europeans continued to regard Ottoman slaves as no different from ordinary servants and, in some cases, indeed, as a privileged estate. Tales of slave girls who became mothers of Sultans, or of slave boys who became Grand Viziers, abounded and were duly recorded by the fascinated Europeans. Needless to say, such cases provided food to the romantic imagination rather than a real picture of the slaves' condition. Besides, the European guests were allowed to see only the carefully selected slaves of their hosts, the ones that could make their master proud by demonstrating their grace, talents or craftsmanship. These were, indeed, elite slaves, and, like all elites, they were very visible, but few in number.

But even for the fortunate few who did end up in the service of great ladies or members of the Ottoman court, life in slavery was far from easy and happy. The wife of Kibrizli Mehmet-pasha, Melek-hanum, who had first-hand knowledge of the matters of the *harem* and slave trade, wrote in her memoir: "There is no doubt that the position of the slaves is not a very happy one."⁵ She admitted, that for the poor Circassian girls life in their homeland must have been very hard because Circassian women

² Most likely, *pashas*—high-ranking military commanders or governors of provinces.

³ John Greaves, *A Description of the Grand Signour's Seraglio, or Turkish Emperors Court* (London, 1653), 36–37.

⁴ John Greaves, *A Description . . .*, 34.

⁵ Melek-hanum, *Thirty Years in the Harem, or the Autobiography of Melek-hanum, Wife of H.H. Kibrizli Mehmed-pasha* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 124.

were regarded as “mere beasts of burden” by their men folk and had not only to do all the household work, but labor in the fields and tend to the animals as well. Many of these girls did indeed have great hopes for the future in Istanbul, but the reality was harsh:

When one wishes to buy a slave, he applies to these gentry [slave merchants], and they exhibit, for his selection, a band of young peasant girls, scantily clad, who had only left their mountain homes a few months previously, and speak none other than the barbaric language of their tribes. They sell for various prices. The amount ranges from about four thousand up to twenty thousand francs or thereabouts (160–800 Pound Sterling). If they are not good-looking, they are only employed in duties that do not necessitate their appearance in the presence of their masters, in which case that value does not exceed from fifteen hundred to two thousand francs.⁶

Girls were usually sold at the age of twelve to thirteen, but sometimes children as young as six years old could be purchased by someone who wished to bring them up as their slaves, or to re-sell them later at a profit after they have received some training. Good-looking girls, brought up and trained at a house of an Ottoman lady had a real chance to be sold as concubines or even as wives. According to Melek-hanum, many Turks, indeed, preferred to take a slave as a wife because such arrangement did not involve a whole clan of in-laws “and other undesirable relations”⁷. But even the position of a wife in a harem of a well-to-do man did not mean security and bliss for a slave girl:

If she [the master’s first wife] be wealthy and of a family which the husband holds in respect, then the poor slave-wife has to put up with all the annoyances, all the humiliations that a jealous and all-powerful rival can invent. Her life is one long martyrdom, which frequently reaches a tragic termination.⁸

But, according to Melek-hanum, the worst fate befell those girls, who were bought by some great Ottoman ladies:

When a girl enters the harem of a lady of a high rank, her situation is truly deplorable. [...] She is usually compelled to spend her nights standing, attending on the riotous excesses of her mistress. From her sheer caprice, they often find themselves condemned to be scourged by eunuchs, armed with curbatches, or whips of elephant skin.

On the other hand, these unhappy creatures are often subjected at once to the desires of their master and the terrible jealousy of their mistress.

⁶ Ibidem, 125.

⁷ Melek-khanum, 126.

⁸ Ibidem, 127.

Threatened with perpetual celibacy, excited by the idea of being chosen either as odalisques or as wives of the second grade, frequently taken advantage of by force—every thing contributes to their downfall. [...]

If the unhappy girls finds herself enceinte, she cannot be sold while in that condition. Moreover, she cannot be sold at all, if she gives birth to a son. Her mistress, therefore, takes her to a midwife to procure an abortion.⁹

These accounts show how the supposedly privileged and protected position in the harem of a wealthy household could (and often did) turn into the most real nightmare of slavery, worthy of *The Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Of course, European travelers were not familiar with such intimate matters of the Ottoman illustrious families: all they were allowed to see were well groomed, beautiful and, apparently, happy girls who enjoyed an immeasurably better life than the one that was led by their sisters in the Caucasian mountains.

Those of the nineteenth-century European travelers who visited the Caucasus were, apparently, also left under the impression that slavery was the most desirable fate for any Circassian girl. (At that time they never described any trade in boys or captive men, as if this aspect of the Black Sea slave trade never existed). In this, they differ sharply from the earlier accounts, which dwell extensively on the trade in men, women and children of both sexes. For example, Sir Johannes Chardin Miles, who visited the Caucasus in the seventeenth century, left the following description of the slave trade in Mingrelia in the 1680s:

[...] The sight of so many Slaves of all Ages and both Sexes, some in Chains, some ty'd two and two, and of the Officers of the Customs that look'd like meer Robbers and Ruffians, had fill'd my Head with a Thousand Fears.¹⁰

Sir John's observations certainly paint a much more unpleasant picture, and the one which is also much closer to the "standard" ideal of slave trade, than the following description by the nineteenth-century American tourist, the same one who was romantically inspired by the vision of the former slave trading port of Anapa and proceeded to imagine the brilliant life that Circassian maidens were destined to lead in the Ottoman harems. Here is his explanation of the Circassian slave trade:

⁹ Ibidem, 127–128.

¹⁰ Sir Johannes Chardin Miles, *Travels of Sir John Chardin Into Persia and East Indies Through the Black Sea and the Country of Colchis* (London: Moses Pitt, 1686), 109.

The Caucasians and the Americans have the same reasons for releasing their children; who, though springing from indifferent sources in the country, make for themselves wealth and a name in the cities; the sons of the former, at various times, having been raised to the highest posts in the Ottoman empire. The mother of the Sultan and the admiral of the Turkish fleet are Circassian slaves, and receive all the honors due to their present exalted station.¹¹

No mention here of chains and ties. Authors of the nineteenth-century sources seem to notice only happy Circassian maidens departing to Turkey in hope of better life. There could be various reasons for such discrepancies: first, the Russian anti-slave-trade activities might have already led to significant changes in the trading pattern, almost excluding males. Another possible reason has to do with the mid-19th-century politics, the European fascination with the brave Circassians and with the support of their resistance against the Russian expansion. Obviously, the general atmosphere of the anti-Russian sentiment during the pre-Crimean War decades encouraged traveling Europeans and Americans to disregard the cruel facts of the Circassian slave trade as much as possible.

It is a general custom in Muslim countries to sell their women, and a Turk in Constantinople sells his own daughter to her husband in the same manner as he sells the poor Circassian girls in Tuapse. Besides, these people do not consider slavery shameful or vile for their women. According to the highlanders' ideas, selling a girl means to marry her off. Slave traders are considered to be the girl's guardians who receive interest when they procure husbands for them. Meanwhile, in Turkey Circassian maidens can easily get into the harem of a Pasha or, even of the Sultan himself. This happens very often, especially to the beautiful ones; the possibility of such improvement of life entertains the poor slaves, and they are not sorry to leave their native land.¹²

Such romantic accolade to slave trade is understandable, when coming from someone whose sympathy to the Circassian cause was strong enough to have spent two years with the highlanders fighting against the Russians. A more impartial observer reveals important details, which eluded the attention of the ardent supporters of the Circassian plight. Dr. Moritz Wagner, who visited the Northern Caucasus at about the same

¹¹ George Leighton Ditson, *Circassia; A Tour to the Caucasus* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1850), 174–175, 177.

¹² A. Fonville, *Poslednii god voiny Cherkessii za nezavisimost'*, 1863–1864. *Iz zapisok uchastnika—inostrantsa* (reprint: Severo-Kavkazskii filial traditsionnoi kul'tury: MtsTK Vozrozhdenie, 1990), 28.

time as the previously quoted travelers, described the practices of slave traders (presumably—the benevolent guardians of the Circassian maidens) in the following way:

The trade with Circassian girls is still carried on as extensively as before, only it requires more circumspection and is confined to the stormy winter months lasting from October to March during which the Russian cruisers remove from the havenless coast. The spectator is filled with astonishment on viewing [...] the small barks in which the Turkish slave-dealers venture on their adventurous voyages during this most perilous season. [...]

Each vessel carries a cargo of thirty or forty girls, who are packed close together like herring in a tub, and submit with great resignation to the distress of sea-voyage, which they hope soon to exchange for the delights of the city of the Sultan. [...]

It is computed that, on the average, five or six vessels out of eight accomplish their mission.¹³

Cold and wet conditions of a sea voyage in the wintertime added sickness (and death) from exposure to the list of dangers, facing the slaves. Obviously, only very healthy and strong ones could eventually make it to the relative safety and comfort of an Ottoman slave market. Mortality must have been especially high among children, who were often sold at six or seven years of age. Even if the slavers' vessels did not perish in the storms, which make the Black Sea almost non-navigable in winter, a voyage that was supposed to last only two days could take five or six, which meant that slaves were deprived of food and water until the ship reached a shore.

But rough weather, cold and hunger were not the only possible hazards of such a journey for a slave, especially if it was a woman. Since the slave dealer was her legal master from the moment of purchase until she was re-sold at the destination, he enjoyed full rights over her, including the right of having sex with her. In fact, the only thing that might have stopped a sensible slave trader in this respect was his own future profit: the price of a virgin was certainly much higher than that of a non-virgin, and he could sustain a serious loss if he tried to sell a pregnant slave under false pretenses. These considerations were not always a serious deterrent, however, as proven by the account of Semsigul, a Circassian slave, whose story became known because she was brave, strong and fortunate enough

¹³ Dr. Moritz Wagner, *Travels in Persia, Georgia and Koordistan; with Sketches of the Cossacks and the Caucasus* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1856), 41–42, 43–44.

to be able to take her former master to court.¹⁴ According to Samsigul, she was forced to have sexual relations with the slave dealer who purchased her in the Caucasian market and as a result of this she became pregnant. In spite of the prohibition of sales of women who became pregnant by their master (as well as of those who bore their master a child), the dealer sold Samsigul into a harem of a high-placed Ottoman official in Cairo. As soon as her condition was discovered, she was returned to the dealer, who refused to take any responsibility for her. The dealer's wife beat Samsigul mercilessly, including hitting her on the stomach and insisted on arranging an abortion in spite of the fact that the pregnancy was by that time in its second half and the midwives refused to participate in this. Samsigul was saved by the charity of a wealthy woman who found out about her plight and gave her shelter in her own house. Later, after the baby was born, the slave dealer's wife claimed him and adopted him as her own, which was her right to do. Although as a result of going to court Samsigul might have received her freedom (the sources give no account of the outcome of the trial), she lost her child and went through a terrible ordeal. No doubt, her case was not unique, and there were many women in her position who never made their complaints known and, quite likely, perished in suffering and pain which we come to associate with the "normal" image of slavery.

We must also keep in mind that a large proportion of the Caucasian slaves were not sold voluntarily by their families, but were taken as captives during raids. Taken all together, this creates a picture of a slave trade not very different from its Trans-Atlantic variety, which was being suppressed at the very same time by a wide alliance of European states.

Some Conclusions

Even though Caucasian slaves were often mentioned in the European literature of the 18th and the 19th centuries (in non-fiction as well as in fiction), the fact of slave trade off the Caucasian coast remained, for the most part, invisible to the Europeans. This paradox can be explained in a two-fold way. First, slaves from the Caucasus were, to use a modern expression, a "name brand" which meant luxury and lavish spending. They were the most expensive slaves on the Ottoman market and, as such, were used as a way to display their owner's wealth and power. The slaves

¹⁴ Egyptian National Archives (*Dar al-Watha'iq al-Quawmiyya*), L/2/67/4, Investigation Report No. 13, pp. 44–54; in: Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, pp. 59–67.

the European travelers might have seen in the households of the Ottoman dignitaries were not employed in hard labor; they were richly dressed, well fed and looked healthy. Of course, their fate seemed much better to the outsiders than even that of many freeborn subjects of the Sultan. As it was often the case, European travelers took display for the real thing.

Second, the few Europeans who did give thought to the fact of slave trade on the Black Sea, tended to exaggerate the advantages and opportunities which awaited the slaves in the Ottoman Empire and to seriously underestimate the danger, misery and sheer horror of the long transportation over the mountains, then—over treacherous sea and finally to the slave market. We have seen an estimate, showing that as much as 25 %(!) of the slaves were lost at sea when the transporting boats sank. And, as we have seen from other sources, for those who made it all the way to become a slave in a rich Ottoman household, the reality was far from the fairy tales of the “Arabian Nights”, but close to what could be expected from everyday dependence on every whim of the master.

All in all, the case of the invisible slave trade on the Black Sea is one of the most striking examples of “Orientalism” in the European attitude towards the realities of the Islamic culture: myths, legends, and the exotic sights of the “mysterious East” created such a brightly-colored picture, that it was impossible for an outsider with his eyes “wide shut” to see the real meaning of what he was witnessing. That’s why, even when looking at a slave market, European travelers saw not the profitable business it was, but a fairy tale they perceived it to be.

*The Two Abolitionisms: The European and American
Enterprise and Their Distant Cousin from Russia*

The subject of the European and American abolitionism is enormous, and the quantity of scholarly literature devoted to it is just as vast. In the brief overview of this phenomenon I make no claim for any original or even remotely comprehensive research. It serves only the purpose of comparing the Russian abolitionist movement with its European (and American) counterpart in the most general terms. I chose to put a more detailed analysis of the similarities and differences between the two forms of abolitionism beyond the scope of this book because of the sheer size of the subject. It could easily constitute a monograph of its own. However, a brief overview of the subject would definitely help with the understanding of the Russian case.

At the end of the 18th- beginning of the 19th century abolitionism was taking root in Europe and in the Americas. It quickly developed from its predominantly religious original form into a social movement and—later—into a hegemonic international norm. The dates of the introduction of the anti-slavery laws in different European countries present us with a surprise: Russia, rarely mentioned among the abolitionist countries, was the second after Denmark to pass such laws. Denmark did it as early as 1792,¹⁵ Russia in 1805, the United States and Great Britain passed their first laws, limiting slave trade in 1807, and Sweden—in 1813.¹⁶ In 1814, the treaties of Paris, Kiel and Ghent outlawed slave trade on an international level and were signed by Great Britain, France, Austria, Russia and Prussia.¹⁷ The Vienna Congress of 1815 confirmed these treaties, and the same year slave trade was prohibited in France.¹⁸ Portugal and Spain finally yielded to British pressure and signed anti-slavery treaties with Great Britain in 1816 and 1817, respectively.¹⁹ Similar treaties officially bound some of the countries of South and Central America with Great Britain in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁰

European and American abolitionism had strong religious roots, which went back as far as the beginning of the 18th century and were based on Protestant ethics. For the Quakers, anti-slavery became a crucial test of religious purity.²¹ A wonderful title of a book by Benjamin Lay, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, speaks for itself:

All Slave-keepers that Keep the Innocent in Bonds are Apostates Pretending to Lay Claim to the Pure Holy Christian Religion of what Congregation so Ever; but Especially in Their Ministers by which Example the Filthy Leprosy and Apostasy is Spread Far and Near; It is a Notorious Sin, which many of the True Friends of Christ and His Truth, Called Quakers, Has Been Many Years and Still Are Concern'd to Write and Bear Testimony Against; As a Practice so Gross and Hurtful to Religion, and Destructive to Government, Beyond What Words Ever Set Forth, or Can be Declared of the Men or Angels, and Yet Lived in by Ministers and Mag-

¹⁵ *An Exposition of the African Slave Trade from the Year 1840 to 1850, Inclusive. Prepared from official documents and published by direction of the representatives of the religious society of friends in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware* (Philadelphia: J. Rakestraw, 1851), 7.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 6–7.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 8–9.

²¹ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, n.d.), 291.

istrates in America. Written for General Service, by Him that Truly and Sincerely Desires the Present and eternal Welfare and Happiness of All Mankind, all the World Over, of All Colours, and Nations, as His Own Soul.²²

As this eloquent book title confirms, slave trade was thought of first and foremost as a mortal sin, or, in more general terms, as one of the evils of the world that had to be eliminated in the great Protestant tradition.

I scarcely know of any subject, the contemplation of which is more pleasing than that of the correction or the removal of any of the acknowledged evils of life; [...] Among the evils, corrected or subdued, either by the general influence of Christianity on the minds of men, or by particular associations of Christians, the African Slave-trade appears to me to have occupied the foremost place. The abolition of it, therefore, [...] should be accounted as one of the greatest blessings, and, as such, should be one of the most copious sources of joy.²³

Three decades later a Special Committee of the French Parliament, when dealing with the same problem, took a more secular approach. As the Report of the Committee stated,

Slavery is one of those institutions which can exist for millennia if nobody asks for the reason of their existence, but become impossible to maintain on the very day when such question was raised.²⁴

Apparently, for the French Parliament, the main problem related to the slave trade and slavery was contained in the practical implications of the developing abolitionist movement not only in France, but abroad as well. Indeed, the system of slavery was quickly becoming more and more difficult (and expensive) to maintain after the “question was raised” by the Great Britain and its allies, and the regular anti-slavery naval patrols were established in the Atlantic. (A few Russian ships also participated in these patrols, but the Russian presence in the Atlantic remained largely symbolic). It is also important to keep in mind, that in the 1830s practical and political sides of slave trade took center stage for all involved parties,

²² Published in Philadelphia, 1736, cited in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 291–292.

²³ Thomas Clarkson, M.A., *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishments of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* (London: R. Taylor & Co. for Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), 1:1, 1:8–9.

²⁴ Rapport Fait Au Nom de la Commission chargée d'examiner la Proposition de M. de Tracy, relative aux Esclaves des colonies, Par M.A. de Tocqueville, Député de LaManche, *Chambre des Députés* (Paris, 1839), 2-e Session, 7.

especially since most issues of morality and ethics of slavery had already been discussed at length by the philosophers and theologians of the previous century.

The Committee does not have to establish that slavery may and must end. This is now a universally acknowledged truth. [...] Therefore, the question that preoccupies us at this time goes beyond theories and enters, finally, the domain of political practice. It is no longer a question of whether slavery is good or bad or whether it should end, but when and how it should come to an end most conveniently. [...]

Humanity and morality have often, and sometimes impatiently, called for the abolition of slavery. Today it is imposed on us by the political necessity.²⁵

There were, however, also some concerns related to the abolition of slavery. The French lawmakers expressed them in the following terms:

Today the blacks are almost totally avoiding the bonds of marriage: they are lazy and irresponsible; they more resemble spoiled children than men. The truths of Christianity are almost unknown to them; they do not know anything about the Gospels but the name.²⁶

At the risk of running ahead of myself I have to say that, as we will see in more detail later, this characteristic of the natives is very similar to the one given by the Russian officials to the population of Imeretia and Mingrelia. Quite naturally, both the Western powers and the Russian government saw their abolitionist effort as *mission civilisatrice*, as bringing progress to the remote and barbarian corners of the world. But, apart from the inevitable “Orientalism” of the Europeans and Russians of the 19th century, the similarities between the two abolitionist efforts were few, and the differences substantial. In fact, these two phenomena represented almost a mirror image of each other: alike, but opposite in major ways.

First, unlike the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which was established and run by the Europeans in the first place, slave trade in the Caucasus was indeed thousands of years old and was an essential part of the local social and economic structures, morals and customs. Second, contrary to the elegant formula of A. de Tocqueville, slavery in the Caucasus showed absolutely no sign of self-destruction “once the question was raised”. Rather on the contrary, it became one of the major causes of the anti-Russian resistance. And, finally, while the European powers sought to

²⁵ Rapport Fait Au nom de la Commission, 2, 10.

²⁶ Rapport Fait au nom de la Commission, 2-3.

prevent their own subjects from owning and selling slaves, the Russian government (even in the 19th century) had to take measures to prevent its subjects from being enslaved.

But the question remains: why was the state, where serfdom was still a legal condition for the majority of its peasants, investing so much resources and effort into the abolition of slave trade on one of its borders? It can't be explained by the mere logic of an Imperial expansion. It remains enigmatic until we consider the peculiar position of the Russian Empire in the space of the contemporary geopolitics and of the emergent geoculture of the European imperialism.

Ever since the beginning of the 18th century, from the time of the Petrine reforms Russia perceived its place in the concert of the European powers as its due. The newly established Russian Empire, the successor of an obscure Muscovite state, had obtained an extraordinary leverage in European politics since the latter half of the eighteenth century. Its accomplishments, especially in the foreign policy and in the military development, were symbolically marked by the first Russian occupation of Berlin in the course of the Seven Years War in 1760. This triumph of the Russian military proved that the Petrine reforms had attained the key mechanism of state power in the Age of Absolutism: a powerful standing army and navy. Yet Russia's belonging in the concert of Western powers remained suspect for a considerable time for a whole number of reasons.

From the West's point of view, the quick transformation of Muscovy, which used to be seen, essentially, as the epitome of Asiatic backwardness and uncouthness, could not help being superficial and, therefore, unconvincing. Such facts as that "*les Boyars Russes*" could now speak French and that their wives and daughters wore fashions from Paris were seen as secondary to other issues, such as the continuing existence of the institution of serfdom, Russia's profoundly feudal legal system or absence of even a hint of civil liberties. Russian military successes made the Western powers, if anything, more apprehensive. Quite in keeping with Alexander Pope's famous line, the European elites believed that "a little learning is a dangerous thing"²⁷ and were not

²⁷ A little learning is a dangerous thing;
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.

Essay on Criticism. Part ii. Line 15.

in a hurry to embrace the Russian bear—not even the one that had been taught to dance the most fashionable cotillion.

Russia's successful participation in the Napoleonic wars and its role in the deposing of the "Corsican monster" led to a brief infatuation of the Western public with all things Russian. Tsar Alexander I became the darling of the European courts, and a Cossack Ataman Platov received an honorary Doctorate at Oxford. That was the proudest moment of the Russian ruling class: the political successes of the 18th century found their culmination in the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), where Russia was an undisputed equal among the "Great Powers"—Austria, Prussia and the Great Britain.²⁸ This euphoria was doomed to be short lived, however. The constitutional plans of Alexander I never came to fruition, serfdom was not abolished and no significant change in the political order of the Russian state was ever achieved at that time. Moreover, the momentum of Empire-building, receiving a considerable boost from the Vienna Congress (apart from the international recognition and prestige the Russian Empire also acquired a larger part of the territory of Poland), was getting stronger. It was only a matter of time before the colonial interests of Russia would clash with these of its recent allies in the Napoleonic wars. It is no wonder, therefore, that the status of Russia as that of a "Great European Power" became suspect again quite soon after the festivities of the Treaty of Paris²⁹ were over.

There was another factor making the European status of the Russian Empire even more questionable. Ever since this new power from the East came to play a significant role in the affairs of Europe, it could not avoid associations with another large Imperial presence there, the Ottomans. It was a much older (and once much feared) player in the European political sphere, and one, which was explicitly treated as the cultural "other". There were, indeed, significant similarities between these two contenders for a place in the European concert of powers, especially when observed from the Western viewpoint. Both countries were absolute monarchies without any regard for civil liberties or individuals' rights. In both countries the institution of slavery (or—in case of Russia—semi-slavery in the form of serfdom) continued to exist even in the enlightened 19th century.

²⁸ France owed its inclusion into the number of the "Great" (which became five instead of the planned four) almost entirely to the diplomatic genius of Talleyrand, King Louis XVIII's Foreign Minister.

²⁹ Treaty of 1814, which brought the dynasty of Bourbons back to power in France and defined most of the resolutions of the Vienna Congress.

Both countries were striving to achieve some degree of European culture, paying most attention to the military in the process, which made them all the more untrustworthy.

It would be fair to say that the Western public was not alone in making these comparisons. In fact, nobody was more painfully aware of these unflattering similarities than the Russian educated elite. For them the image of “Turks” (as the Ottomans were habitually called) was a constant reminder of how narrow was the gap dividing the two empires and how thin was the coat of the European culture, attained by the Russian society. The Ottoman Empire served as the direct opposite of everything the Russians believed they should be striving for: progress, education, liberal reforms, personal freedoms, even “civilized” treatment of women. V.G. Belinsky, one of the most influential Russian literary figures of the 1840s, compared the place of women in the Russian society to that in the “Turkish harems, where they keep girls in ignorance and servility under the pretext of protecting their innocence” and bitterly complained about the sorry state of the women’s education in Russia with all its pretenses for “European polish.”³⁰

The image of the Ottoman Empire became firmly entrenched in the minds of the Russian intelligentsia as an example of how a “non-European” government treated its subjects, what policies such a government was likely to adopt and what ideology it was promoting. In his “Writer’s Diary” Fedor Dostoevsky describes the Turks and their policies in the Balkans as the very epitome of barbarian morals and backwardness. In his polemics with Leo Tolstoy he goes as far as calling the Ottomans’ treatment of the Bulgarians “evil incarnate” and asks—quite rhetorically—whether a civilized government could allow such horrors to happen.³¹ Dostoevsky, never known for his support of the Tsarist government, in this case expressed his full approval of the Russian intervention in the Balkans in order to liberate the long-suffering Slavs from the brutal Turkish rule. This approval had as much to do with Dostoevsky’s conviction of Russia’s messianic role in the world, as with his desire to distance his country as far as possible from the all-too-common comparison with the Ottoman state.

³⁰ V.G. Belinsky, “Evgenii Onegin” kak entsiklopediia russkoi zhizni, *Sobranie Sochinenii V.G. Belinskago*; St. Petersburg, Izd. Tov-va M.O. Vol’f, 1883, p. 327.

³¹ F.M. Dostoevsky, *Dnevnik pisatel’ia*, 1877; in Dostoevsky, F.M., *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*; Leningrad, Nauka, 1972–1990; t. 27.

Even as late as 1900s the “Turks” were still a source of much anguished thought for the Russian intellectuals. The revolution of 1909 and the establishment of a constitutional parliamentary rule in the Ottoman Empire dealt a heavy blow to their patriotic pride and served as an additional proof of a hopeless state of the current regime in Russia. A famous writer of social satire, Arkadii Averchenko, devoted several of his amusing stories to the discussion of the subject, describing, among other things a not-so-far-off future in which the Russians would be taking lessons from the Turks in everything, starting from political freedoms (of speech, publications and associations) and to fashions (“a fez is already much worn as a so-called smoking-cap, so why not adopt other articles of clothing, practical for our climate?”).³²

In this manner the Russian elites found themselves constantly checking their actions against two major examples: the positive one of the West (the goal to be attained) and the negative one of the East (personified in the Ottoman Empire, to be distanced from at all costs). In this effort they developed a peculiar form of a racist colonial attitude towards the peoples of the Caucasus, as well as towards the Ottomans and Persians, which served an important purpose. It was a Western instrument adopted by the Russian elites after the Petrine reforms for dealing with the insecurity of Russia’s European status. In their dealings with the “true Oriental despots” the Russian officials lost no opportunity to stress the grandeur of their own state at the expense of their adversaries. The legendary episode of the audience given by the Shah of Persia to Ermolov is a good example of such policy. The court etiquette—until Ermolov’s arrival scrupulously followed by all foreign diplomats—required that the visitor removed his shoes and approached the Shah’s presence on his knees. Ermolov, however, became quite violent in his fury against the “barbaric custom” and threatened with leaving and resuming the hostilities unless he could keep his boots on and walk to the Shah’s throne rather than “crawl”, as he put it. It is important to note, that the British diplomats followed the rules of the Shah’s etiquette without a murmur (although it’s hard to believe they enjoyed doing it). However, for them it was more of an issue of personal inconvenience than of principle. For Ermolov, on the other hand, his personal temper and pride aside, it was a matter of proving to all concerned (first of all, to his own compatriots, then to Persians and after that—to the British) that Russia was far superior to Persia and could even score where

³² A. Averchenko, *Zapiski Prostodushnogo*; Moskva: A/O “Kniga i biznes”, 1992, p. 193.

the British were content to “crawl”. Of course, such ardent desire to prove one’s “belonging” does not come from feeling secure. On the contrary, the British, who enjoyed considerable influence at the Persian court, saw no harm in humoring the Shah in smaller matters such as shoe removal or knee-bending. For a Russian official, conscious that his country’s European status could depend on his every move, such condescension for the natives was yet unthinkable. Even such a liberal thinker as Alexander Griboedov quite seriously considered Persians inferior to Russians in most respects, in spite of his excellent knowledge and profound interest in the local culture and customs. That’s why he would not yield an inch at the time of crisis and would not even dream of trying to solve the problem of the Shah’s runaway slaves by any means except direct conflict. He firmly believed that he was defending a just cause and that, and the fact that all the might of the Russian Empire supported him, should keep him above all the petty passions of Persians. It was partially that particular hubris and the deep-rooted conviction in the European moral superiority that brought about his tragic death.

At this point it may be profitable to say a few words about the situation on the other end of the Caucasian slave-trading route. What was the attitude of the Ottoman government and of the Ottoman educated elite towards the phenomenon of slavery and slave trade in the Empire? How did the Ottoman intellectuals react to the increasing demands on the part of the European governments (especially the British) to abolish slavery and to ban slave trade? Perhaps the best description of the Ottoman attitude towards this problem belongs to Lord Ponsonby, the British ambassador in Istanbul in his letter to Lord Palmerston:

I have mentioned the subject [*of banning slavery in the Ottoman Empire—L.K.*] and I have been heard with extreme astonishment accompanied with a smile at the proposition for destroying an institution closely interwoven with the frame of society in this country and intimately connected with the law and with the habits and even the religion of all classes, from the sultan himself down to the lowest peasant.³³

Indeed, such attitude becomes more understandable if we keep in mind, that for a large proportion, if not for the absolute majority, of the Ottoman elite of the time the question of slavery was not an abstract philosophical problem to be pondered with detachment. Most of the Ottoman highest administrators had mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, wives

³³ Report of Lord Ponsonby to Palmerston, 17.12.1840, in: Philip Guedalla, *Palmerston*, London, E. Benn, 1926, p. 267.

and concubines of slave origin, and many of them were of slave origin themselves. The problem of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, therefore, was seen not as a matter to be discussed with any foreigners, no matter how powerful and influential. It was seen much more as a family problem, if problem is, indeed the right word in this case. The position of the *kul/harem* slaves was seen as a privileged one, and this attitude was automatically extended to all slaves in the Ottoman Empire. According to Ehud Toledano, who conducted a special research of this issue, for much of the nineteenth century, "European abolitionist arguments were either taken as an offense or met with smiling dismissiveness, and thus, no real discussion of the issues could ensue."³⁴

It was only in the 1870s when the Ottoman intellectuals began addressing the issue of slavery, and even then they were doing it with extreme caution. A good example of such careful and at times controversial, approach is the way Ahmet Midhat, one of the most prominent Ottoman writers of the time, treated the topic of slavery in his works. As many, (perhaps, the majority) of his Young Ottoman colleagues, Ahmed Midhat had a mother who was a Circassian slave by origin. It is not surprising, therefore, that his attitude towards slavery remains inconsistent, condemning it in one of his plays ("May the eyes of those who sold us be blinded!")³⁵ and supporting it in an essay with the age-old argument that many of the slave girls eventually become queen-mothers, that the majority of wives of the Ottoman elite are slaves and buying a slave is, in fact, the same as choosing a wife.³⁶

It is obvious that for the majority of the Ottoman ruling elite the problem of Circassian slavery remained non-existent until the very end of the Ottoman Empire, when both the slavery and the social system that supported it were swept away by a wave of modernization and Westernization. The *kul/harem* slavery was too intimately connected to the most private sphere of life: Circassian women were mothers, wives, wet nurses, nannies and other female members of the family of every Ottoman high official or intellectual, no matter how liberal or pro-Western his views. Quite often these officials and intellectuals were themselves former slaves, or knew that their immediate ancestors (fathers or grandfathers) were of slave origin. All this made a detached approach

³⁴ Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 117.

³⁵ Ahmet Midhat, *Esaret, Letaif-i Rivayat*; Istanbul, 1290/1873-1874, vol. 1., pp. 73-74; in: Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 123.

³⁶ Parlatur, Ismail, *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kolelik*, Ankara, 1987, pp. 42-45.

to this problem all but impossible. Not unlike their Russian counterparts, Ottoman intellectuals were torn between their roots (Islamic culture with all its implications, including *kul/harem* slavery) and their desire to belong to the new civilization of the West, with its fabulous promises of progress and modern science.

Returning back to the Russian abolitionist effort in the Caucasus, however, we have to remember that it kept its momentum and energy mostly because it was not limited to the policy-making spheres and government officials. It was popular not just with the liberal part of the Russian educated elite and the dissident circles of the intelligentsia, either. It found ardent approval among the common people as well. It is even possible to say that the anti-slave trade policy of the Russian government really enjoyed sincere support of the majority of the population of the country. For anyone who has even a remote idea about Russian history, such statement sounds almost like a contradiction in terms. Cases when the Russian government met with an enthusiastic support of its subjects of all walks of life have always been precious few. The reluctance of the Russian populace to follow the Government's lead became proverbial since the times of the Petrine reforms and was a source of much consternation to the educated circles of the country. This melancholy topic inspired M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin to create an unforgettable metaphor of the relationship of the Russian powers-that-be (predominantly aggressive and moronic) with the "people" (mostly lazy, cowardly and ignorant). In his famous political satire "The History of a Town", he described the inhabitants of the Town of Glupov³⁷ falling as one man on their knees in response to the introduction of mustard.³⁸

... The Glupovites were aware of being in revolt, but could not help staying on their knees. (...) What thoughts haven't gone through their heads during that time! If they agreed to eat mustard, wouldn't they be forced to eat something even more disgusting next? If they didn't agree, wouldn't they be flogged?³⁹

Such conservative inertia and strong distrust of the government be it, as in case of Glupov, imbecile, or—quite incredibly—wise became deeply

³⁷ The name means literally "Foolstown".

³⁸ A satirical, but easily followed allusion to the introduction of the culture of potatoes by Peter I and to the peasant revolts resulting from the measure.

³⁹ M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, *Istoriia Odnogo Goroda*; M.: Izdatel'stvo "Pravda", 1984, p. 110.

rooted in the Russian psyche. If we keep this in mind, the unanimous support of the anti-slave trade measures in the Caucasus becomes even more significant and worthy of close attention.

Many stories told by the participants of the Caucasian war show that quite often no encouragement from the authorities was even needed for carrying out anti-slave trade measures. Frequently Russian soldiers, Cossacks or sailors took the initiative in attacking the slavers' caravans or ships and setting the slaves free. And, although Russia's participation in the anti-slave trade patrol of the Atlantic was, for the most part, symbolic, it was in the center of much attention in Russia. A well-known author of "naval tales", K.M. Staniukovich devoted a series of stories to the adventures of the crew of a frigate in the Atlantic on such a patrol duty. In one of the stories the Russian sailors save a little African boy from a slave ship. The boy is adopted by the crew and becomes a Russian subject and a sailor. In this story, as in many others, Staniukovich drew parallels between the hopeless position of the African slaves and an almost as dependent situation of the Russian sailors, who were drafted from among serfs. These stories were tremendously popular in Russia at the time of their publication, as well as later.⁴⁰

The reasons for such popular support of the anti-slave trade measures becomes much easier to understand, once we remember that many generations of Russians, especially in the southern part of the country, had lived under a very real threat of the Tartar invasions, destruction of their homes, capture and slavery.⁴¹ Since the predominant majority of the Russian peasants remained illiterate well into the 20th century, most of their historical representations and ideas came from the oral tradition. In the historical songs and ballads, the events of the "Mongol Yoke" of the 12th–14th centuries remained just as fresh and important as the more recent Tartar raids of the Russian South, wars with "Turks" (all kinds of Moslem enemies could be called "Turks", even if not Turkic) or even the invasion of Napoleon's armies. Unlike the Europeans and American travelers in the "mysterious Orient", the Russians were fully aware of the real practices

⁴⁰ In the Soviet times the story about the African boy ("Maksimka") was adapted for a movie script and also enjoyed great popularity. (K.M. Staniukovich, *Morskie rasskazy*, M.: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986).

⁴¹ The last major Tartar raid in the southern provinces of Russia occurred during the reign of Catherine the Great. Thousands of people were captured; losses in cattle, numbers destroyed homes and ruined crops were enormous. This event certainly influenced Catherine's decision to expedite the war on the Crimean Khanate and to annex the Crimea. More details about it in Chapter 3.

of the Turkish and Tartar slave traders. The bitterness of loss of families, broken homes and separation from the loved ones long outlived those, who suffered it.

Russian folklore on the subject of captivity and slavery is abundant and extremely expressive. One of the most popular ballads tells the story of an old woman, who is taken captive by the Tartars and sold into slavery. She is then taken into the household of a very rich Turk and becomes a nanny to his son. In the wife of the master the old woman recognizes her own daughter, who had been captured by the Tartars a long time before, at the age of seven. The young woman also recognizes her mother and offers her riches, gold and silver, offers to send her home. But the old woman chooses to stay with her “little Russian” grandson. Both women weep for their lost homeland and are deeply unhappy.⁴²

Another popular song⁴³ presents a modern scholar with the imagery of abduction, ethnic rape and a call for the righteous revenge:

It is not a white swan flying away
 It is a beautiful girl running from captivity
 The good horse is running fast for her,
 His tail and mane are flying after him. [...]
 The girl ran up to the river Dar'ia
 She stood on the steep riverbank,

 And she called with all her might:
 O, praised be thee, our mother Dar'ia-river!
 Dost thou still have any shallow fords?
 Dost thou still have any wooden bridges? [...]
 Two Tartar guards ran after the girl,
 She spread her marten coat,
 She threw herself into the river Dar'ia
 And she went straight to the bottom.⁴⁴

Folklore also paints an image of the slave traders—Tartars or Turks, as they were usually called. They were portrayed almost exclusively as cruel, ignorant and generally barbarian people who held nothing sacred. Many ballads describe a situation when three Tartars capture a Russian girl. Here is one of the variants:

⁴² *Istoricheskie pesni i ballady* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1991), 91–93.

⁴³ These songs are still rather popular with the Russians as drinking songs, and can be heard in different variants of the text and music. The text, translated here is just one of the many existing variations on the theme.

⁴⁴ *Istoricheskie pesni i ballady*, 81–82.

Three Tartars captured a beautiful girl,
 Three Tartars, three basurmans.⁴⁵
 And the first of them says to the girl:
 I shall trample you down with my horse!
 And the other one says to the girl:
 I shall pierce you with my lance!
 And the third one says to the girl:
 I shall take you as my slave!⁴⁶

Another version of the same theme is even more emotional and graphic in the description of the Russian slaves' fate:

Three basurmans divided their plunder by casting lots,
 But one of the vile dogs⁴⁷ does not draw his lot,
 He takes a beautiful girl without it, [...]]
 He took the girl by her white hands,
 And he, the vile dog, took her to his white tent
 And he began to jeer at her,
 And he wanted to do outrage upon her beautiful body,
 And the girls called with a loud voice:
 Oh, brother, my brother!
 Do not let me be violated by the vile Tartars,
 Do not let them jeer at me!
 And the mighty warrior rode right to the Tartars in fury,
 He trampled one down with his horse,
 He tied the other to the tail of his horse
 He cut the third one's head off with an ax,
 And threw their bones into the steppe,
 And he took the young girl home with him.⁴⁸

Obviously, in Russian mentality captivity was never perceived as a way to achieve happiness and prosperity, although some Russian slaves, especially young girls, could reach a life of ease and comfort in a wealthy man's harem. Many factors contributed to the formation of such clearly defined negative perception. The first and most important was the fact that most of Russian slaves were captured during violent raids and often witnessed the death of their relatives and the destruction of their homes.

⁴⁵ A Russian vernacular epithet for Muslims, a way of pronouncing the word *Musul'manin* (Muslim). Had a somewhat derogatory meaning, but could also be used as a matter-of-fact description of a person's religion.

⁴⁶ *Istoricheskie pesni I ballady*, 85–86.

⁴⁷ "Vile dog" or just "a dog" is a common metaphor, used to describe the enemy in Russian folklore.

⁴⁸ *Istoricheskie pesni i ballady*, 88–89.

After this tremendous shock, the captives were transported with their legs and arms tied, barely allowing them to walk. They suffered from hunger and thirst, and many, especially young children, died. Even for those, who survived long enough to be sold at an Ottoman market, it was not the end of hardship. Russian slaves in a Muslim country were faced with the prospect of conversion to Islam, which for a Russian Orthodox Christian was the equivalent of eternal damnation. Although the official ideology of Islam forbids forceful conversion of infidels, such cases were certainly not unheard of. Conversion could be achieved not by brutal force, but by putting a slave into such intolerable conditions that he would accept the conversion “voluntarily”. I say “he” because only males were considered worth the trouble of conversion. The religious affiliation of women was not important. Their children were born Muslim, and that was all that mattered. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Tartars and Turks in the Russian folklore were invariably called *poganye*⁴⁹—the infidels, which word eventually came to mean “filthy, vile, despicable”.

It is possible to say that here we encounter one of the earliest forms of Orientalism, as it was formulated by Edward Said “... as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Turks, Tartars and, to a lesser extent, other Steppe nomads became the embodiment of the “other” in the Russian popular mythology, based on the folklore imagery like the examples we’ve seen. It is extremely important to remember, that this folklore survived well into the nineteenth century: peasants passed it on, generation to generation; and children of the Russian nobility heard these songs in the nursery from their wet nurses and nannies. Popular songs in the same tradition were composed during the Balkan War, at the end of the 19th century. Slavery and slave trade were neither abstract ideas, nor a matter of ethical choice in the Russian culture. They were intimately related to a profound historical trauma suffered centuries ago, but refreshed and re-lived every time a ballad about a slave’s fate was sung.

⁴⁹ The word “pagan” came into the Russian language from Latin and, in other languages, at first it meant “idolaters”. Later its meaning changed to signify almost exclusively Russia’s Muslim foes: Tartars and Turks, and acquired the additional derogatory meanings of “unclean, untouchable, evil”.

⁵⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

It is peculiar that none of the other peoples encountered by the Russians in the course of their expansion to the southeast was depicted in a similarly dark, one-dimensional way. It appears, that the Russians found it much easier to relate to the Kabardins and the Circassians in general, which were not perceived as aliens. They were regarded as potentially important allies against the Turks, conveniently located beyond the enemy line. Some of this perception may have to do with popular historical mythology, and some of it may be due to the fact that this territory and its people were not entirely unknown to Russians. After the Grebenskii Cossacks established themselves on the Terek River, in the Northern Caucasus, in the 16th century, the whole region became seemingly less remote on the popular mythological map.

Some Conclusions

European/American and Russian anti-slavery efforts had few things in common. Apart from an "Orientalist" approach to all the peoples and cultures beyond the borders of Europe/USA, they shared no other features in their ideology. In fact, these two phenomena represented almost a mirror image of each other: alike, but opposite. First, unlike the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which was established and run by the Europeans in the first place, slave trade in the Caucasus was an ancient and essential part of the local social and economic structures, morals and customs. Second, due to its strong roots in the local economies, slavery in the Caucasus was tenacious and extremely resistant to all attempts of its abolition. Caucasian peoples engaged in the slave trading activities had been dependent on it for thousands of years for such life-supporting products as salt and iron. Also, unlike the European and American slave owners and slave traders, Russian subjects were themselves quite often sold into slavery until as late as mid-19th century.

The Russian anti-slave trade sentiment was not limited to the policy-making spheres and government officials. It was extremely popular among the Russian liberal educated elites, dissident circles of the intelligentsia and among the common people. For the elites it served as a way to both confirm their feeling of belonging to the European culture and to distance Russia from any association with the Ottoman Empire, which was seen as an epitome of Oriental backwardness. As far as the Russian common people was concerned, abolition of slave trade was seen by them as a just cause and a vindication for centuries of fear and humiliation.

*Historical Myth and Mythical History:
Muscovy and the Caucasus Before the 18th Century*

From the vantage point of Muscovy, the Caucasus was not one of the semi-legendary fabulous and exotic lands of the Orient that were fascinating the contemporary West Europeans. Indeed, although the contacts between Muscovite Russia and the Caucasus were neither regular, nor intense, the two lands had enough communication to maintain a presence on each other's mental horizons. In the somewhat anachronistic and old-fashioned, but nonetheless essentially correct formulation of Mikhail Rostovtseff, this was

... The unity of the region which we call South Russia: the intersection of influences in that vast tract of the country—oriental and southern influences arriving by the way of the Caucasus and the Black Sea, Greek influences spreading along the sea routes, and Western influences passing down the great Danubian route; and the consequent formation, from time to time, of mixed civilizations, very curious and very interesting.⁵¹

Both the North-Western Caucasia and the Kievan Rus belonged to this type of “mixed civilizations”, or borderland peripheral formations, originating in the early medieval period as parts of the Byzantine extended empire. Byzantine influence induced enduring similarities in the state institutions and in the culture of the ruling elites, but, above all, in the religion of Greek Orthodox Christianity. The Caucasus and Rus were drawn together in a particularly curious way, when the Principality of Tmutarakan' existed on the Taman peninsula in the 10–12th centuries AD. This state was uniquely picturesque in its multi-ethnicity. It was ruled by the descendants of the Chernigov Princely house and was counted among the “lesser” principalities of the Kievan Rus. Its population consisted of Eastern Slavs, Varangians, Greeks, Turkic nomads and Kasogs (one of the ancestral peoples of the modern Adyghs). While the dominant groups professed Byzantine Christianity, the populace apparently retained various ethnic forms of paganism. Although it was marginal in the times of Kievan Rus, Tmutarakan' endured in legend and in language.⁵² It featured quite prominently on the mental mythological map of early modern Russia as a far-off southeastern outpost of the Russian realm (*Russkaia*

⁵¹ M.I. Rostovtseff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922), 5.

⁵² In modern Russian T'mutarakan' is still used as a metaphor for something located “in the middle of nowhere”.

zemlia). This perception was further enhanced by the fact that all former Byzantine spheres of influence, including T'mutarakan', were seen by the Muscovites as symbolic beacons leading to the Holy Land and to Constantinople (known in the Kievan Rus as *Tsar'-Grad*—the Tsar City), i.e. to the center of true Orthodox Christianity.⁵³

Other important contacts, that left enduring memories and myths, were the Medieval dynastic marriages. The best-known examples of such marriages at the time of Kievan Rus were the marriage of Prince Iziaslav of Kiev to a Georgian princess in 1154, and the marriage of Prince Iurii of Bogoliubskii family to Queen Tamar of Georgia in 1185.⁵⁴ This legacy supplied the early modern state-building in Muscovy and Caucasia (Georgia above all) with a common stock of symbols, images and rituals of great legitimizing appeal, since they were perceived as original ancestral institutions (*dedovskie ustanovleniia*).

Shortly after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, the doctrine of “Moscow as the Third Rome” incorporated popular self-imagery, as well, as the mythological representations of the “others” into a fairly coherent geopolitical theory. This new doctrine was custom-tailored to the ambitions and goals of the Grand Princes of Muscovy, who had successfully created a centralized state in the territories of the North-Eastern Slavic principalities. (This process entered the Russian history textbooks under a peacefully pastoral name of the Gathering of the Russian Lands—*Sobiranie russkikh zemel'*). The legendary main author of this doctrine, monk Filofei (*Theophilus*) formulated it in his famous letter to an influential Muscovite courtier:

Although the walls, and the pillars, and the grand houses of Rome have not been captured, its soul has been captured by the Devil [as punishment] for her gluttony. Although the Agarians (*the infidels*—L.K.) have taken the Greek kingdom, they have not vanquished its faith, so they are forcing the Greeks to forfeit their faith [...] Therefore, let everybody know that all Christian kingdoms have come to their end, and have all descended into one Kingdom under the rule of our Monarch, according to the Books of Prophets, and this is Russia: for two Romes have fallen, but the third Rome is Moscow, and it stands firm, and there shall be no fourth ...⁵⁵

⁵³ I.M. Smilianskaia, “Vostochnoe Sredizemnomor'e v vospriatii rossiian I v Rossiiskoi politike (vtoraia polovina XVIII v.)” in: *Vostok*, 1995, No. 5 (Moscow: Nauka), 68.

⁵⁴ N.M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, 3 (St. Peterbourg, 1842–1843), 130; D.M. Lang, *The Georgians* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc., 1966), 114.

⁵⁵ “Pismo Filofeia, nastoiaztelia Elizar'evskogo monastyria Mikhailu Grigor'evichu Misiuru, d'iaku”; in: M. Kovalenskii, ed., *Moskovskaia politicheskaia literatura XVI veka. Izbornik* (St. Petersburg: Energiia, 1914), 46–47.

According to this doctrine, Moscow was the only rightful heir to the legacy of the Byzantine Empire and, by implication, the next principal protector of all true Orthodox Christianity in the world. Further consequences of this doctrine led to Russia's dynastic claims to the Great Steppe, the Volga Tartar Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, and to the Crimea. The latter was considered a particularly sacred place, since St. Vladimir, the Grand Prince of Kiev (who was at that time proclaimed the first Russian Tsar *post mortem*), received his baptism there from the Byzantine Greeks. The Caucasus was claimed largely in theory, but, nonetheless, claimed it was. The rights of the T'mutarakan' Princes of old to rule over the Kasogs were—also *post factum*—extended as far East as Kabarda, while the 12th-century dynastic marriage of Iurii Bogoliubskii to Queen Tamar offered potential grounds to claim parts of the Christian Southern Caucasus as well. According to the new geopolitical stance of the rapidly growing Muscovite Empire, these were Orthodox Christian lands, only temporarily abandoned to pagans and Muslims.

The spirit of early Muscovy was strongly reminiscent of the Spanish *Reconquista*. The official ideology was created on the foundation of popular beliefs and historical mythology, and in the course of a hegemonic cycle it reinforced the same popular perceptions through the Church and through the secular powers. According to the picture painted as a result of this creative process, the expansion of Muscovy to the south-east was an Orthodox re-conquest of the ancestral lands, rather than an act of aggression. Ivan the Terrible argued along these lines when he deemed it necessary to justify the occupation of Astrakhan in 1554. He claimed Astrakhan as his "... ancient domain, which was ruled by the Tsar's ancestors under the name of T'mutarakan'".⁵⁶ It is noteworthy, that during his Astrakhan campaign the Tsar received active support from the "Piatigorsk Circassians" (the Kabardins), whose troops secured the arrière-guard of the Russians against a pursuing army of the Crimean Khan. The Muscovite and the Circassian troops acted together on more than one occasion. In the words of a contemporary document,

On the third day of the same month of October, Grigorii Semenov, Pleshcheev's son of the Piatigorsk Circassians came to the Tsar and Grand Duke of all Russia Ivan Vasilevich, and the Tsar and Grand Duke sent him to

⁵⁶ G. Peretiat'kovich, *Povolzhè v XV-XVI vekakh. (Ocherki iz istorii kraia I ego kolonizatsii)*, (Moscow, 1877), 219. Apparently, the fact that the historical T'mutarakan' was located in a totally different place seemed immaterial to Ivan IV. The general direction of the southeast from Moscow was all that mattered.

Circassia, to Prince Temriuk Aidarovich, so that he could protect him from his enemies. [When they came to Astrakhan] there was a *strel'tsi* commander Grigorii Vrazhskoi with them and five hundred of *strel'tsi*, and five atamans of the Cossacks with five hundred men. Temriuk and the Tsar's servicemen subjugated [Temriuk's] enemies and bent them to his will.⁵⁷

The Muscovite–Circassian alliance was, however, not due to any deep cultural-religious affinity. Such claim would be particularly spurious considering the fact that the population of Kabarda still professed the native version of pagan syncretism under a very thin veneer of Islam, and could not share in the Orthodox Christian ideology of Moscow.

The Soviet-era official interpretation of the early Russian–Circassian relations, which stressed mutual desire to stop the Crimean raids, proves to be correct in its core argument despite its totally anachronistic and heavily ideological wording (“the union of peoples and working masses”). This alliance rested solidly on common geopolitical interests, conditioned by the predatory behavior of the Crimean Khanate. With the emergence of the Ottoman Empire, this semi-nomadic relic of the Golden Horde became a nominal tributary of the Ottoman dynasty and, in fact, a semi-dependent imperial avant-post. It was entrusted by the Ottomans with securing the vast territory between the Northern Caucasus, the eastern borders of Poland and the southern defense lines of Muscovy. In this respect the Crimean Khanate was one of the most clear and long-lasting examples of a mercenary state. Regular raids on the neighboring territories provided the Crimean state with a major source of revenue as well as with a form of payment for the troops, thus relieving the Ottoman treasury from what would have otherwise become a heavy financial burden. At the same time, the Crimean raids constantly harassed the enemy defenses and could be used by the Ottoman government as a source of diplomatic leverage. However, no treaty with the Crimean Khan or with the Ottoman Sultan could put an end to the Crimean raids, or even achieve a long enough pause. The Crimean troops had to be remunerated with loot or tribute, for there was no other way to sustain them. The balance of power that largely persisted in the area to the north of the Black Sea between the late 15th and mid-18th centuries guaranteed a relatively long existence of the Crimean Tartar state and the continuation of the borderland warfare.

⁵⁷ *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia v XVI–XVIII vv. Dokumenty I materially v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1957), 11.

The bulk of trade exports and the annual tribute which the Crimean Khanate channeled to the central parts of the Ottoman Empire consisted of male and female slaves of both Slavic and North Caucasian origin. In fact, the primary goal of the Tartar invasions was capture of people, since in the relatively poor borderlands human loot was the easiest to obtain and the most profitable. The success of each raid was measured in the numbers of prisoners taken. The ferocity and the extent of any particular invasion depended on whether the Tartars encountered any organized resistance; and on whether the natural conditions (such as the weather) allowed for a large-scale operation of nomad cavalry. For example, the situation was particularly favorable to the invaders in 1521, when the army of Mukhammad-Ghiray assaulted the provinces of Moscow, Riazan', Nizhnii Novgorod, Vladimir, Kolomna and others, laid waste to the towns and villages and took the astonishing number of 300–400 thousand people into captivity.⁵⁸ The depopulation of the very Russian heartland was terrible and was remembered for generations to come. Forty years later the heir to the throne of the Crimea boasted in his letter to Ivan the Terrible in 1567: “[We] took more than twenty thousand Circassian prisoners.”⁵⁹ Even taking into consideration the inevitable exaggerations in the Muscovite—Crimean diplomatic correspondence, the volume of slave trade was considerable indeed.

The continuing abduction and sale of Christians into heterodox captivity featured most prominently in the Russian foreign policy of the time. In 1531, Grand Duke Vasili III threatened the Crimean Khan with a war of retaliation, unless he returned the Russian captives.⁶⁰ The issue of captives became an indicator of the state of the Russo-Crimean relations. So, when the Crimean Khan Islam-Ghiray was seeking a temporary alliance with Moscow in 1535, he volunteered to set free all the Russian captives taken in his previous raid without any ransom.⁶¹ The same issue was raised by Ivan the Terrible in the early 1550s as a justification for his conquest and annexation of the Tartar khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan.⁶² The plight of the fellow Orthodox Christians in Mus-

⁵⁸ A.B. Kuznetsov, *Diplomatiicheskaia bor'ba Rossii za bezopasnost' iuzhnykh granits (pervaia polovina XVI veka)*, (Minsk: Izdatel'stvo "Universitetskoe", 1986), 50.

⁵⁹ E.N. Kusheva, *Narody Severnogo Kavkaza I ikh sviazi s Rossiei v XVI–XVII vekakh*, (Moscow, 1963), 95.

⁶⁰ A.B. Kuznetsov, *Diplomaticheskai bor'ba Rossii*, 63.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 91.

⁶² N.A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI–XIX vekakh*, (Moscow, 1958), 24–29.

lim captivity (*v basurmanskom polone*) remained a major issue for the Russian diplomacy and of the popular imagery of the East throughout the entire existence of the Muscovite Tsardom. It also played an important role in the Russo-Circassian relations and was used as an additional bond in the nascent alliance. The Russian ambassador to the Crimean Khanate reported to Moscow in 1567:

On the 24th day of March the Turkish Tsar Selim sent Maamet-chaush to the Crimean tsar, and he ordered the [Crimean] tsar to send him three hundred good-looking young boys and girls, and they were found and sent to the Turkish [sultan] with Mustafa-aga.⁶³

This common grievance allowed the ruling elites of Muscovy and Kabarda to view their geopolitical confrontation with the Crimea as a problem of defense of their population against raiding and abductions, instigated by a common foe. The Muscovite diplomacy stressed the slave trade and the intolerable nature of the tribute demanded by the Crimean Khanate in order to emphasize the advantages of the union with Russia. The Kabardin princes, on their part, saw Moscow as a relatively distant, if not outright benevolent, superior, ally and master. This mutual interest, buttressed by Muscovy's formidable resources and successful expansion, gave momentum to the Muscovite-Kabardin relations, which were sustained through the latter half of the 16th century. The Russians built a military outpost on the Terek River in the early 1560s. The union was further reinforced by the marriage of Ivan IV to the Circassian princess Kuchenei (baptized as Maria), daughter of Prince Temriuk Aidarovich.⁶⁴ Following this marriage, the majority of Kabardin princes chose to swear allegiance to the now immensely influential Prince Temriuk who, in his turn, had already proclaimed himself "a willing and obedient servant of the Tsar of Russia."⁶⁵ The Soviet historians later described this episode as "the voluntary union of Kabarda and Russia", and the 400-year anniversary of the event was widely celebrated in 1957.

Kabarda soon became the Muscovite strategic foothold in the Northern Caucasus, which led to an increasing Russian presence in the area. New borderlands attracted settlers from all walks of life, who established themselves to the north of the Terek, and later came to be known as the Grebenskii Cossack Host. These Cossacks were under a heavy influence of their Circassian neighbors, intermarried with the local peoples,

⁶³ *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 7–8.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 5.

adopted their dress code and many of their customs, and eventually blended in, still remaining strict Orthodox Christians. In the meantime, the official Russian military presence was not constant; it came and went following the trends of diplomacy and priorities of Russia's foreign policy.⁶⁶

The rapid expansion of Muscovy in the 16th century, especially in the southeastern direction, amounted to a revolution in the geopolitics, economy and demography of Northeastern Europe. Contemporaries, however, perceived this new situation as a continuation of the previous, by then almost legendary, epoch of the Tartar-Mongol Yoke. This time it was not the Steppe nomads, who came to besiege Moscow; rather it was the Muscovite armies, who invaded the Tartar realm. But both the Russian popular belief and the official ideology continued to nurture the image of the Russian slaves, suffering in the Muslim Turkish captivity.

Some Conclusions

Since the beginning of recorded history, the territory of the Caucasus, and the northern shore of the Black Sea, have belonged to the periphery of the Mediterranean civilization. From the formation of the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire), this territory fell under its indirect control. The Slavic state of Kievan Rus was also connected to the Byzantine Empire by important trade routes and—from the 10th century AD—by close ties of common religion, culture and dynastic marriages. Until the 13th century, the vast territory of present-day Southern Russia and Ukraine was loosely united under the Orthodox Christian aegis of Byzantium. This unity was broken by the Mongol invasion of the 13th century and the sharp decline of the Kievan state. The center of Eastern Slavic culture moved further North and eventually was established in Moscow, while the territory to the North of the Black Sea fell under the control of the nomads. With the decline of the Byzantine Empire and the formation of the new center of power in its place—the Ottoman Empire and with the gradual rise of the Muscovite state the lands in between these two expanding empires inevitably became contested buffer zones of continuous borderland skirmishes, raids and more or less regular warfare. The defeat of the vassal-states of the Ottomans, the Khanates of Kazan'

⁶⁶ Muriel Atkin, "Russian Expansion in the Caucasus to 18,813", in: M. Rywkin, ed., *Russian Colonial Expansion to 1917* (London & New York: Mansell Publishing Limited), 146.

and Astrakhan' became the first indication of the further ambitions of the growing Russian state. The rulers of Russia were quite willing to welcome any allies that would share their goals in eliminating the constant threat of the Crimean invasions, which led to closer contacts with the Kabardin aristocracy and renewed ties with the Caucasus. However, the goal of putting an end to the Crimean raids and slave trade could not be achieved yet.

The Beginning: The First Attempts to Ban Slave Trade

The time of Peter the Great meant a big change for the Russian involvement in the Caucasus. Peter's desire to make Russia an equal partner in the European concert of powers led him to plans of further expansion not only in the Baltic region, but also in the South and Southeast. This time Russia neither used any legendary claims to the lands of the East, nor did it resort to dynastic marriages. The Caspian campaigns of Peter I were a significant departure from the Muscovite geopolitical strategy in their explicitly externalized motivation. Unlike Moscow, the new capital of St. Petersburg planned its foreign policy as a part of European one, including European colonial interstate relations. Peter's advance to the South was not intended to simply roll back the Muslims and to secure Russia's southern border. It was, rather, an early emulation of the English, Dutch and French mercantile and military designs in East India.

However, the start was rather inauspicious. After a series of abortive attempts to secure Russia's strategic outposts around the Black Sea from the Danube to the Caucasus, St. Petersburg was forced to accept an inconclusive and outright humiliating peace settlement in 1711. According to this agreement, Russia pledged non-interference in the Ottoman sphere of influence around the Black Sea and forfeited the fortress of Azov.⁶⁷ But Peter was not easily discouraged. Apparently, he intended to take full advantage of the demise of the Safavi Empire and to use its wealth for the creation of a Russian equivalent of the European commercial empires in Asia.⁶⁸ As soon as the Safavi collapse offered an opportunity, Peter sought a way to bypass the still formidable Ottomans from the East, via either side of the Caspian Sea and via Persia, with the ultimate goal of reaching

⁶⁷ Muriel Atkin, "Russian Expansion . . .", 148.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 147.

the fabled India. In a way of reconnaissance, he even furnished an expedition of 4000 men to the Khanate of Khiva. Its goal was to establish an alliance with the Khan, or, at the very least, to explore the possibility of a large-scale campaign on the way to India. All, but 40 men were treacherously murdered at the Khan's orders, the rest were either sold into slavery or "set free" in the desert. Peter I never retaliated, being too preoccupied with his other foreign policy projects.⁶⁹

Still keeping in mind the grand design of the Eastern Empire-building, Peter encouraged all the Caucasian lords, kings and princes, who sought an alliance with Russia and promised them Russian military support in their plight against Persia. As a result of this diplomatic effort, Georgian troops participated in the successful Russian campaign of 1722, when Russia established a protectorate over the principality of Tarki in Dagh-estan. At the same time the Russians established their control over some Lezghi principalities, founded a few new fortifications with Russian garrisons, including Fort Holy Cross on the border of the principality of Tarki, and also occupied an ancient and strategically important city of Derbent⁷⁰ Although Derbent did not stay under Russian control for a long time, the newly-founded forts played an important role in the Russian anti-slavery effort long after Peter's death.

During the 18th century slave trade continued to be one of the most prosperous trades of the Caucasian region. The Daghستاني towns of Enderi and Braguny gained notoriety for their large slave markets where captives were brought from all over the Caucasus for re-sale to wholesale traders, who, in turn, transported them to the Crimea and, later, to the Ottoman Empire. Quite often the captives tried to escape, to find refuge in the Russian forts, and appealed for help to the Russian military authorities. The Commander of the Fort Holy Cross wrote to his superiors in 1733:

Turkish merchants from Azov bring their goods to the Kumyk villages without paying any duties and on their way back, having sold the goods, they bring great numbers of Georgians *yasyr's*,⁷¹ 200 people each time or even more.⁷²

⁶⁹ See P. Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, (New York: Kodansha International, 1992), 15–19.

⁷⁰ Muriel Atkin, "Russian Expansion . . .", 148–149.

⁷¹ *Yasyr*—a Tartar word borrowed by the Russians, which meant a recent captive, intended for re-sale.

⁷² O.P. Markova, *Rossiia, Zakavkaz'e I mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia c XVIII v.*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), 133.

Such letters posed a diplomatic problem for St. Petersburg. Selling Christians into slavery was intolerable for both political and religious reasons. On the other hand, at the time Russia was still in no position to bully the Caucasian potentates and the Crimean Khanate. To a large extent the anti-slavery measures had to be undertaken by the local Russian military commanders at their own risk with the silent approval of the central authorities. On some occasions, however, the orders were quite explicit and required resolute action. For example, when the Astrakhan governor-general bought and set free only one Kalmyk woman out of a party of captives, St. Petersburg reacted with utmost indignation:

Such [Governor's] decision is worthy of bemusement, for he set free a pagan Kalmyk woman, while thoroughly Christian Georgians were left in the hands of Muslims. [Even if there were no possibility to ransom the Georgians] he should have taken the Georgians from the Tartars by force because letting Christians to be sold across Russian borders into Turkish slavery for suffering and misery sets a bad example for other Christian countries and is also against our consciousness.⁷³

In 1760 the Russian Senate issued a decree, according to which all slaves of Armenian and Georgian origin seeking refuge in the Russian forts were not to be returned to their masters, but had to be interrogated and granted their wish. In cases when the Ottoman slave owners filed complaints with their government and tried to return their slaves using diplomatic pressure, the Russian side refused to accede:

There are many examples that not only the Crimean Khan or Serasker of Kuban, but the Ottoman Porte itself refuses to return Russian subjects of their own [Muslim] faith, who have defected to their side. As for the Christians who have escaped into the Russian territory, let it be known to everybody, that they cannot be returned into captivity.⁷⁴

In 1763 the Russian government established the fort of Mozdok in Kabarda and welcomed all Caucasian natives who desired to convert to Christianity to come and settle in the vicinity of the new fort, under the protection of the Russian garrison. The Crimean Khan and the Ottoman Porte reacted with profound displeasure and demanded an explanation. The new Russian fortification was strategically positioned so, that it could hinder the slave traffic from Daghestan to the Kuban region and to the Crimea. The Ottoman government complained that “the fort which has

⁷³ I.I. Iakubova, *Severnyi Kavkaz v russko-Turetskikh otnosheniakh v 40–70-e gody XVIII veka* (Nalchik, 1993), 41–42.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 46–47.

been built on the Terek River hinders the passage from Daghestan, and already a few Georgian captives have been taken from merchants by force.”⁷⁵ St. Petersburg responded to this complaint with an ingenious formula that perfectly reflected Russia’s international position at the time. At this point the Russian Empire could depend completely neither on its military might, nor on the purported European sense of moral superiority over the Turks, as was the case in the 19th century. In the mid-18th century Russian diplomacy saw no loss of prestige in arguing the case before the Ottoman government, relying on precedents and the principle of reciprocity:

As it is well known, the Magnificent Porte would never tolerate it if any Christians were transporting through its territory Muslim slaves, intended for sale. So, it appears just and fair to allow Christian slaves to seek asylum from Muslim captivity in Russian towns and forts and to prevent Muslims from transporting Christian captives through Russian territories.⁷⁶

Obviously, the whole argument was purely hypothetical. There was no traffic of Muslim slaves in existence, and the Porte was aware of that. However, the explanation was accepted without relieving the tension between the two powers. The problem of slave trade remained one of the central issues of the Russian foreign policy in the South and Southeast. In 1771 it became a matter of special attention in the Russian Collegium (Ministry) of Foreign Affairs and in the Senate. The Collegium issued a report concerning the situation with the slave trade in the Caucasus and suggested a number of measures to be taken towards the local slave traders and the runaway slaves. This report established a number of important facts about the main routes, markets and destinations of slave traders in the region. All captives were intended for the slave markets of the Ottoman Empire via the Crimean Khanate. For example, the Lezghi of Daghestan were capturing people in Georgia and selling them on the well-known slave markets of Daghestan to the Crimean Tartars, who, in their turn, took them to the Crimean ports and shipped them to the Turkish slave markets. Major routes of slave caravans avoided the Russian possessions in the Caucasus and went through the lands of the Muslim Kumyk princes.

The Collegium suggested that Christian captives, seeking asylum in the Russian forts should be sent to Astrakhan and later assigned perma-

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 47.

⁷⁶ I.I. Iakubova, *Severnyi Kavkaz v russko-turetskikh otnosheniakh*, 48.

ment residence in Russia as “state peasants”. Christian slaves should not be extradited, but their owners were entitled to the monetary compensation of 50 rubles for each slave, regardless of their age or sex.⁷⁷

The commanders of the Russian forts of Mozdok and Kizliar were ordered to

Forbid passage to the Crimean and Kuban Tartars, especially with captives, whom they take to slavery, and establish for this reason a permanent post on the opposite bank of the Terek and also regular frequent patrols on both banks of the same river.⁷⁸

The problem of the slave trade in the Caucasia was directly linked to the interests and the demand for slaves that existed in the Ottoman Empire and, more imminently, to the Crimean Khanate with its well-organized infrastructure of slaving. While the Ottoman part of the problem could not be solved with one blow and required persistent international diplomatic effort, the Crimea was another case. It was not only the most important center of slave trade on the Black Sea, but it was also the key to securing the strategically vulnerable southern borders of the Russian Empire. A full two centuries after the subjugation of the Kazan, Astrakhan and Siberian Tartar khanates, the new, post-Petrine Russian empire poised itself for the conquest of the last successor state of the Golden Horde.

Russia had made several attempts to contain the Crimean influence in the region and to put an end to the enslaving of the Russian subjects. In 1735 the Russian army invaded the Crimea “to free some 20,000 Christians held captives by the Tartars.”⁷⁹ For the first time in many years the campaign was a success for the Russians, and the peace settlement of Belgrade prohibited any Tartar raids in southern Russia. The raids, however, continued to be a significant threat to the interior provinces or Russia still for some time to come. A devastating proof of this was delivered in 1769. In that year the Tartar army of Kerim-Ghiray invaded the Elisavetgrad province and captured 624 men and 559 women, 13,567 cattle, 17,100 sheep, 1557 horses. Four churches, six mills and 1190 houses were burned to foundation, as well as 6337 sacks of wheat, etc. One hundred men and twenty women were found killed on the spot.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, 48–49.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, 49.

⁷⁹ Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1772–1783*, (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 23.

The eminent Russian historian Vladimir Solov'ev attached symbolic importance to this raid: "The last Tartar invasion in our history."⁸⁰

Obviously retaliation was inevitable, especially since it fit very well with the general design of the Russian foreign policy. In 1770s, after half a century of recession in the Russian imperial plans that followed the death of Peter I, the strategy of securing the Asian borders relied on the solid background of the new structural and conjectural strengths. Russia was emboldened by its newly acquired prestige in Europe and by the internal accumulation of resources during the post-Petrine time. The structural strength was crowned by the political success of the immensely stabilizing reign of Catherine the Great, who skillfully applied it to the further expansion of the Empire. On April 8, 1783, Catherine issued the Proclamation of Annexation of the Crimea. The Russian Empire gained the entire northern shore of the Black Sea and immediately started securing this strategic breakthrough by building the navy and seaports. With the demise of the Crimean Khanate the scene was set for a seemingly easy annexation of the Caucasus. This, however, would unexpectedly cost Russia major effort and the longest war in its history.

Some Conclusions

The internal reforms and the foreign policy of Peter I set in motion the mechanism of Empire-building that continued to work long after Peter's death. Although some of Peter's ideas, especially concerning his internal policy, were never fulfilled, the process of territorial expansion and of accumulation of military and political power continued under his successors and reached one of its peaks under Catherine II. From the early 18th century it became obvious that the geopolitical ambitions of the new Russian Empire were not limited by the western direction. Peter and his successors paid close attention to the southern and eastern borders of Russia and continued to contest the Ottoman influence in the area. The issue of slave trade at the time became a good pretext for the construction of the Russian fortifications in the Northern Caucasus and—ultimately—it was one of the reasons for the annexation of the Crimea when it became obvious that the Russian Empire could do it with impunity. The elimination of the Crimean Khanate left the Ottoman slave markets with only one source of slaves from the Caucasus and the Great Steppe: the Caucasian shores of the Black Sea.

⁸⁰ P. Perminov, *Posol tret'ego klassa* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 135.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS

He represented the Russian State in the East, and this was not a trifle. Thousands of former captives were returning to Russia, changing their lives. In his mind's eye he saw himself leading them out of Persia the way Moses had led the Jews out of Egyptian captivity ...

(Iu. Tynianov, *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar*)¹

If all the Caucasus needed was the rule of Law, Our Sovereign would have sent here not me, but The Legal Code of the Empire.

(Viceroy Prince Vorontsov)²

Even when looking at an ordinary map of the Caucasus it is easy to see that between Russia and the Southern Caucasus there lays a mountain ridge of a formidable size. If a map could be made three-dimensional, the impression would be even stronger, making it extremely clear, what a forbidding obstacle in the way of any territorial expansion such a ridge must be. Nevertheless, it was here, in the Transcaucasia, and not in the Northern Caucasus as might be imagined, where Russia's conquest of the Caucasus started. Until the end of the 18th century this territory was dominated by the Persian Empire, and the local states were clearly divided along the lines of their relations with this central power: they were either the Persian vassals or Persia's opponents, albeit much weaker ones. The states of the eastern part of Transcaucasia, partly bordering on the Caspian sea and those close to them, were predominantly Moslem khanates, allies and vassals of Persia: such were the Khanates of Baku, Erivan, Nakhichevan, Derbent Shirvan, Quba, Karabakh, Ganja, Sheki and Talysh.

¹ Iu. Tynianov, *Smert' Vazir-Mukhtara*; Iu. Tynianov, *Sochineniia*, t. 2., M., Terra, 1994; 381.

² Zakharova, O., *Svetleishii Kniaz' Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov*, (Odessa, 2008), p. 168.

The opponents of Persia in the Southern Caucasus were represented by a few Christian states, loosely allied to each other and, for the most part, used by the Persian Shahs as a constant source of slaves for the needs of their court and of the army. These were the Georgian kingdoms of Kartli-Kakheti and Imeretia and also the principalities of Mingrelia, Guria and Abkhasia. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Georgian slaves for the Persian state. W.G. Clarence-Smith uses a picturesque term “tidal wave”, when referring to the numbers of the Caucasian prisoners of war, regularly driven to Persia for enslavement.³ Georgian kingdoms and principalities existed under constant threat of a Persian invasion, and such existence drained their resources, bringing their very future into question.

The most important political move for the future fate of Transcaucasia was made in 1783 when, confronted again with an immediate Persian threat, king Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti appealed to Russia for protection. Catherine the Great reacted to the appeal and, according to the treaty of Georgievsk, a Russian protectorate was established over this Georgian kingdom.⁴ Russian presence there was at the time very limited and amounted to only two battalions with four field cannon stationed in Georgia’s capital, Tiflis.⁵ However, this bridgehead opened possibilities for creating the infrastructure, which would later be extensively used by the Russians in Transcaucasia. The newly-founded fortress of Vladikavkaz was intended to become the key Russian stronghold on the northern side of the mountain ridge as evidenced by its significant name—*Vlad(e)i Kavkaz(om)*, or, *Possess the Caucasus*. A chain of smaller forts linked it to the older garrison in Mozdok.⁶ These fortified settlements now sat on a new road built across the Main Caucasian Ridge, which became the supply route for the Russian troops in Georgia. Later, this road would be called the Georgian-Military Highway and in a not unfair unofficial metaphor, “Russia’s lifeline to its possessions in Transcaucasia”⁷

The first attempt to station troops in Georgia was short-lived due to the logistical problems posed by the mountains. The two battalions were

³ W.G. Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 93.

⁴ A.R. Ioannisian, *Prisoedineniie Zakavkazia k Rossii i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia v Nachale XIX stoletia*, (Erevan, Izdatelstvo AN Armianskoi SSR, 1958), XIX.

⁵ Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, 20–21.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 4.

soon withdrawn, probably because the original plan of Catherine II in regards of Transcaucasia was limited to establishing protectorate over Kartli-Kakheti and consolidating the Transcaucasian Khanates into two vassal states: Armenia and Caucasian Albania (largely coinciding in territory with the modern Republic of Azerbaijan). All smaller Georgian kingdoms and principalities were to be included into this “Georgian protectorate”, and the ancient Western Armenian lands—into the Armenian state.⁸ This simple and, curiously, proto-nationalist plan had, however, to be abandoned. The idea of creating buffer-states in Transcaucasia proved to be still-born largely because of the momentous military conjuncture. In the words of a prominent nineteenth-century Georgian writer and political thinker Alexander Chavchavadze,

It was the invasion of Agha-Mohammed Khan and the sack of Tiflis of 1795 that decided the fate of Georgia. She had to rest her hopes on Orthodox Christian Russia which had supported Georgia before.⁹

In order to save its prestige Russia had to intervene militarily on behalf of its Georgian vassals after the monstrous sack of Tiflis by the Persian armies when “corpses of dead men, women and children paved all the streets and the vicinity of Tiflis”, while ten thousand inhabitants of the city were captured and taken away as slaves.¹⁰ The seminal choice between an informal empire and direct conquest was in this case made by default.

Although after Catherine’s death in 1796 her son Paul I tried a radical re-orientation up to the point of undoing much of his mother’s policies, especially in the domain of foreign relations, the developments in the Caucasus had already received a strong momentum of their own, which simply could not be ignored or overcome. Tsar Paul, bound by the Treaty of Georgievsk, had to confirm his willingness to protect Georgia against any attacks by Iran. Three years later Paul had to face the issue of direct annexation of Georgia due to succession problems after the death of King Georgii XII, who left no direct heirs and bequeathed his kingdom to the Russian Tsars.¹¹ Paul’s Manifesto of the incorporation of Kartli-Kakheti into the Russian Empire was signed on December 30, 1800 and, not without hesitation, confirmed a year later by Paul’s successor, Alexander I on September 24, 1801.¹²

⁸ A.R. Ioannisian, *Prisoedinenie Zakavkazia k Rossii*, XVIII.

⁹ G.A. Galoian, *Rossia i Narody Zakavkazia*, (Moscow: Mysl, 1976), 112.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 111.

¹¹ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 4.

¹² *Ibidem*, 5.

After this turning point military conquest of the whole Caucasian region became imminent. Contrary to numerous legends and folk tales, however, this rugged territory had little to offer in terms of riches or natural resources. As it was soon discovered by Russian officials in the area, these lands could hardly be expected to become economically viable. On the contrary, they required substantial investments, not to count military and diplomatic effort, while any material profit was, at best, questionable. *Statskii sovetnik* (State Councilor) Litvinov, charged with the task of making a survey of Russia's new Caucasian possessions, wrote his opinion on Imeretia and Mingrelia to Prince Tsitsianov, then the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army in Georgia:

Since Russia has sent her army here and continues to support it at her own expense, she must forget about this money because both these lands put together will never be able to repay the expenses. Although the Russian army is absolutely necessary here for protection of these lands, there is no agriculture developed enough to provide the army with sufficient supplies. The acquisition of mines also should not be overestimated by the government. Mines cannot be exploited in parts where there is no population, no roads and no life-supporting crafts [...] Taking all this into consideration, Russia should expect only meager profits, if any at all, and only in the remote future; not before these parts are populated, agriculture is sufficiently developed, arts and crafts introduced and safe and stable monetary trade established [...] Two generations can easily pass before the beginning bears its fruit.¹³

What then made Russia hold on to her possessions in the Caucasus in spite of the obvious financial and military burden, imposed by this task? The short answer and the obvious gain lay of course in the sphere of geopolitics: expansion in the south-east direction consolidated the control of the Black Sea coast in the hands of the Russian government and eventually pushed the Ottomans back beyond the sea.

There was a more complicated and a more profound reason as well. By the end of the eighteenth century Russia became firmly incorporated into European geopolitics. Seminal achievements of Peter I and Catherine II, which earned them both the appellation of "The Great", allowed the Russian state and its newly-made aristocracy to enter the European scene on exceptionally prestigious terms. From then on, the major concern and preoccupation of the rulers of Russia was to uphold and maintain this high status, largely unwarranted by the internal economic and social

¹³ Opisanie Imeretii i Mingrelii sostavlennoe statskim sovetnikom Litvinovym, Oct. 25 1804. AKAK, 1-2:410.

structures of Russia that looked backward compared to the capitalist West (or, in terms, of Wallerstein's World-System analysis, the core of the capitalist world-economy).¹⁴ But the West itself never remained static, prompting Russia to pursue an ever-moving target.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Europe was overtaken by the new secular ideologies arising from a radically new worldview prepared by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. These ideologies shared what I. Wallerstein called the emergent geo-culture of progress.¹⁵ By striving to ascribe themselves to Europe, Russians logically opposed themselves to the rest of the world, to the allegedly backward, despotic and decadent Orient. The opposition was no longer strictly religious; it was secular and presupposed, perhaps, an even wider, unbridgeable gap than ever before.

In terms of policies pursued by Russia in the Caucasus, the new geo-culture of progress made itself evident from the outset of military conquest. In the sixteenth century, the Muscovites treated their Caucasian counterparts as fairly equal, although very different, people (which, incidentally, made possible the marriage of the Russian Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible) to the daughter of a Kabardin Prince Temriuk Aidarovich). The nineteenth-century Russians, however, saw themselves as bearers of the torch of progress into the dark corners of the Universe. Even Orthodox Christian Georgian aristocracy was accepted by the Russian nobles on an equal footing only after the Russian *mission civilizatrice* had been accomplished in Georgia and this land had been purged of its "Oriental vices". General opinion of the Russian administration about their native co-religionists was far from favorable:

[These people] are not ashamed of promising to do something they have no way or intention of doing; they have no idea of loyalty or keeping one's promise; each lives for one's own [...] Although they are superficially pious, they do not follow the spirit of Christianity, nor do they treasure any Christian virtues. Frequent contacts with the Tartars (Muslims—L.K.) filled their hearts with despicable vices ... Only a few people may be excluded from this general description.¹⁶

It is important that among the most intolerable vices of the local population the slave trade was always considered first and foremost:

¹⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 1–3 (New York: Academic Press, 1974, 1978, 1989).

¹⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The French Revolution as a World-Historical Event", in: I. Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 7–22.

¹⁶ *Opisanie Imeretii i Mingrelii sostavlennoe statskim sovetnikom Litvinovym*, Oct. 25 1804. AKAK, 1–2:407.

Profits [from the slave trade, so conveniently and abundantly extracted, have become not just a part of the local custom, but some sort of a virtue. For, whoever kidnaps more people and sells them to the Turks, can hire more armed men and get even richer through further plunder.¹⁷

So, the Russians concentrated their civilizing effort in Transcaucasia around the slave trade. And, before proceeding further to discuss in detail what and how was done to achieve this goal, it is important to pay attention to one important exception: the Moslem Transcaucasian khanates, where slave trade was not an issue for the Russian administration from the moment of their inclusion into the Empire of the Tsar.

Explaining why certain things did not happen is always a much harder task for a historian than dealing with what did take place. If an event never happened, one cannot expect to find any documents related to it. It does not leave any noticeable trail that scholars are trained to follow. So much the worse for a historian who encounters a non-existing phenomenon begging an explanation, such as the absence of slave trade in the former Moslem Khanates of the Southern Caucasus after they came under the control of the Russian administration. Apparently, once the military resistance of the local rulers was overcome by the Russian army and a Russian administration established in the region, the problem of slave trade never arose again. Compared with the enormous expense and energy that had to be devoted to the eradication of slave trade everywhere else in the Caucasus, this phenomenon cannot but astonish. Although it may not be possible to be absolutely certain about why something did NOT happen, some explanation is definitely in order. Since the territories in question were the vassal states of the Persian Empire, the explanation may be found in Russian relations with Persia at the beginning of the 19th century.

The end of the 18th- beginning of the 19th century was the time of intense political and military conflict between the Russian and Persian empires which manifested itself in a series of wars: of 1796, 1806–1813 and 1826–1828. All of these wars were fought in the Southern Caucasus, and in all of them Russia was successful, even if the Russian army was withdrawn from the conquered territories by Tsar Paul I who ardently tried to undo everything his mother Catherine II had achieved before him. But even Paul I had to accept the *fait accompli* of the Treaty of

¹⁷ Ibidem, 409.

Georgievsk and confirm Russia's protectorate over the Georgian kingdom. The Russo-Persian war of 1806–1813 further established Russian military superiority over Persia and, according to the Gulistan Treaty of 1813, Russia acquired the following territories in the Southern Caucasus: the principalities of Mingrelia, Abkhazia, Imeretia and Guria; the khanates of Baku, Shirvan, Derbent, Karabakh, Ganja, Shaki, Quba and part of the Talysh khanate.

From the point of view of slave trade these territories could be divided into two distinctly different parts: the areas that traditionally “supplied” slaves (Mingrelia, Abkhazia, Imeretia and Guria—all predominantly Christian principalities with close, albeit sometimes controversial ties to the Georgian kingdom) and the areas that served as a bridgehead for the Persian invasions in Transcaucasia: the Moslem khanates of Baku, Shirvan, Derbent, Karabakh, Ganja and Quba. These territories with their predominantly Moslem (and, to a large extent, nomadic) population were never used by the Persians as sources of slaves for two serious reasons: first, Islam prohibited enslavement of freeborn Moslems, and, second, mass enslavement of notoriously warlike nomads was not a winning proposition when compared with a possibility of capturing of the inhabitants of towns and villages. Therefore, the vassal Moslem khanates had a relatively passive role in the Persian invasions of the Georgian states: as faithful allies they provided the logistic support and served as auxiliaries in the Persian army, but on their own they were not a serious challenge for the Russian Empire: they were strong only as long as Persia could support them.

From 1813, the Transcaucasian khanates were ruled by the Russian military administration, but the Russian expansion in Transcaucasia did not stop there. As a result of the war of 1826–1828, according to the Treaty of Turkmanchai, the Russian Empire extended its power to the khanates of Erivan, Nakhichevan, the rest of the Talysh khanate and the territory of Ordubad. In addition to these territorial claims, Russia was entitled to 10 *kurors* of war reparations and received exclusive diplomatic and trade privileges in Persia. Taking into consideration that one *kuror* equaled 500,000 Persian toman or 2 million Russian silver rubles (3 million pound sterling at the time), the Treaty of Turkmanchai was a crushing blow not only to the military power of Persia, but also to its political and economic potential. After 1828 Persia was no longer a threat for Russia's supremacy in the Transcaucasia, on the contrary, the Shah's government was trying to do its best to appease the Russians and avoid any possible confrontation with the Tsar. The already related tragic

episode of 1829, when the Teheran mob stormed the Russian mission and slaughtered everybody including the Ambassador put the Shah in such dread of the consequences that he sent his son and heir to St. Petersburg to apologize in person, even though everybody at the Shah's court was at the time convinced that the prince was going to be executed as a retribution for the horrible offence.

Under such circumstances Persia was neither capable nor willing to instigate any dissent against the Russian rule in the former Transcaucasian khanates, let alone continue carrying on large-scale military raids. These territories, therefore, were left to the management of the Russian colonial administration to be ruled as they saw fit. This management included, among other measures, mass settlement in the area of the Christian population of former slaves who chose to become Russian subjects after the Treaty of Turkmanchai. Thousands of Armenians were allotted lands in the former khanates, which created a strong support base for the Russian government. At the same time, Russian authorities were doing their best to make the ruling elites of the former khanates comfortable with their new status as members of Russian nobility: they were allowed to keep all their titles, privileges and estates. With time, they (or their descendants) entered the Russian military service, received their education in St. Petersburg or Moscow and blended in rather smoothly with the rest of the ruling classes of the Russian Empire. Such two-fold approach secured the former Moslem khanates for the Russian Empire and made them, ironically, the easiest to govern among all Russia's new possessions in the Caucasus, even including the territory of Christian Georgia, which presented its Russian administrators with tremendous difficulties.

These difficulties became apparent almost immediately after the Russian Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus Prince Tsitsianov initiated the anti-slave-trade campaign in the former Georgian states on November 12, 1804 by his decree banning slave trade in Imeretia and Mingrelia:

I, Prince Tsitsianov, General of Infantry etc., having been informed that slave trade still exists and flourishes in Imeretia and Mingrelia [...] by the powers invested in me by His Imperial Majesty our Emperor, take it upon myself to announce to all and each of the subjects of the two abovementioned provinces that until criminal law for them is approved by our Sovereign, all the godless persons who sell Christians into the hands of the infidels will be court-martialed as offenders of law and violators of personal safety. And, their guilt being proven and judgment made,

they will be sent off to Siberia for hard labor, their title, position or origin notwithstanding. Those who would assist the authorities in proving the guilt or catching the offenders will receive a reward from the government, according to their God-pleasing act.¹⁸

The initiative in this enterprise was not limited to the government and its officials, but was met half way by the spontaneous anti-slave trade acts of Russian soldiers or Cossacks. In 1800, a few years before any formal orders had been given to the Caucasian troops and Cossacks in regards to slave trade, a Cossack patrol attacked a caravan of slavers on the banks of the Terek and set free all slaves intended for sale in Anapa.¹⁹ The caravan belonged to the female Khan of Avaria called Ghikhim-bike who duly protested but received no compensation.²⁰

Escaping slaves often sought refuge in Russian settlements or forts and were given asylum by the authorities while the question of the owner's compensation was settled depending on the owner's importance and/or loyalty to the Russians.²¹

In 1809, the Russian corvette *Krym* intercepted an Ottoman vessel bound for Constantinople with a cargo of slaves.²² The slaves were confiscated, set free and allowed to return to their own villages. However, the majority of them petitioned the authorities for a permission to stay in Russia because "they saw no future for themselves in their own lands, other than slavery."²³

The same corvette figures in another document on occasion of capturing three Turkish vessels in 1811. The Russian commanding officer reported his action and asked for further instructions:

In compliance with the orders of the Commander of the Ports and Fleets on the Black Sea, two ships under my command, namely, corvette *Krym* and tender *Konstantin*, have attacked and captured three enemy vessels on the 8th of this month. This occurred in the course of our regular patrol service near Batum shores. The crews of the two captured vessels managed to escape due to the proximity of the shore and the night's darkness. On the third vessel there have been found seventeen captives and two women.

¹⁸ Orders to s.s. Litvinov from Prince Tsitsianov, Nov. 12, 1804. AKAK, 2:415.

¹⁹ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Krasnodarskogo Kraia (GAKK), Fond 249, Op. 1, Sv. 91, Document 605, list 1.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Istoriiia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza, 78–79.

²² AKAK, 6:2, 513.

²³ GAKK, Fond 249, Op. 1, Sv. 91, Dokument 605, L. 1.

The former agha²⁴ of the fortress of Sukhum was also on this ship. I have now arrived with the above mentioned persons at the roadstead of Poti.²⁵

However, although Russian men-of-war patrolled the Black Sea coast with orders to attack and capture all vessels suspected of being slavers' ships the source of the problem lay ashore, in the slave markets of Daghestan and in the well-known slave trade ports of Sukhum-kale, Anapa, Poti, Anaklia and Batum. Russian authorities were well aware of this and their main preoccupation in the beginning of the nineteenth century was putting an end to slave trade off the coastal line of the Georgian principalities of Guria, Mingrelia and Imeretia. One of the major difficulties, however, lay in on the fact that in these parts slave trade was conducted by many of the most elevated and aristocratic families of the land—exactly the social group which contemporary Russian policies were designed to attract into the imperial service:

In Mingrelia and in Guria the Princes themselves and also their servants trade in slaves because of their dissoluteness and greed for money. They get them through baranta²⁶ or even sell their own subjects. In Imeretia Tsar Solomon's ban on slave trade is still in force, while in Georgia the Lezghins have to pay heavy price for their loot ever since Russian troops have been stationed there.²⁷

[...]

If we take into consideration what a fortune two hundred gold pieces makes for any highlander (which is not a high price here for young girls and boys of outstanding beauty) it is hard to believe that any of them would be able to resist such temptation.²⁸

The issue of slave trade became a reliable indicator of larger political allegiances and began to play a role in determining inter-state alliances. This was particularly evident in the instances of power succession in the Transcaucasian states when conflicting dynastic claims could be made. Any Russia-oriented ruler in Transcaucasia had to commit himself to the abolition of slave trade, while Princes who supported its con-

²⁴ Agha—a commander or a civil official in the Ottoman Empire.

²⁵ Raport kapitan-leitenanta Svinkina general-maioru Simonovichu, May 10, 1811, # 313. AKAK, 4:451.

²⁶ *Baranta*—cattle or prisoners captured in a raid as a compensation for an insult or injury.

²⁷ Semen Bronevskii, Noveishiia Geograficheskii i istoricheskii izvestiia o Kavkaze, sobrannia i popolnennia Semenom Bronevskim (Moscow, 1823), 310.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 308.

tinuation could count on help from Ottoman officials, the closest of whom was the Pasha of the Akhaltsikhe district, bordering on Georgian lands:

The Regent of Guria Prince Kaikhosro and his ward, the rightful heir to the throne Prince Mamia, express their profound loyalty to our Sovereign and their zeal in His service. Considering themselves already subjects of His Imperial Majesty, they hope for His favor and protection against the neighboring enemies, especially against Pasha of Akhaltsikhe. [...] The Pasha set free Vakhtang Gurieli (a pretender to the throne—L.K.) and promised him armed support so that he could restore himself to the throne of Guria, on the condition that he would do his best to supply as many captives as possible and would encourage the slave trade.²⁹

The reaction of the Russian authorities to such appeals was quite predictable and consistent. The slave trade was equaled to high treason and murder and anyone guilty of any of these three crimes had to be tried by a Russian military court. The Russian Commander-in-Chief Prince Tsitsianov made this very clear to Tsar Solomon of Imeretia when answering the following request:

Let my Princes, noblemen and other servitors enjoy respect and honor; and if they violate any laws, being new subjects and not skilled in [Russian] laws, do not let Russian officials try us in court or dishonor us, but, the guilt being proven, let us decide on their penalty.³⁰

To which Tsitsianov replied:

Who would take away their honors and respect? The procedure of the courts of justice has been approved by our Sovereign and submitted to Y.M. But these procedures exclude cases of slave trade, murder and treason, which, according to His Imperial Majesty's orders shall be tried by Russian military tribunals, regardless of the person of the offender, his rank or lineage.³¹

Indeed, the problem of punishment of such grave offenders presented no small question even for those local rulers who were eager to support Russians in every possible way. Some of them in their zeal went way too far even in the opinion of the severe Prince Tsitsianov, as was the case of Prince Grigorii Dadiani of Mingrelia. This potentate introduced beheading as well as cutting off of arms and legs and blinding as punishment for

²⁹ Raport s.s. Litvinova kniazii Tsitsianovu, ot Oct. 25, 1804 # 109, Sudzhuk. AKAK, 1-2:406.

³⁰ Pismo kn. Tsitsianova k tsariu Solomonu, ot Mar. 31, 1805, # 210. AKAK, 1-2:434.

³¹ Ibidem.

slave traders and murderers. When confronted with Tsitsianov's displeasure, he explained his actions:

As you have announced to me the revocation of capital punishment, it will from now on be abolished. But I ask you for instructions in regards of punishment for great sinners before God, for those who would not renounce their sins or for slave traders and thieves: and as your wisdom commands we shall do from now on. [...] Such punishments as decapitation or cutting off arms and legs or blinding have been introduced in our country only because we do not have any distant parts such as Siberia, where the criminals could be sent. [...] So I am asking for your instructions in regards to murderers, slave traders and bandits.³²

Quite naturally, Prince Dadiani enjoyed full support from Prince Tsitsianov who was no stranger to the Caucasian affairs and was, in fact, closely related to the Bagratid family, the royal clan of Kartli-Kakheti. With Russian help, Dadiani re-established his control over a long-lost territory of Odishi, on which occasion Prince Tsitsianov addressed the elders of Odishi with a fatherly admonition:

Be prudent, zealous and obey your lord Grigorii Dadiani as it is becoming to Christians.

Selling captives is an intolerable and godless act and let it be established that beginning today, June 16th of 1804 there will be no captives sold in Odishi, and let nobody dare do this. If any godless person disregards this announcement and engages in slave trade, he will be punished according to the Imperial law and executed with his whole family.³³

Unfortunately for Prince Dadiani, slave trade had strong supporters among his closest circle of relatives. Soon after the cordial agreement had been reached with Russia, Grigorii Dadiani suddenly died in October 1804 under mysterious circumstances which did not exclude the possibility of poisoning. Following his death the slave trade once again thrived in Mingrelia. The State Councilor Litvinov wrote on this account:

Every day I get more and more complaints concerning people of Odishi being kidnapped and sold by the Abkhazes. This may even become a source for unrest in the region. These impudent violators must be stopped, and to achieve that it is necessary to place troops on the borders with Abkhazia.³⁴

³² Pismo kn. Grigoriia Dadiani k kn. Tsitsianovu, Aug. 21 1803 (Publisher's translation into Russian, original in Georgian). AKAK, 1-2:460.

³³ Nastavleniie vsem Odishskim starshinam, kniaziam, dvorianam i vsem zhiteliyam. Jun. 16 1804. AKAK, 1-2:475.

³⁴ Raport s.s. Litvinova kn. Tsitsianovu. Nov. 12 1804, # 118. AKAK, 1-2:487.

As far as the future of Mingrelia was concerned, the Russian officials considered it wise to support Prince Dadiani's son, Levan, who was at the time only ten years old. It was, in Prince Tsitsianov's opinion, a good opportunity to provide the young heir with an appropriate tutor and to make sure his education was indeed suitable for a loyal subject of the Russian Empire. Again, abolition of slave trade was high on the list of priorities:

I find it most necessary to provide the young Prince with a worthy mentor who, while educating him, would introduce him to ideas contrary to those of his ancestors and relatives who engage in slave trade to the peril of mankind. If we help his morals develop in the ways of good, it could also serve the well-being of his people.³⁵

Slave trade also figured prominently in relations with the neighboring territories, especially with the independent principality of Abkhazia and with the Ottoman Empire. Faithful to the millennia-old tradition of their land, the ruling elite of Abkhazia considered slave trade one of the most profitable and respectable enterprises and remained most reliable purveyors of slaves for the Ottoman markets. Abkhazians raided the territories of Mingrelia and Imeretia and captured people who were later sent to the Ottoman Empire through the ports of Poti, Batum and Anaklia. Control of these ports, therefore, became central for the abolition of slave trade as well as a means of applying pressure to the Abkhaz rulers. Prince Tsitsianov wrote on this account to Prince Chartorvsky:

Concerning our previous discussion of means to acquire the wharf and fortress of Poti without giving any pretexts for indignation on the part of the Porte [...] I have sent there Major-General Tuchkov with an escort of one Major, two officers, fifty grenadiers and five Cossacks, and a present of a splendid dagger for the fort's commander. I don't think, however, that it will be possible to keep Poti without resorting to force because its commander seems to profit from its trade immensely. [...] As far as the other acquisitions [of Guria and Mingrelia] are concerned, all the seaports appertaining to them should be returned to Russia, no matter how close our alliance with the Porte is at present time. All the more so this return would follow the spirit of the peace treaty of Kainardzhi and would leave the Turks no possibility to trade in captive Christians. Therefore, I am now respectfully suggesting that [...] the ports of Batum and Anaklia should be rightfully in our hands. If the political situation does not allow it at the

³⁵ Vsepoddaneishii raport kn. Tsitsianova, Dec. 13 1804 # 23. AKAK, 1-2:491.

moment, it is necessary to establish there our consuls in order to prevent trade in captive Christians, to exercise our influence and for the purposes of surveillance.³⁶

It was quite obvious that control of the shoreline was vital in the matter of suppressing slave trade off the Georgian coast. Most ports of the area depended on slave trade and, as Mr. Litvinov pointed out on his report to Prince Tsitsianov,

Anaklia does not deserve the name of a fort. [...] It would never offer any resistance if the need arises to take it. Since the garrison of Anaklia mostly subsists on the slave trade there is no doubt that we shall obtain a legitimate pretext to demolish or capture this port shortly. Either we shall oust the Turks from the port if they dare to continue this trade, or Kelesh-bek will be forced to vacate it himself and to cede this place to us voluntarily.³⁷

When, in the course of the next Russo-Turkish war, the Russian army finally captured the fortress of Poti, the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army at the time General Tormasov stressed in his address to the men and officers of the Caucasian Corps:

[Due to this brilliant victory] this fortress, most important in its location and fortifications, now guarantees free communications between Mingrelia and Tavrida [the Crimea]. It has now cut off all means for the Turks to capture and enslave the poor Christian people of Mingrelia and to continue the godless slave trade. Now this fortress has prostrated itself before the Russian Empire and has become her subject for all eternity.³⁸

In their anti-slave trade measures Russian officials put the strongest emphasis on total abolition of all trade in Christians, i.e. Armenians, Georgians, etc. In practice, however, even Russians themselves were not absolutely safe from the prospect of being secretly sent to the Ottoman Empire as “live merchandise”. The example of fourteen Russian sailors shipwrecked near the fortress of Poti in 1805 proves that. Only Prince Tsitsianov’s personal interference prevented them from being sold. Tsitsianov wrote on this account to the *Pasha*³⁹ of Akhaltsikhe:

I have received Your Excellency’s letter through Mustafa-gha as well as the fourteen Russian sailors that you have sent to me. I thank you for having fulfilled the obligation of the peaceful alliance, existing between our two

³⁶ Pismo kn. Tsitsianova k kn. Chartoryiskomu, Apr. 25 1804 # 193. AKAK, 1-2:471.

³⁷ Pismo d.s.s. Litvinova k kn. Tsitsianovu, May 7 1805. AKAK, 1:512.

³⁸ Proklamatsia generala Tormasova, Nov. 24 1809. AKAK, 3:764.

³⁹ *Pasha*—an Ottoman title of military commander (approximately equal to General) or civil governor of a province.

great Powers. [...] I request, however, that you, as a direct superior of the commander of Poti, take measures to prevent such incidents as befell these sailors from happening in the future. I know that they were robbed in Poti, brought to Suram almost naked, and, besides, contrary to the peace treaty, the Agha of Poti intended to sell them into slavery.⁴⁰

From the Russian point of view Prince Tsitsianov proved to be a lucky choice of a Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus at the very beginning of the Russian rule in the region. Apart from being related to the royal family of Kartli-Kakheti and, therefore, much more familiar with the local ways than his predecessors (and most of his successors), he was also extremely energetic, consistent and firm in his policies. He used his diplomatic and military talents for consolidating the Russian authority and for gaining trust and loyalty of the local ruling elites. During his tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian line, Mingrelia (1803), Guria and Imeretia (1804) accepted the Russian protectorate.⁴¹ The Lezghi communities of Chartalah, the sultanate of Elisu and the Khanates of Ganja, Karabagh (Qarabakh), Shirvan and Sheki were brought under Russian control by military force.⁴²

P.D. Tsitsianov's sudden death in 1806⁴³ slowed down the incorporation of these new imperial acquisitions. His immediate successors, although unable to match Tsitsianov's acumen, intimate knowledge of local conditions and sheer energy, nonetheless continued Russia's policies in Transcaucasia along the same lines as best they could.

Their success, however, was extremely limited for quite some period of time. A combination of factors, such as diplomatic constraints during a period of peace with the Ottoman Empire, lack of interest in local social structure and customs and—quite often—personal weaknesses, paralyzed a number of Russian governors of Transcaucasia and reduced their activities to mere attempts to preserve *status quo* and prevent as much damage to their career as possible. At the same time, the Ottoman officials of the bordering provinces (especially of Erzerum and Alkhalt-sikhe) were personally interested and involved in the continuing slave

⁴⁰ Pismo kn. Tsitsianova k Selim-pashe, Jan. 8 1805 # 4. AKAK, 1–2:902.

⁴¹ Moshe Gammer, *The Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 6.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ Tsitsianov was murdered by the Khan of Baku during the negotiations of surrender; his head was cut off and sent to the Shah of Persia. Some researchers do not exclude the Shah's direct involvement in the assassination. Baddeley, *Russian Conquest*, 70–71; Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: the Role of Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley: 1969).

trade. In spite of the conditions of the peace treaty between the two Empires, which prohibited slave trade, the Ottoman side did little, if anything, to stop the traffic in captives:

The Serasker of Erzerum Yusuf-Pasha [...] still makes only empty promises and does nothing to prevent the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe from his actions which contradict the conditions of peace. [...] Selim-Pasha of Akhaltsikhe keeps up to three hundred Lezghins, pays them and allows them to rob and pillage any places in Georgia. [These Lezghins] with some natives of Akhaltsikhe assaulted the village of Akh-Bulak in the province of Pambak, captured all of its inhabitants, took away all valuables and cattle. Later, the same brigands assaulted a large transport with salt in the province of Kars on its way to Georgia and pillaged it completely. Taking into consideration all these hostile acts on the side of the Porte, I find it possible to break the peace treaty at any moment.⁴⁴

St.-Petersburg, however, at this time was completely immersed in the quick-paced games of European politics centered around Napoleon. It insisted, for once, on amicable relations with the Ottoman neighbors, thus leaving the Caucasian administration without any clear priorities or goals. In theory, the Russian Commanders-in-Chief were expected to further “civilize” the territory entrusted to them, eliminate slave trade and bring Transcaucasia more and more firmly under regular Russian rule. In practice they found themselves in the middle of a vicious circle of contradicting interests and more often than not preferred to do nothing rather than risk doing something that might displease powers that be. So, six years and three Commanders-in-Chief later General Rtishchev was dealing with the same problem as General Gudovich before him:

The Turks use all their insidious means to encourage feuds in Abkhazia and to incite the people against their lawful ruler, Georgii Sharvashidze. Their [the Turks’] clandestine plot and attempts at corrupting the Abkhaz people have come so far that colonel Prince Manuchar Sharvashidze, the brother-in-law of the potentate of Mingrelia Levan Dadiani, a loyal and zealous subject of Russia, was killed by his own brother who had been seduced by the Turks; and the godless slave trade which had been strictly prohibited, is on the rise again. Turks support this godless and unlawful trade by all means, and they have received up to three hundred captive Christians from Abkhazia and Mingrelia only in the last five months [...]⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Pismo Gudovicha Rumiantsovu, Dec. 8 1807, # 279. AKAK, 2:554.

⁴⁵ Otnoshenie generala Rtishcheva k tainomu sovetniku Italinskomu, May 24, 1813, # 97. AKAK, 5:789.

All attempts of Russian administrators to appeal to the articles of the peace treaty between Russia and the Ottoman Empire or to establish personal contacts with the Ottoman officials of the neighboring territories proved to be unsuccessful. Although the Russian Commander-in-Chief and the Serasker of Erzerum occasionally exchanged gifts and pleasant letters,⁴⁶ little could be done to discourage the Turks from supporting the raiding and slave trade:

All my demands concerning the exchange of captives and prisoners of war and also concerning retribution for plunder and robberies caused by the Ottoman subjects of the provinces of Kars and Akhaltsikhe to the inhabitants of Georgia have been left unanswered.⁴⁷

More than that, Ottoman officials sometimes found ways to save slave traders from Russian justice even when they were caught in the act. Whether it was done through diplomatic channels or outright bribes is obviously hard to establish, but in the case of one Kara-sulo the interference of the *Pasha* of Akhaltsikhe worked wonders. Kara-sulo was arrested in the town of Gori for having bought an Osetin boy and, contrary to all expectations, General Rtishchev ordered the commandant of Gori to set Kara-sulo free and escort him to the Turkish border.⁴⁸ By that time the Osetin boy had already frozen to death during a snowstorm, and the Russian commandant of Gori became the scapegoat of the whole incident:

This vice [slave trade] continues to grow among the gentry of Gori [...] due to your lack of attention to this most important problem. I, therefore, order you to do everything possible at all times to eliminate this godless trade in captives with the Turks [...] Those who are caught in the act of selling or buying Russian subjects, whether they be Turks or native sellers, should be arrested and sent to Tiflis with a convoy, their name or rank notwithstanding. Otherwise I will hold you personally responsible for any lack of zeal in this matter. You should also make sure the person who sold the Osetin boy to Kara-sulo is found and report to me as soon as possible.⁴⁹

Of course, personal qualities of the Russian Commanders-in-Chief were extremely important for establishing the general spirit of administration.

⁴⁶ Pismo generala Rtishcheva k Erzurumskomu seraskiru, July 4, 1813 # 3. AKAK, 5; 790. Idem, July 7, 1813, # 107. AKAK, 5:790–791.

⁴⁷ Otnoshenie generala Rtishcheva k t.s. Italinskomu, May 24, 1813, # 97. AKAK, 5:789.

⁴⁸ Predpisanie gen. Rtishcheva i.d. Goriiskogo okruzhnogo nachalnika podpolkovniku Tokarevu, Aug. 20, 1815, # 837. AKAK, 5:832–833.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

General Rtishchev was, most likely, one of the least suitable candidates for this post. His successor, General Ermolov, who was famous for his biting remarks, called Rtishchev “quite distinctive in his perfect incompetence” and elaborated on that:

Generally Rtishchev was a kind man of good intentions but he was totally under control of that rogue of a wife of his who was greedy and loose, and of the scoundrels and outright extortionists who surrounded him. And, therefore, he, a weak and, possibly, not an altogether innocent creature, gave way to terrible corruption.⁵⁰

Apparently, as far as the slave trade was concerned, Russians had made little progress in Transcaucasia since the times of Prince Tsitsianov, in spite of all the military effort. The local nobility, presumably Christian and formally equal in position to the Russian gentry, failed to live up to the expectations of the Russian administration. The system of relations between the landlords and their bonded people was notably complex and could not possibly be reduced to a “lord–serf” dichotomy. Obviously, Christian lords in Georgia found no harm in selling other Christians into Muslim slavery as long as these Christians did not belong to their own “clientele”, i.e. were relative strangers, as, most likely, was the case with the Osetin boy.

The Russian administration of the time made no attempts at understanding this system or of conducting any civil reforms. Russians had only a vague idea of the social structure of Georgian society, social relations or customs. Failure to comply with the Russian standards of behavior was taken as proof of “Oriental backwardness” and “Turkish influence which corrupts Imeretia nobles to the extent when they can sell their fellow Christians to the heathen in order to buy themselves some luxurious saddle or silver stirrups.”⁵¹

According to the data I have collected here, not only was the godless trade in captives prohibited and severely punished in the Kingdom of Imeretia, but even serfs could not be sold by their masters across the Imeretia borders [...] However, in the last years of the late king Solomon Archilovich, due to his diminishing power, the Imeretia nobles have taken liberties and have begun the intolerable trade in people not only across the border to Guria, Mingrelia, etc. but even through the Crimea [...] In order to prevent any abuse it is absolutely necessary to announce everywhere that

⁵⁰ Letter by Ermolov to Count Mikhail Vorontsov, # 23, Tiflis, Jan 10, 1817. *Arkhiv Khiazia Vorontsova*, 36:180.

⁵¹ Predpisanie gen. Rtishcheva general-maioru Simonovichu, Oct. 2, 1815, # 904. AKAK, 5:485–486.

all sales of people across the Imeretia border are now prohibited. [...] All sales within the territory of Imeretia have to be conducted according to Russian law, i.e. no serfs can be sold without their families or without land with the only exception of destitute ones.⁵²

In spite of the fact that serfs could be legally sold in the Russian Empire at the time, trade in people in Imeretia gave the Russian administration grounds for concern. Apparently, it was closely, if not directly, related to the Turkish slave trade off the Caucasian coast. Indeed, in 1816, in his report addressed to the Emperor, General Rtishchev pointed out, that

At the end of the King's rule the godless trade in Christians and their sale to the Turks were tolerated, but now due to the severe measures taken by the Russian Government it has *almost* stopped. [*My emphasis—L.K.*]

I also discovered another vice that has taken root among the Imeretin gentry to the detriment of the Christian faith. [The Imeretin landlords] thought it permissible to pawn their Christian serfs or even to outright sell them to the Jews in Kutaisi. [...] I have put an end to such lawless trade immediately through the following measures: all Christian families that have been pawned or sold to Jews should be immediately confiscated by the Government and their former lords must pay their fair price back to the Jews, for the lords are in this case twice as guilty as the Jews since it is they who have violated all laws, including the laws of their own faith and conscience [...]⁵³

The last paragraph of this report is most interesting and revealing. It shows not only the religious prejudices of the Russian administration but also the fact that the strictest standards were sometimes applied not to the non-Christians of the Empire but rather to the co-religionists, in this case Georgians, who, unlike the Jews, were not expected to have any customs or beliefs different from Russian Orthodox Christianity. Georgians were supposed “to know better”. All proofs to the contrary and complex local realities baffled Russians and brought all projects of social and political reform in Transcaucasia to a screeching halt. Russian military administrators found it impossible to apply Russian standards; laws and norms to local conditions, while native standards of social behavior struck them as “uncivilized” and way too “Oriental”:

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Vsepoddaneishii raport generala Rtishcheva, Sent. 3, 1816, # 104. AKAK, 5:191–192.

I shall continue my attempts to create a set of new rules and laws for Imeretia which I shall try to make them as close to local customs as possible. As a preliminary idea, however, I may now say that local rules and laws should be completely different from the Russian ones because even the example of Georgia has shown that the natives of the Caucasus require a very special form of government in accordance with their national character and customs which are here as important as laws.⁵⁴

The good intentions of General Rtishchev did not bear fruit, however. No civil code for Georgia was created during his tenure, and the period of Russian military rule lasted well into the 1840s, changing its character in the wide range from openly militant and strict to apathetic and hardly noticeable, according to personal qualities and ideals of the current Commander-in-Chief.

One of the most fascinating personalities ever to assume this post certainly was General Alexei Petrovich Ermolov who received his appointment to the Caucasus on June 29, 1816. He was one of the most brilliant generals of the Russian army who, by the age of forty in 1816 had already made a striking military career, distinguished himself at the battle of Borodino, was the commander of the Russian and Prussian guards at the fall of Paris in 1814 and was universally popular with officers and soldiers alike. He had a complex personality, was both admired and hated for his trademark sincerity and straightforwardness, but, whatever the opinion about him may be, even his enemies never questioned his integrity. His patriotism bordered on xenophobia, his hatred of the language of diplomacy bordered on belligerency. When asked by Tsar Alexander what reward he preferred for his loyal service, Ermolov famously answered: "Sire, create me German!" Thus openly, however humorously, protesting the privileged position of the nobles of German extraction at the Russian court and in the army. Also, in the times when French was the Russian nobility's language of choice, Ermolov spoke it only with foreigners and made a point of conducting all his correspondence in Russian. After the famous episode when he refused to remove his boots before the audience with the Shah of Persia, he explained his actions: "Let the English crawl on their bellies in front of the Infidels. A Russian soldier has no business doing such things". Surprisingly, his mission to Persia was successful, although, according to Ermolov's notes, he hated every minute of it. However, his feelings about the "Orient" and its vices notwithstand-

⁵⁴ Otnoshenie generala Rtishcheva k ministru politsii, June 27 1812, 33. AKAK, 5:471.

ing, Ermolov considered his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian army a fulfillment of his old wish:

I have always desired this appointment, even when my rank did not give me any right to expect it.⁵⁵

A strong believer in the Russian mission of progress, civilization and enlightenment in the Caucasus, Ermolov was also convinced that military force was the only way to fulfill this mission:

This people has not been created for the benign rule of Emperor Alexander; it needs an iron scepter to be governed.⁵⁶

The slave trade was among the Caucasian phenomena least tolerated by General Ermolov. Unlike his predecessors who considered hard labor in Siberia the strictest punishment for such offense, Ermolov introduced public executions of slave traders in the former slave markets. As a Russian diplomat and writer A.S. Griboedov pointed out, "Before Ermolov they were trading in slaves in these bazaars, now slave traders are being hanged here."⁵⁷

However, in Transcaucasia, slave trade had never been a purely internal matter of the Russian authorities. Here, as always, it received considerable support from the Ottoman side of the border. Therefore, anti-slave trade measures necessarily required diplomacy and involvement in the large-scale foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Ermolov proved to be unwilling to bend his principles and was not afraid of direct confrontation with St. Petersburg, if need be. When the question of possible return of Abkhazia and Sukhum-kale to the Turks arose in the Russian government, Ermolov strongly opposed the idea. In his letter to Russian Foreign Minister, Count K.V. Nesselrode (another "German" of high rank in Ermolov's opinion), the Caucasian commander pointed out that such action would bring profound distrust towards Russians on that part of the local peoples and ruling elites, that it would certainly result in the massacre of the Russian-oriented Abkhaz aristocrats and would make control of the border almost impossible.⁵⁸ His most important objections, however, concerned slave trade in the region:

⁵⁵ Pismo A.P. Ermolova M.S. Vorontsovu, Jan. 10, 1817, Tiflis. AKV, 36:179.

⁵⁶ Pismo A.P. Ermolova M.S. Vorontsovu, Jan. 10, 1817, Tiflis. AKV, 36:179.

⁵⁷ Griboedov, A.S., *Puteshestvie ot Mozdoka do Tiflisa*. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St-Peterbourg, 1889), 2:393.

⁵⁸ *Otnoshenie generala Ermolova k grafu Nesselrode*, July 16, 1820. AKAK, 6:652–653.

So far the possibilities for slave trade here have been reduced as much as possible due to the supervision of our commander of Sukhum-kale and to the naval patrolling of the shoreline. But if we cede Abkhazia [to the Turks] this trade will flourish again. This point deserves special attention, since so many states are now taking measures against trade in Negroes, while here they will sell Christians—the inhabitants of Imeretia and Mingrelia. Most likely, the Turkish government will accept conditions concerning the ban on slave trade but will violate them very soon. Who is going to supervise how these conditions are carried out if every Ottoman official deals in slaves?!. Besides, the Caucasus has supplied the harems of the sultans and aristocrats since time immemorial [...] One has to be only too credulous to believe the Turks' promises.⁵⁹

So important and profitable was slave trade for the Ottoman officials that they even organized military slaving expeditions to Guria:

[Prince Mamia Gurieli] also complains that the Turks invade his country with impunity, cause destruction and take his subjects into captivity [...] They do not even expect any revenge on the part of the Prince since, according to the Treaty with the Porte, he has been prohibited to do so.⁶⁰

The Russian administration of Guria supported the potentate's petition to allow him to try and punish those of the invading Turks who would be caught in the act and also to organize pursuit of the ones who would try to escape.

Although such expeditions can rarely be accomplished without any shooting or even casualties, [Prince Gurieli] thinks that even if he loses a dozen of his subjects a year in such a way, he still will have saved hundreds of those who will not be taken into captivity, and he will set an example for other [bandits].⁶¹

It appears that many of the atrocities at the border of the Russian and Ottoman Empires took place exactly because of such slaving expeditions. Although the conditions of the peace treaty between the two states banned slave trade and also forbade any use of military force, these articles apparently were not enforced by either side. Ermolov's administration encouraged the pursuit of slavers across the border and the use of armed force even on the Ottoman territory. Some of such pursuits were successful enough for the Ottoman government to take notice and make

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 653.

⁶⁰ Raport general-maiora Kurnatovskogo general-maioru Veliaminovu, July 3, 1818, # 619. AKAK, 6:666.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 668.

a formal protest to the Russian envoy in Istanbul Baron G.A. Stroganov. The protest was duly forwarded to Ermolov, who replied:

I am now asking Your Excellency to inform the Ottoman Government of the insolent and piratical behavior of its officials of which, I am sure, the Porte remains unaware. The fact that we have not so far undertaken a single unfriendly unctuous action makes such behavior even less pardonable. On the contrary, we have so far generously and magnanimously tolerated it.

I am convinced that as soon as Your Excellency discloses these unfriendly actions to the Ottoman Government with your well-known skill and prudence, the Porte will understand that we had full right to reciprocate.⁶²

Ermolov, however, fully realized that diplomacy could not change the strained situation at the border. In his letter to Count Nesselrode he almost openly admits to his plans to use military force:

I have to inform Your Excellency that, according to my information about the Turkish provinces adjacent to Georgia, the Porte is powerless in the lands where the spirit of license and disobedience reigns supreme. The same behavior of the Turkish officials will continue, the same unstoppable brigandage and banditry will go on. [...] I have been trying to contain the anger and revengeful feelings of the local people but I can do that no longer. Their hearts call them to avenge their fathers, wives or children who are now dead or taken into slavery. It would be indecent to warn them of consequences of their revenge, for if they had means to restrain the predators while being subjects of the Georgian Tsars, they rightfully expect to have the same means while being subjects of the Russian Emperor.⁶³

The Ottoman officers and officials have made an alliance with the robbers and bandits because trade in captive Christians is the most profitable commerce. So, instead of reducing the brigands, they encourage them and lose all respect on the part of the local population, which leads in turn to violence and disobedience.⁶⁴

On many occasions Ermolov and members of his administration directly addressed Ottoman officials of the adjacent territories. These letters have none of the pleasantness of the ones written by Ermolov's predecessors, and such disregard of diplomacy often became a source of friction between the Caucasian commander and St. Petersburg.

⁶² Otnoshenie generala Ermolova k grafu Nesselrode, Aug. 23, 1818, Lager' na reke Sunzhe. AKAK, 6:410.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 410.

⁶⁴ Otnoshenie generala Ermolova k grafu Nesselrode, Aug. 30, 1818, krepost' Groznaia. AKAK, 6:412.

I have asked Your Excellency to return the officer and the interpreter. [...] You have not answered my letter because you are ashamed of admitting that your own subordinates do not obey you and despise your power over them. [...] I have many times informed you about the brigandage of the inhabitants of the Akhaltsikhe province in the lands of our jurisdiction, but neither you nor your predecessors have done anything to satisfy our claims, so the killings and banditry are continuing. I shall take adequate measures for the protection of my Sovereign's subjects and you will see the results for yourself. I shall not bother you with any more claims and I do not expect you to reply to this letter because all you can write is lies, and I know better than believe anything you say.⁶⁵

On another occasion, it was Ermolov's Chief-of-Staff, General Veliaminov, who wrote to the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe. This time it concerned a fifteen-year-old Georgian boy who had been captured by the Ottomans on Russian territory and sold to the province of Kars. In response to insistent demands of the Russians, the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe found the boy and personally brought him to the border. He also suggested that the boy's family pay a ransom of 3300 silver kurushes.⁶⁶ General Veliaminov called this request "surprising and indecent" and later proceeded to say that

[...] Not only is the slave trade going on with impunity, but the governors of these provinces themselves, instead of taking measures to uproot the evil and return the stolen goods and people, require ransom from the offended party. [...] I, therefore, continue to insist that the boy be returned not only without any ransom but also with gratitude on your part that the Russian government does not pursue the incident any further and does not insist on any compensation for the poor father of the boy. [...] If, however, Your Excellency does not return the boy unconditionally, I shall be forced to take measures so that the boy be returned to his suffering father. I shall, therefore, pay the ransom at the expense of the Turkish subjects; to which end I shall arrest any and all Akhaltsikhe merchants or officials that happen to be in Imeretia. The impudence of your subordinates gives me full right for such actions.⁶⁷

But, in spite of all punitive measures and diplomatic effort applied by General Ermolov and his staff, slaving expeditions from the Ottoman side of the border remained an almost constant source of threat. The Russian Chief-of-Staff in the Caucasus often received reports of such incidents.

⁶⁵ Pismo generala Ermolova k Ali-pashe Ahaltsikhskommu, Oct. 19, 1820, # 217. AKAK, 6:428.

⁶⁶ Pismo general-leitenanta Veliaminova k Akhaltsikhskommu pashe, Aug. 7, 1822, # 2564. AKAK, 6:436.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

The Governor of Imeretia Major-General Kurnatovskii reported that a detachment of Turks from Akhaltsikhe and Adjaria [...] have taken into captivity four peasant families, twenty men and nineteen women. During the shooting two Imeretins and two Turks were killed. The bandits were pursued but the captives could not be returned.⁶⁸

The potentate of Guria Prince Mamia Gurieli informed me that on April 9 a Turkish subject Akhmed-bek Khimshiashvili assaulted the village of Aksana with a large party. They captured several people but the Gurians pursued the bandits, got back the captives and took many prisoners, among them the brother of Akhmed-bek himself, two officers, twelve ensigns and seventy three Turks; they also killed one Agha and thirty three other people.⁶⁹

The fact that at this period of time the Ottoman officials were, indeed, supporting slave trade and saw no wrongdoing in engaging in it themselves is supported by researchers of the Ottoman slave trade in our own time. According to Ehud Toledano, the earliest attempts to restrict slave trade in the Ottoman provinces were made only in 1841 in Tunisia.⁷⁰ Until then, and, indeed, for the most part afterwards, the Ottoman authorities continued to dismiss the problem of slave trade in the Empire as non-existent.⁷¹ Besides the continuing support for slavers from the Ottoman side of the border, the Russian administration once again had to face the fact that in Transcaucasia much of slave trade was conducted by the local aristocrats who traded not only in captives purchased from the highlanders (sometimes brought all the way from the Northern Caucasus) but also in stolen cattle, horses and kidnapped local peasants. As General Veliaminov pointed out in his letter to the Senate,

[...] Some of the local noblemen continue to rob and steal not because of the poverty but because such was the custom here before, at the time of Tsar Solomon. Local Princes and noblemen used to sell across the border not only stolen cattle but also people, and we have to set a strict example for them in order to put an end to this practice.⁷²

The example was created of the case of Teimuraz Lordkipanidze, an Imeretia nobleman who had been condemned to hanging for robbery.

⁶⁸ Raport general-leitenanta Veliaminova generalu Ermolovu, June 15, 1818, # 30. AKAK, 6:409.

⁶⁹ Otnoshenie generala Ermolova k baronu Strogonovu, May 6, 1819, # 1467. AKAK, 6:418.

⁷⁰ Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 118.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁷² Raport generala Veliamonova v Pravitelstvuiushchii Senat, June 29, 1822, # 2483. AKAK, 6:604.

Taking into consideration his noble origin, an exile for life to Siberia was substituted for the death penalty.⁷³ No doubt, similar fate awaited Princess Orbeliani, had her guilt been proven in spite of the fact that her brother was a well-respected general of the Russian army. General Ermolov paid close attention to all matters concerning slave trade and was not known for making exceptions.

[...] Trade in people is flourishing in Poti as never before. Prince Orbeliani's sister, who was married to the former potentate of Guria, frequently visits the commandant of Poti for reasons unknown, and they say that only half of her attendants return with her from these visits. We may conclude from this that under the pretext of such visits she conducts slave trade. I, therefore, order you to establish surveillance over Prince Orbeliani's sister and to find out the reason of her frequent visits to the commandant of Poti.⁷⁴

Although Ermolov's suspicions were probably well justified, it was not easy to prove them. The officer who was appointed to conduct the investigation and to collect the information about Princess Maria Gurieli found it impossible to do so secretly. He resorted, instead, to direct interrogation of Princess Maria's nephew, the potentate of Guria. According to him, his aunt was not engaged in slave trade and maintained her relations with the commandant of Poti only because she was trying to get back her serfs, who were often running away across the border.⁷⁵ Although the whole story remained quite suspicious, the Russians had to leave it at that.

I have strongly reprimanded General Kurnatovskii for having used such an unsuitable method for secret investigation and I have ordered him to strictly and officially forbid Princess Gurieli to visit Poti or to meet the commandant of Poti. [...] She also must not even send her people across the border to sell their merchandise without letting General Kurnatovskii know about it. I have also ordered him to continue the close secret surveillance over the said Princess.⁷⁶

However, in spite of all military, diplomatic and administrative measures, the slave trade in Transcaucasia was still going on during and after A.P. Ermolov's tenure, which ended in June 1826. According to some estimates, about 4000 slaves were sold off the Caucasian coast in the

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ Predpisanie generala Ermolova general-leitenanu Veliaminovu, June 22, 1818, # 338, Lager na Sunzhe. AKAK, 6:666.

⁷⁵ Raport general-leitenanta Veliaminova generalu Ermolovu, Oct. 23, 1818, # 156. AKAK, 6:669.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

1830s.⁷⁷ Ermolov's successors—Count Paskevich, Baron Rozen, General Golovin, and General Neidgardt—still had to deal with this problem, and they did, however without Ermolov's passion and without much progress.

Ermolov's departure signified the beginning of a deep crisis for the Caucasian administration. In spite of his contradictory character and obvious flaws as an administrator, Ermolov's unquestionable honesty, personal charisma and integrity cast a noble light on the whole Caucasian corps. The morale of his officers and men remained high, and he was certainly taken seriously by his enemies. He was respected even when hated. After his departure "... his gigantic form continued to cast its shadow on the Caucasus and all his successors had to compete with it."⁷⁸ The immediate successors failed in this competition rather miserably. None of them, except Count (later, Prince) Paskevich were capable military commanders, and the contemporaries judged their administrative talents as less than mediocre. However, lack of consistent and practical civil policy towards the territory of Transcaucasia contributed to the failures of Russian administration more than any other factors.

In a way, here we encounter a paradox and a seeming contradiction between outward appearances and inner processes. From a diplomatic and military point of view, Russia was making incredible progress in the Caucasus. As a result of the wars of 1826–1827 and 1827–1829 and the consequent peace treaties with Persia and the Ottoman Empire, respectively, Russia finally stabilized her Caucasian border. The Treaty of Turkmanchai of 1828 with Persia established Russian control over the Khanates of Erivan and Nakhichevan and stated Russia's exclusive right to have naval forces on the Caspian Sea.⁷⁹ According to the Treaty of Adrianople of 1829 with the Ottoman Empire, Russia received the territory of the eastern shore of the Black Sea from the delta of the Kuban to the port of St. Nicholas, inclusively. The Ottoman Empire also forfeited its former claims to control over Georgia, Guria, Imeretia and Mingrelia; it also confirmed Russian control over the Khanates of Erivan and Nakhichevan.⁸⁰ Slave trade was prohibited in all ports of the Black Sea, and the Straits were open to merchant fleets of all countries.⁸¹ The territories of Kars, Bayazet and Erzerum were returned to the Ottoman

⁷⁷ N.A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI–XIX vekakh* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1958), 191–192.

⁷⁸ Moshe Ganner, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 37.

⁷⁹ G.A. Galoian, *Rossia i narody Zakavkazia*, 167.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 176.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

Empire, and all Christian population of these territories were allowed to emigrate to Russia if they chose to do so. As a result, more than ninety thousand people, predominantly Greeks and Armenians, moved across the border and settled in the Russian provinces of the Caucasus and in other southern Russian lands.⁸²

It was obvious that after the external borders had been consolidated, measures were in order to establish internal peace and civil reforms which would lead to the incorporation of the Caucasia into the Empire. This was, however, easier said than done. In the late 1820s, especially after the arrival of several hundred lesser participants of the Decembrist mutiny of 1825, the Caucasus acquired the reputation of a “warm Siberia” in the current expression.⁸³ Malaria, cholera and dysentery claimed hundreds of lives, not counting casualties of a seemingly endless war in the Northern Caucasus. The morale of the army degraded as the soldiers and officers were getting used to the cruel methods of the anti-guerilla expeditions. The Caucasus became a general place of exile. A few high-ranking officials were offered the post of the Caucasian Commander-in-Chief but politely declined what had become more of a liability than an honor.

Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg a special Committee for the Organization of the Transcaucasian Territory (the Caucasian Committee) was established in 1837. Several plans of civil reforms and incorporation were submitted and none were found practical.⁸⁴ The Caucasian administrators were, for a time, left to their own devices, and their policies towards the local population varied according to their personal ideas and ambitions.

Some Conclusions

The first three decades of the Russian administration in the Southern Caucasus did not meet with considerable success either in terms of establishing a firm control of the territory, or in terms of putting an end to the slave trade in the area. In this region the Russian Empire encountered well-established feudal societies with strong social hierarchy and high value of land. Here, only the members of the highest aristocracy

⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ D.N. Somov, *Dekabristy na Kubani. K istorii obshchestvennoi zhizni nashego kraia.* (Krasnodar: Kubanskii universitet, 1985), 5.

⁸⁴ Anthony L.H. Rhineland, *Prince Michail Vorontsov, Viceroy to the Tsar*, 127–133.

conducted the trade in slaves for reasons, which lay, for the most part, outside pure economic or mercantile interests. In the already mentioned words of General Vel'iaminov, they did it "not because of poverty, but because such was the custom here before", or, rather, because this was their special privilege, an important part of their social position as members of the royal clan. On the other hand, it was also a way to acquire luxury goods which served the same purpose—confirm the exalted status of their owners and stress their "belonging" to what was at the time perceived as the ultimate achievement of civilization—to the Ottoman and Persian culture. Pure military and administrative measures on the part of the Russian administration proved to be ineffective against the traditional power structure and established ways of the socialization of the local elites. If anything, they were counter-productive. Faced with the increasing Russian military-administrative control, Georgian aristocracy sought refuge in its past—glorious deeds of their ancestors, history, myths and established privileges, one of which, was, incidentally, the right to trade in slaves. Even the younger generation of Georgian nobility became quite conservative at the time, which culminated in an abortive plot against the Russian rule in Transcaucasia in 1832. With Russian administrators so close and so oppressive, close ties with the Ottomans appeared to be a natural solution with everything that followed from such ties, including, again, active slave trade. In spite of the fact that the Southern Caucasus was not engaged in an active military conflict with the Russian empire and was, for the most part, "pacified" from the 1820s on, the Russian administration did not seem to make much progress towards the incorporation of this region into Empire or towards the suppression of slave trade there until a breakthrough of the 1840s.

A Case of Success: Vorontsov in the Southern Caucasus

In 1844, after years of deliberation and indecisiveness, Tsar Nicholas I resorted to a time-honored method of solving the insoluble problems: appoint one man to the task, make him fully responsible and give him a free hand, provided he did the job. Peter the Great favored such methods, but the Western democratic influences made them less popular as time passed. The Tsar's choice was made much easier by the fact that he found a perfect candidate for the post: the former Governor-General of Novorossia and Viceroy of Bessarabia Count Mikhail Semenovitch Vorontsov.

M.S. Vorontsov belonged to one of the wealthiest and most illustrious families of Russian aristocracy.⁸⁵ He was born in 1782 in England where his father was Russian Ambassador at the time, and spent his youth in that country before entering service in Russia at the age of sixteen.⁸⁶ He distinguished himself in military service in the Caucasus under Tsitsianov and in the Napoleonic wars, and was a much-decorated general by the age of thirty-eight.⁸⁷ In 1823 he was appointed Governor-General of Novorossia (New Russia)⁸⁸ and Viceroy of Bessarabia and remained on the post with considerable success until 1844. Among his most notable achievements of the time was the reconstruction of Odessa, the famous Black Sea port that became the marvel of the Russian South and an example of perfect taste in architecture and city planning.

Vorontsov's success in Novorossia assured Nicholas I that he was the only person capable of cleaning the Augean Stables of the Russian Caucasian administration. From the Tsar's point of view, Count Vorontsov was indeed the perfect candidate: he had ample experience of governing the new provinces of the Russian Empire as well as considerable military experience and was renowned as a gifted diplomat. Nicholas I stressed all these advantages while making the offer on terms impossible to refuse:

Having reinforced the Caucasian Corps with the 5th Corps of Infantry, I hoped to give the Caucasian commanders all means to subjugate our enemy and to start a gradual and steady incorporation of these lands. My hopes, however, were not realized, for this year's campaign was far from achieving its goal.

At the same time, the civil matters, which are very closely tied to the military circumstances in this region, are also in disorder, and both these subjects of utmost importance to our State remain in the most unsatisfactory condition.

I am more than ever convinced that this situation has to be resolved in a permanent and stable way and I have chosen, as an immediate executor of my will, a person whom I trust absolutely and unconditionally and who

⁸⁵ His family estate counted 24,000 serfs in different guberniias of Russia; he also purchased 27,000 desiatin of land in the Kherson guberniia, the most fertile lands of the Empire. He was certainly among the top five richest men in Russia. See, "Formuliarnyi spisok o sluzhbe feldmarshala kniazia Vorontsova". AKV, 39: VI.

⁸⁶ For a complete and detailed biography of Count Vorontsov see Anthony L.H. Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov, Viceroy to the Tsar*.

⁸⁷ Formuliarnyi spisok o sluzhbe feldmarshala kniazia Vorontsova, AKV, 39: IX–XI.

⁸⁸ The Crimea and the territories of Southern Ukraine and Southern Russia, incorporated into the Empire after the annexation of the Crimean Khanate.

combines renowned military gallantry with experience in civil matters, which are equally important for this position.⁸⁹

Vorontsov was offered the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army and Viceroy of the Caucasus with unlimited plenary powers (*Glavnokomanduiushchii voisk na Kavkaze i Namestnik v sikh oblastakh s neogrnicennym polnomochiem*), subordinate and accountable only to the Tsar himself.⁹⁰ Such an offer could not possibly be declined and Vorontsov, although elderly and in ailing health, accepted.

As it was indicated in the Tsar's letter to Vorontsov, Nicholas I had finally come to understand that none of the problems of the Russian administration in the Caucasus could be solved separately. All military and civil matters of the region had to be dealt with on the basis of a consistent policy of reforms that could eventually lead to the incorporation of the region into the Russian Empire. Vorontsov shared this point of view, and, before his departure to the Caucasus, he arranged for a *carte blanche* in his future activities as Viceroy.

As an experienced governor of newly acquired territories of the Empire, Vorontsov realized that all the "barbaric customs" and "oriental vices" that Russians had been trying to abolish for so long (including the most important of them, the slave trade) were parts of a tightly interwoven system of ancient social and economic relations. Attempts to undermine parts of the system while leaving the rest of it in place were certainly doomed from the very beginning. In order to abolish slave trade, as well as in order to put an end to the Caucasian war and incorporate all these lands into the Empire, the whole local socio-economic system had to be replaced by a new one. The whole local society had to be rebuilt on a new foundation; new moral, social and cultural values had to be introduced, and a new, Eurocentric, identity of the local elites had to be created. Count Vorontsov himself expressed his views in an elegantly laconic fashion:

In order to introduce civilization in these parts we have to behave ourselves in a civilized manner. As soon as the natives see the advantages of the European culture and education, our task will become a thousand times easier and more pleasant.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Sobstvennoruchnoe pismo Gosudaria Imperatora Nikolaia Pavlovicha k grafu Mikhailu Semenovichu Vorontsovu, Gatchina, Nov. 17, 1844. AKV, 39:499.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 499–500.

⁹¹ Pismo Vorontsova k Ermolovu, Mar. 30 1847. AKV, 36:342.

Indeed, culture and education remained among the top priorities in the course of Vorontsov's viceroyship. In Transcaucasia he did not have to get involved in any military action—this region was, for the most part, peaceful (except for an abortive conspiracy of some young Georgian aristocrats in 1832 against the Russian administration in Tiflis; and a peasant rebellion of 1841 in Guria but neither of them was a serious threat to the Russian rule). A large part of the population there was Christian (Georgian and Armenian). The old ruling elites there were clearly defined and kept all their privileges and authority over their subjects. It was for them that Vorontsov's strategy for overcoming the "oriental backwardness" was specifically designed.

Vorontsov did not favor straightforward administrative russification, which had been attempted before him. On the contrary, he broke up the all-imperial administrative divisions, finding them inflexible and totally inadequate in the presence of traditional boundaries of the ancient states and principalities.⁹² The administrative units of the Caucasian province were re-established along the lines of these traditional boundaries, and named, in the Russian fashion, after the major cities of such units (the province of Tiflis instead of Kartli-Kakheti; the Erevan province instead of Armenia etc).⁹³ These measures met with great approval of the local population and made Vorontsov popular in Transcaucasia.

The popularity of the Viceroy grew stronger after Vorontsov insisted on including twenty "relevant" statutes of the traditional Code of Law of Vakhtang VI into the Imperial Code of Laws, thus ensuring their use in the Georgian provinces. It was especially important that the twenty statutes were selected by a committee of Georgian aristocrats and scholars.⁹⁴ Moreover, Vorontsov successfully solved the extremely complex and sensitive issue of the status of Georgian nobility by establishing provincial committees of local nobles who judged the claims of their countrymen to a noble status quite effectively. These committees approved or dismissed claims of nobility and presented the Russian administration with ready lists of Georgian aristocratic families, avoiding any misunderstanding or tension between the Russian officials and Georgian elites.

The new Viceroy aimed at creating in Transcaucasia a new economic and cultural center similar to his previous triumph, the so-called *pearl of*

⁹² Ibidem, 156.

⁹³ G.A. Galoian, *Rossiiia i narody Zakavkazia*, 202–203.

⁹⁴ Anthony L. Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov* ... 171.

Novorossia, a booming and flourishing city of Odessa. “Caucasia, or, at least, its leading edge, was finally given a taste of what it meant to be part of Western civilization.”⁹⁵

Vorontsov encouraged participation of the natives in local administrations and in the judicial system, to which end he established and developed an extensive educational system. In addition of a *gymnasium* (secondary school) in Tiflis, another one was built in Kutaisi. Curriculums included not only standard subjects of Russian schools, but also subjects in Georgian, Armenian and Turkish languages, Caucasian history etc. A system of primary schools was created in order to “provide the children of urban and other free classes with necessary and practical education and to prepare some of them for government service.”⁹⁶ A few parish schools were established in the highland districts as well as some other specialized schools, such as Muslim schools, trade schools and schools for girls. The total number of students in all Transcaucasian schools was already a significant 3597 people in 1847, and almost twice as many in 1855.⁹⁷ Best students of the Transcaucasian *gymnasiums* were able to continue their education in Russian universities thanks to the sixty government scholarships, also established by Vorontsov.

The Viceroy encouraged the development of local trade and industry, took personal interest in explorations for mineral resources (which he funded) and established the Caucasian Agricultural Society which had as its goal “. . . the development and dissemination of useful practices, techniques and innovations in all spheres of agriculture.”⁹⁸

He also founded museums and libraries, established newspapers in Russian and in all major Caucasian languages, and also personally participated in the creation of public parks and gardens in major cities. Vorontsov’s favorite project was the re-construction of the city of Tiflis, the Caucasian capital which was never properly rebuilt after its sack in 1795 and had been violently hated by all Russian administrators before him for its “Asian” dirt, lack of comfort and what Ermolov called “general ugliness”. Many of these projects were paid for from Vorontsov’s personal funds, such as the creation of the Russian drama theater in Tiflis in 1845 and of the first Georgian drama theater in 1850. He also had an opera

⁹⁵ Ibidem, 175.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 173.

⁹⁷ G.A. Galoian, *Rossia i narody Zakavkazia*, 206.

⁹⁸ “Otchet, predstavlennyi i chitannyi sekretarem Kavkazskogo Obshchestva Selskogo Khoziaistva v godichnom zasedanii Obshchestva 27 dekabria 1850 goda”. *Zakavkazskii Vestnik* (Tiflis), 4. (January 25, 1851): 14.

house built in 1851 and engaged an Italian opera company to come and perform there.^{99,100}

The Viceroy also funded the restoration of the ancient palace of Georgian kings in Telavi and established there a public museum and a garden.¹⁰¹ All these cultural enterprises were immensely popular with the population, especially with the city folk and local aristocrats. A Georgian poet Akakii Tsereteli expressed the general feeling after Vorontsov's death in a well-known phrase: "As long as the memory of Georgia itself shall live, so long shall the name of Vorontsov live!"¹⁰²

In short, Vorontsov successfully created a new social and cultural atmosphere in a once God-forsaken province of the Russian Empire. Georgia all of a sudden became part of Europe instead of a territory influenced by Persia and Turkey. The Pashas of the neighboring Ottoman provinces no longer personified splendor and enviable life-style for the Georgian princes. On the contrary, they became a symbol of backwardness and barbarian customs. A Georgian aristocrat, whose daughter took piano lessons, spoke French, dressed from Paris and was, quite likely, engaged to a Russian officer, would not dream of conducting slave trade. Not only would he refuse to do so because it was a grave criminal offense, but because it was incompatible with his new status of a European gentleman. Slave trade became not only punishable but also laughable and worthy of nothing but contempt along with Oriental fashions in dress.

As Ronald Suny points out, the life stories of the former anti-Russian conspirators (of 1832) were quite indicative of the shifts in the mentality of the Georgian nobles. One of the main conspirators, Dmitri Kipiani, later in life "... served as a highly placed official in the Caucasian administration and in 1857 became a member of the Viceroy's council, the highest governing body in the Caucasus. Prince Grigol Orbeliani was appointed Chairman of the Viceroy's Council in 1857 and three years later became Governor-General of Tiflis"¹⁰³

Vorontsov eliminated slave trade in Transcaucasia by purposefully transforming the relations of power and the very nature of the hitherto

⁹⁹ G.A. Galoian, *Rossiiia i narody Zakavkazia*, 207.

¹⁰⁰ Theaters played an exceedingly important role in the Russian "civilizing mission" as the contemporaries saw it. More about it in: Austin Jershid, *Orientalism and Empire*; McGill-Queen University Press, 2002; pp. 64–65.

¹⁰¹ "Vozobnovlenie drevniago dvortsa gruzinskikh tsarei v gorode Telave", *Zakavkazskii Vestnik* (Tiflis), # 13, April 18 1851, 1.

¹⁰² Robert G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 73.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, 75.

traditional ruling elites. His reforms, if reform is the appropriate word, sought to integrate the ruling class of Transcaucasia into the Russian imperial edifice. Vorontsov did not envision significant changes for the commoners, except for re-asserting their dependence on the native aristocrats and the Russian state or, even, creating these dependencies anew where they were lacking. Vorontsov changed the lifestyles and identities of the ruling classes, making the old sources of power and income, such as the slave trade, not only prohibited, but socially unacceptable as “Oriental” and “barbaric”.

From the time of Vorontsov’s Viceroyship slave trade off the coast of Transcaucasia is no longer mentioned in Russian archival documents. This would not be true if slave trade still existed, taking into consideration the importance of this issue for the Russian administration. This is confirmed by Turkish material which led a Turkish scholar Ehud Toledano to the conclusion that “... the Georgian traffic in slaves was noticeably on the wane in 1830s”.¹⁰⁴

He also states that, according to the Russian consul in Batum, the small traffic that still existed was conducted by some Turkish subjects from the province of Çürüksu who ostensibly crossed the Georgian border and kidnapped and sold Georgian children. At the request of the Russian consul an investigation was conducted and measures were taken to prevent such occurrences in the future. According to Toledano, “... by and large, the prohibition of traffic in Georgians was holding well. At the time the Ottoman market was being generously compensated for the loss of Georgians by the steadily growing influx of Circassian slaves from the [Northern] Caucasus.”¹⁰⁵

The final test of the incorporation of the Transcaucasian provinces into the Russian Empire came during the Crimean War. The Ottoman Empire, apart from being a traditional foe of the Christian Transcaucasian nations, now came to symbolize Oriental backwardness as opposed to the newly discovered European civilization. The fact that in this war the Ottomans were allied to the British and the French (the quintessential Europeans) mattered little in the Caucasus, where no European troops were engaged. In his report to the Tsar, Viceroy Vorontsov wrote concerning the establishment of the local irregulars: “Georgians are the same Orthodox subjects of the Russian Sovereign as

¹⁰⁴ Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression*, 141.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 142–143.

Russians, and during the war they can all be given arms and called to militia even with their own officers”¹⁰⁶

Indeed, Georgians proved the Viceroy to be right. Almost all princes and nobles of the Kutaisi province volunteered as irregulars and brought their serfs with them. Men from fifteen to eighty years old took part in the militia, and all of them participated in the war at their own expense.¹⁰⁷ The nobility of Tiflis, Gori and Telavi fielded two brigades of cavalry and five brigades of infantry, 250–500 men in each, asking only for gunpowder and lead from the Russian government.¹⁰⁸ Even more noteworthy is the fact that the nobility of the Muslim Transcaucasian provinces also took an active part in the formation of the irregulars. Cavalry brigades were organized in the territories of modern Azerbaidzhan and Karabakh, and they were later cited for bravery on the Caucasian front.¹⁰⁹ The Russian military governor of Shemakha province reported that all cavalry detachments in his region had been formed from volunteers.¹¹⁰

Vorontsov’s policy of supporting the traditional power elites in the Caucasus came to abundant fruition in Transcaucasia. Thanks to the gallantry and loyalty of the Caucasian troops, the Russian army managed not only to withstand the attacks of the Ottomans, but actually gained ground against them, captured the fortress of Kars and eventually brought the campaign to a successful end on this front. This paradox of the Crimean War, which is traditionally regarded as disastrous for Russia (which it certainly was) is rarely mentioned: at the time of the terrible losses at Sevastopol and the humiliating defeat in the Western theater, Russian (and Caucasian) troops proved victorious in Asia. Of course, they were not confronted with the Allied forces, but with the Ottoman army (Prince Vorontsov, ailing and ready to retire at the time, had feared most of all for the safety of the Caucasian coastal line in case of the Allied descent, which, luckily, was reduced to an abortive attempt at the Taman’ peninsula).

Leaving all the other consequences of the Crimean War aside and looking at it strictly from the point of view of what it meant for the Transcaucasian provinces of the Russian Empire, we can obviously say that at the end of the war the ruling elites of this region were completely

¹⁰⁶ Khadzhi-Murat Ibragimbeili, *Kavkaz v Krymskoi voine 1853–1856 gg. I mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia* (Moscow: Glavnaia redaktsiia Vostochnoi literatury, 1971), 120.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, 139.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 145.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 147.

and wholeheartedly accepted as equals by the Russian educated society. The process of incorporation was finalized by the exemplary loyalty and discipline of the native brigades, fighting under the Russian banner in the Crimean War.

Some Conclusions

By the time M.S. Vorontsov was appointed Viceroy of the Caucasus all kinds of military or administrative pressure had proven to be useless against ancient social institutions and cultural norms, based on the feudal system of values. Vorontsov's "administrative miracle" consisted in changing the cultural norms and social institutions, while preserving the same basic system of values. He introduced the Georgian nobility to the European life-style and culture, while leaving their rights over land and serfs intact, and, sometimes, even strengthening them. This was done by showing the Georgian nobles a more impressive (in a way, a more efficient) way to enjoy their privileged status by associating themselves with the European "educated" elite, not with the Ottoman or Persian courtiers. One may say that Vorontsov "seduced" the Georgian nobles into accepting the cultural assimilation, which made slave trade just as obsolete and unthinkable as multi-layered Persian dress or Turkish fashion in shoes. The Tsarist government supported Vorontsov's initiative even after his death: no other provincial nobility enjoyed such favorable terms of the emancipation of serfs as did the Georgian one. It helped to maintain the European life-style for another generation of Georgian nobles, and only by the end of the 19th century it became obvious that most of them really could not afford it at all. At the turn of the 20th century the impoverished Georgian gentry seeking rich brides became legendary and were described in humorous literature and plays. But by then they were so thoroughly Europeanized that going back to the slave-trading practices of their great-grandfathers was obviously out of the question. So, they went into the Russian Imperial military or state service instead.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Не смею выразить я вслух,
Но мир войны не заменяет.
Здесь прежде был свободы дух,
Теперь . . . чиновником воняет!

(Граф В.А.Соллогуб, эпиграмма 1871 г.)¹

When the Russian Empire first made a claim to the Caucasian region, it did so, as we have seen, in the Southern Caucasus. It was a risky political decision and, from the point of view of the military logistics, a situation that perilously stretched the communications of the Russian army. What made the situation particularly difficult and even potentially disastrous, was the fact that, while expanding to the South of the Caucasian Ridge, the Russian Empire had at the same time to take measures for the “pacification” of the vast territory between its new possessions in Transcaucasia and the hinterland of the country—the rugged and fraught with violence territory of the Northern Caucasus. Even though at that time this lands had nothing to offer in terms of resources or possibilities for economic development, sheer logic of the Imperial colonial expansion made it necessary for the Russian state to spare no effort or resources for the incorporation of this region and making it governable. The difficulties of this task were quite obvious even at the beginning of the enterprise, but not even the worst pessimists among the Russian bureaucracy could imagine how truly formidable and Sisyphean it was going to turn out.

In order to understand the historical logic behind the Russian involvement in the Northern Caucasus, we have, once again, to go back to the moment when the Russian Empire moved into the Crimean peninsula.

¹ In our very own Caucasian Kingdom
One can't tell war and peace apart:
There used to be a whiff of freedom,
And now . . . it stinks of bureaucrat.

(An epigram by Count V.A. Sollogub, 1871)

Russia's possession of the Crimea was finalized in 1792, when a century long Russian military effort against the Ottoman Empire culminated in the Treaty of Jassy (or Yassy). This treaty recognized the Crimea as Russian territory for all time and also granted Russia the lands of the Moldovan principalities between the Bug and the Dniester rivers. It also required that the Ottoman Empire use all power and all means to control the peoples inhabiting the left bank of the Kuban river and residing at the border in order to prevent them from raiding the territories of the Russian Empire and to restrain them from any abuses or robberies of the Russian subjects, their settlements, houses or lands, and to put an end to capturing people for slavery.² With the annexation of territories of the Crimea, of the Kuban region and of the Taman Peninsula, Russia obtained access to the Caucasus as well as to the Balkans both by land and by sea.³

Of course, the impoverished mountainous region held little interest by itself, but it offered a bridgehead situated in strategic proximity to the centers of both the Persian and the Ottoman Empires, and it could be used by the Russian land armies. This was a potential advantage that no other European state could match at the time. Napoleon's Egyptian expedition was an abortive attempt to create similar geopolitical leverage for France in Africa. The British, in their turn, felt that they could no longer be sure that their Indian colonies were safe from a possible invasion by other European armies. The insurmountable geographic and climatic barriers lying between India and the rest of the Asian continent would not be explored and fully appreciated until much later in the nineteenth century.⁴

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Jassy, Russia's involvement in the Middle Eastern politics, as well as her expansion in the Caucasus reached an unprecedented level. This period of rapid territorial expansion and strong performance in foreign policy was prepared by the entire reign of Catherine the Great, who did not regard the access to the Black Sea as her only important goal in the South-East. She was also successfully preparing a base for Russian expansion in the Caucasus. These moves were also facilitated by the international political situation. Britain and France were absorbed in their protracted struggle for European and world hegemony that would soon lead to the Napoleonic wars. Russia,

² N.A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze*, 162.

³ Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, 156.

⁴ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*.

in the meantime, was free to secure and strengthen her influence in the Black Sea region, as well as to expand in the East.⁵

The founding of the fortress of Mozdok in 1763 in the central part of the Northern Caucasus was followed by the establishment of a new Cossack Host: the Mozdok Cossacks. This area had been formerly dominated by the Kabardins whose tribute-paying dependent population were the predominantly Christian Osetins.⁶ The Russian administration encouraged all Caucasian natives who desired to convert into Christianity to come and settle in the vicinity of the new fort under the protection of the Russian garrison. At the same time, it was announced that those who were willing to settle on the Russian side of the Terek and become Christian would be generously rewarded: nobles were entitled to ten rubles per person, commoners—to five rubles per family, half of that sum for bachelors.⁷ Soon Mozdok became a safe haven for escapees from all over Kabarda, which created great tension between the Russians and some of the Kabardin princes. Two decades later a Russian diplomat in charge of taking stock of the recent history of Russo-Kabardin relations recounted these grievances:

The Kabardins, enraged by the fact that their fugitive slaves have now found an asylum, have rebelled against Russia and split into two parties, one of which is against us and the other supports us. (...) Both these parties came to a compromise and sent an envoy to St. Petersburg in the person of the potentate of Larger Kabarda by the name of Kaituka Kaisynov. He delivered the following three⁸ demands: 1. Demolish the fortress and the settlement of Mozdok; 2. Pay ransom for all their Christian who seek refuge with us; 3. Those Kabardin princes and nobles who convert to Christianity and settle on our side of the river should forsake their lands and property in Kabarda; 4. Reduce taxes in Kizliar⁹

The same year Kaituka Kaisynov was sent back, and the files do not show, what kind of response he had received. In the meantime, "... the

⁵ Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, 156.

⁶ John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, 32–36.

⁷ Vypiska iz Kabardinskikh del, v kollegii Inostrannykh Del nakhodiashchikhsia, ot 1762 goda po 1779 god, *Akty, Sobrannyya Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Komissiei* (AKAK), (Tiflis, 1894), 1:29.

⁸ The discrepancy between the number of demands mentioned here and the actual number of points listed in the text, exists in the source, which has been translated without editing.

⁹ Vypiska iz Kabardinskikh del, AKAK, 1:23–24.

Kabardins allied themselves to the tribes from beyond the Kuban River and started raiding our borders.”¹⁰

It is quite possible that Kaituka Kaisynov was not even given an audience before any Russian bureaucrat of high enough standing, judging by the lack of documentation and by the fact that all Russian policies towards escaping slaves in Kabarda continued as before. So did requests for monetary compensation for the escapees.

Grievances by the Kabardin aristocrats were supported by demonstrative protests in the form of continuous raids and threats of concluding an alliance with the Ottoman Empire. These developments finally drew closer attention of St. Petersburg. Two more envoys of the Kabardin notables were allowed to submit their petitions to the Governing Senate. This time, we know exactly what the Senate decided:

Since the main cause of displeasure of the Kabardins lies with the fact that their subjects and slaves have been encouraged to escape to our side, we must take into consideration that most of those escapees come from low classes or even are criminals. It does no harm, therefore, to return those to their owners, making it known, however, that it is done only as a great favor to the latter. For all Christian captives who seek refuge with us we shall pay fifty rubles per person, regardless of sex and age. Kumyks, if they request equal treatment with the Kabardins, should be paid half the money, i.e. twenty five rubles. The escaping Christians should be (...) sent to the internal Russian provinces and settled there. (...) However, this only concerns those Christian slaves who have been bought by their masters for domestic service. Those who have been acquired or captured for sale may be kept without any payment as punishment to their masters for this abominable trade.¹¹

The Senate clearly abstained from more decisive measures to curb the slave trade. In the 1760–1780s Russia still lacked a definitive long-term policy towards the Caucasus. This was partly due to Russia’s relative weakness—the Russian command did not yet feel that they could afford any major conflicts with the influential Kabardin aristocracy. Mozdok, however, was kept intact, no matter how much the Kabardins desired its demolition. Incidentally, to this day a peculiar ethnographic sub-group of Kabardin Christians lives around Mozdok, which is now a district center in North Osetinia. Thirty years later, in 1792–1793, the Caucasian Line, as the Russian chain of fortifications came to be called, was further

¹⁰ Vypiska iz Kabardinskikh del, AKAK, 1:29.

¹¹ Vypiska iz Kabardinskikh del ...; 1:31.

reinforced by a number of new fortresses: Shelkovodskaiia on the Terek river, Kavkazskaia on the right bank of the Kuban and Ust-Labinskaia at the confluence of the Laba and the Kuban rivers¹²

Also, in 1792 Catherine II's decree assigned the Taman peninsula and all the lands on the right bank of the Kuban to the Black Sea Cossack Host. This territory had been known since the Ancient Greeks' time for its fabulous harvests of fish and caviar, and was now destined to receive the remnants of the Ukrainian Zaporozhe Sech (Zaporozh'e Sich) Cossacks. The Sech' had been ordered destroyed and abolished by the selfsame Catherine in the aftermath of the Pugachev rebellion. In this way the potentially troublesome Ukrainian Cossacks were moved away from their historical homeland—and Russia's central provinces—to the new frontier of the Empire.¹³

At that time the Cossacks constituted ten cavalry and ten infantry regiments. The total of Russian settlers (predominantly peasants) in the area was estimated at 23,960 men in 1791.¹⁴

The period of political indecisiveness and containment of the highlanders came to an abrupt end with the death of Catherine the Great in 1796. Her successors—first her son Paul, and then her grandson Alexander I—each in his own turn had to decide what to do with the Caucasian region. The decision was almost made for them when King Georgii XII of Georgia died in 1800 without any direct heirs and bequeathed his kingdom to the Russian Tsars.¹⁵ Paul's Manifesto of the incorporation of Kartli-Kakheti into the Russian Empire was signed on 30 December 1800 and, not without hesitation, confirmed a year later by his son Alexander on 24 September 1801.¹⁶ After this turning point, military conquest of the Northern Caucasus became imminent. This rugged territory could by no means be expected to become economically viable. Rather, it occupied a strategic position, controlling Russia's access to her new possessions in the Southern Caucasus. It was also important for control of navigation on the Black Sea and was positively crucial for eliminating Ottoman presence at the Russian borders.

As far as the slave trade was concerned, in the early 1800s the Russians were hardly in a position to take any serious measures for its elimination

¹² P.G. Butkov, *Materialy dlia Novoi Istorii Kavkaza s 1722 po 1803 god*; (St. Petersburg: 1869), 2:245.

¹³ Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*.

¹⁴ P.G. Butkov, *Materialy dlia Novoi Istorii Kavkaza*, 255.

¹⁵ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsars*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 5.

in the Northern Caucasus. At that time the Russian army was fighting two wars simultaneously: against the Persians (1804–1813)¹⁷ and against the Ottomans (1807–1812)¹⁸, not to mention Russia's participation in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and the French invasion of Russia in 1812. In spite of such a dire military situation, all the wars turned out to be successful for Russia and, although the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire did not bring any territorial gains, it did include a separate article concerning captives and slaves:

Article VIII. All prisoners of war, captives and slaves, either male or female, regardless of their rank or status, who would be found in both Empires after this Treaty has been ratified, are to be freed and returned without any payment or ransom, as well as all other captive and enslaved Christians of any nation. All Russian subjects who by any chance might be captured and found in the Ottoman Empire after the present Treaty has been signed, should also be freed unconditionally, and all Ottoman subjects in Russia should be released likewise. An exception is only made for those Muslims who have voluntarily converted to Christianity, or for Christians, who have accepted Islam.¹⁹

Although the anti-slave trade policy remained in force, extreme circumstances sometimes required a more cautious approach to this sensitive issue. So, when an Abazin ruler Kelesh-bek expressed his desire to accept Russian protectorate over his domain, his request was met with favorable attention in spite of a rather extravagant demand among other conditions,

8. To allow the purchase of slaves in Russia, for it is impossible for the Abazins to live otherwise.²⁰

Such was the last, but crucial, point in the list of conditions of accepting the Russian protectorate, submitted by Kelesh-bek to the Russian author-

¹⁷ The Peace Treaty of Gulistan (1 October, 1813) confirmed the Russian possession of the khanates of Qarabakh, Ganja, Sheki, Shirvan, Derbent, Qubah, Baqu and Talysh. It also acknowledged the Russian possession of all Daghestan, Imeretia, Guria, Mingrelia and Abkhazia. See: G.A. Galoian, *Rossia i narody Zakavkaz'ia*, (Moscow: Mysl', 1976), 151.

¹⁸ The Peace Treaty of Bucharest (16 May, 1812) established the ante-bellum status quo, proclaiming all borders in Asia and in other parts "exactly the same as they were before the War". Differences in the interpretation of the status quo served later as a source of further conflict between the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. *Vneshniaia politika Rossii XIX I nachala XX veka, Dokumenty Rossiiskogo Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1967), 365.

¹⁹ *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*, 365–366.

²⁰ Vypiska iz pis'ma Diuka de Richelieu poluchennago 31 Oktiabria 1806 goda. *AKAK*, 3:194.

ities. Even as the negotiations with the Abazin potentate were still going on, the Russian Commander-in-Chief count Gudovich received a secret letter from St. Petersburg, which clarified the government's position on this matter:

Our present relations with the Porte dictate that we encourage all who express their sympathy to us. Therefore, H.I.M. Authorizes you to formally grant Kelesh-bek protectorate as soon as we sever our relations with the Turks.²¹

Fine points and conditions of the protectorate, especially the delicate issue of slave trade were more elaborately discussed in other dispatches from St. Petersburg:

(...) I have the honor to inform Y.E. That H.I.M., having approved of the commendable desire of Kelesh-bek, has Sovereignly authorized Duke de Richelieu²² to sign a decree with Kelesh-bek in accordance with his requests, except the last article concerning slave trade. This article should be modified as much as possible so that it would correlate to our laws, especially as far as Christian captives are concerned. Besides, there should be left provisions for further modifications of this article in the future²³

(...) Pour ce qui concerne le tout dernier, relatif à la permission d'acheter les esclaves, il affecte trop l'humanité pour que Sa Majesté puisse a l'accorder sans restriction. Ce point est annoncé par Kelesch-bey comme celui auquel il attache le plus d'importance; il sera donc difficile de l'engager as'en désister entièrement; mais au moins faut-il tâcher de le modifier pour le moment, autant qu'il est possible, en faveur des esclaves chrétiens, et afin de pouvoir les terms de l'abolir entièrement, de mettre pour dernière clause que nous nous réservons le droit de modifier ou de changer même quelques uns des articles arêtes présentement, mais que ce ne sera jamais qu'en consultant les intérêts de Kelesch-bey et son peuple et moyennant des compensations suffisantes en leur faveur.²⁴

The secret understanding with Kelesh-bek was duly reached and signed, but a fate all too common to the pro-Russian potentates in the Caucasus befell him: he was murdered by his own son, who also killed his younger brother and, with the support from the Ottomans, proclaimed himself ruler of the Abazins. The Russian administration put a price on his head

²¹ Pis'mo barona Budberga k grafu Gudovichu, 5 Sept. 1806. AKAK, 3:193.

²² A.E. du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu was a royalist émigré from the revolutionary France who was appointed Governor-General of Novorossia (New Russia, i.e. Southern Ukraine and the Crimea) by Alexander I in 1803 and served until 1814. In: Anthony L.H. Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov, Viceroy to the Tsar*, 58.

²³ Pis'mo barona Budberga k grafu Gudovichu, 14 Nov., 1806. AKAK, 3:193-194.

²⁴ Pis'mo barona Budberga k diuku de Richelieu, 14 Nov., 1806. AKAK, 3:193-194.

but only many years later was the Abazin territory finally subjugated by Russian military power.

This story seems to be highly indicative of the realities that the Russian administration encountered in the Northern Caucasus. Unlike in Transcaucasia, where the Russians could use the already existing state structures to support their own candidates to local thrones, here the Russian administration for the time being had to simply give up any attempts to pursue political solutions and resort to military force.

The whole first half of the nineteenth century was almost entirely spent in efforts of military subjugation of the Northern Caucasian peoples. A succession of Russian Commanders-in-Chief of the Caucasian army made few attempts at any civil incorporation of the region or at developing a system of civil administration. The commanders, most of whom were illustrious generals of the Napoleonic wars but had little talent or desire for “native diplomacy”, carried out the anti-slave trade policy mostly through punitive expeditions. The general scheme of “government” could be simply described as follows: a Russian commander addressed the local peoples and promised them protection and commercial advantages in return for their loyalty and peaceful behavior. An “accord” was signed with the local potentate or the elders, but sooner or later it was violated, and, as a result of a raid, large numbers of people were killed and taken into captivity. A punitive expedition was organized, and the cycle repeated itself indefinitely. Address, treaty, raid, punitive expedition. Most of the sources of the period fall into one of the four groups: addresses of the Russian commanders to the Caucasian communities, texts of accords, reports of raids and reports of punitive expeditions. Addresses to the local peoples were usually rather standardized, one-formula-fits-all texts, listing potential advantages of cooperation and perils of dissent. A good example of such a letter was created by General Gudovich in 1806 and used to address a number of different Caucasian communities:

(...) If you give up your banditry, stop taking captives and lead a peaceful life, than you can be sure that you will find prosperity, happiness and will forever remain in favor with His Majesty. (...) If you abstain from raiding and remain loyal to Russia, if you also do your best to prevent others from brigandage and robbery, or, if unable to do so, inform about them the Russian command, then you will have the following advantages, granted to you by His Imperial Majesty: 1. You will be able to buy salt which you need, in the same quantities as other loyal subjects of the Russian Empire, i.e. The Kabardins, the Nogais etc. You will get it from the local salt lakes at a very low fixed price. 2. In times of heavy snowfalls you will be allowed to

graze your cattle on our side of the Terek and use the unoccupied grazing lands there. 3. You will not be discriminated against on any grounds and will be made equal in your rights to other loyal subjects of His Majesty and will, therefore, enjoy His full protection from your enemies who will be severely punished.

I sincerely hope that you will choose the way to your own good and prosperity and remain prudent and peaceful. Those, who, in spite of all the mercy and goodwill of his Imperial Majesty, will persist in their sinful brigandage and slave, will experience the just and terrible wrath of my Emperor, the Sovereign of Sovereigns, and they will be punished so severely that they will regret their impertinence, but it will be too late for them.²⁵

The same letter (with names and particulars changed) was also delivered to the Chechen villages of Aldi, Larger and Lesser Atagi and to the communities of Kaituko, Gisu Mamadagi, Zhibu and Kazan-bii.²⁶

The local peoples treated such texts according to circumstances, keeping peace with the Russians when it suited them and resuming raids in their own good time. Reports of raids on Russian settlements prove this very convincingly:

Circassians from beyond the Kuban attacked a nearby settlement by the name of Sengileevka, or the village of Bogoiavlenskoe, and captured a large number of people (...) The present state of the poor settlers cannot help but call for pity and compassion, for not only have they been robbed of their cattle, and other property, but their wives and children have been taken away from them, which has destroyed and devastated all their families. A number of people were dangerously wounded and are now dying. (...)

Killed on the spot: men—25, women—1, wounded and drowned: men—2, women—1; two burned corpses found on a fire site. Captured: men—22, women—46, children of both sexes—34; 102 people altogether. Stolen: 1,355 heads of cattle, 588 horses, 721 rubles of cash. Damage to the houses and to the peasants' property amounts to 5, 670 rubles.²⁷

Information of this kind was considered to be important enough to be included into special reports to the emperor, although, apparently, not all tragic occurrences were reflected in such delicate cases. The feelings of the young monarch were spared the most gruesome details:

²⁵ Obrashchenie generala Gudovicha Shanevskomu kadiiu I vsemu obshchestvu. 20 Sept. 1806, No. 274. AKAK, 3:624–625.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Raport Kavkazskogo grazhdanskogo gubernatora Nikolaia Kartvelina grafu Gudovichu, May 11, 1807, No. 1434. AKAK, 1–2:624–625.

Groups of predators from beyond the Kuban managed to pierce our lines on April 28 and later on May 23. In the first case they killed and captured 136 people of both sexes, on the second—179 people, large numbers of cattle and other property. After this misadventure which happened against all our expectations, I ordered General Bulgakov to take all measures for protection of the Line and to take reasonable punitive actions against the Beslenei tribe, which is the closest to the Kuban.²⁸

However, in spite of all punitive measures the *Zakubantsi* (literally—the Transkubans, or the people from beyond the Kuban river) continued to cause considerable trouble to the settlers and to the Russian military administration for years to come. The successor of Count Gudovich at the post of the Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus, General Tormasov, continued to receive similar reports from the Northern Caucasus:

Zakubantsi assaulted and plundered the village of Kamennobrodskoe on November 2 of last year. (...) the Circassians killed 72 men, 27 women, 11 male children and 14 strangers who happened in the village at the time. They also captured 37 men, 130 women, 101 male children, 84 female children. Altogether killed and captured 488 people. Cattle and other stolen property of the peasants been estimated at 83,739 rubles and 50 kopeks.²⁹

The dire situation of the Cossack settlers in the Northern Caucasus was well described in the letter of the Mozdok Cossack elders to General Rtishchev in August of 1811:

(...) Three of our *stanitsas* (*Cossack villages*) have been burned by the Kabardins to the foundation, a great many people were killed and taken into captivity; and after such a terrible disaster assaults from various (*Caucasian—L.K.*) peoples did not give us any time to get any better, and then we suffered from a new raid, and whole families were taken into captivity while our servicemen were with the army and only the elderly and the youngsters were defending our homes (...). Since we have no other means to save our captives from the Chechens, we have to pay ransom for them, which is a great deal of money and reduces us to terrible poverty. (...) As far as the peaceful (Chechen) villages are concerned, they are supposed to prevent the raiding bands from going through their lands but they do not do so and do not even pay the established penalty for the cattle and captives which have been taken away through their lands.³⁰

²⁸ Vsepoddaneishii raport grafa Gudovicha, June 29 1807, AKAK, 1-2:632.

²⁹ Raport deistvitel'nogo statskogo sovetnika Malinovskogo generalu Tormasovu, 23 Jan., 1809, No. 234, Georgievsk. AKAK, 3:884.

³⁰ Proshenie Mozdokskogo poselennogo kazach'ego polka starshin I kozakov generalu Rtishchevu. 4 Aug., 1811. AKAK, 5:843-844.

The Mozdok Cossacks petitioned for a number of measures to be taken in order to facilitate the payment of ransom for their families and comrades. They asked for permission to chase the raiding parties into their own territory (which, apparently they had not been allowed to do) and, whenever possible, to take cattle of the “non-peaceful” tribes as *baranta* (penalty) to be later exchanged for the captives. They also asked that the Chechen potentates and elders who let the raiding bands pass through their lands be made responsible for the ransom of the captives.³¹

The impossibility of a clear understanding of the nature of the “accords”, signed between the Russians and the local communities persisted for a long time and created numerous occasions for mutual frustration and conflicts. What the Russian administration perceived as an official “treaty”, the natives saw as a temporary truce, at best, and behaved accordingly. Such predictable unreliability was a constant source of complaints for the Russian administration in the Northern Caucasus, and drew the most violent response. This can be seen very well in the case of the Lezghins, who were considered one of the most “troublesome” peoples for the Russians in the Caucasus.

The Lezghins had previously sworn allegiance to the Russian Tsar, which they, most likely, understood as a mere formality, or a very loose alliance, involving a payment of symbolic tribute, at the very most. The Russians, however, interpreted the same document as promise of absolute loyalty and obedience to the Russian administration. When the Lezghins resumed their habitual raiding activities and captured several Cossacks, it was considered treason, and a punitive expedition under the command of General Prince Orbeliani was dispatched to the spot. According to the documents, the expedition was a success, since the Lezghins “repented and asked for His Majesty’s mercy”. In his address to the Lezghin communities, General Gudovich announced the following measures as condition of their pardon:

1. Give amanats³² from among your most honorable families (...)
2. Pay immediately half of your dues in gold and the other half in silk (...)
3. All subjects of His Imperial Majesty taken by you into captivity must be

³¹ Ibidem, 845–846.

³² *Amanat*—an honorary hostage, taken from a community or family as a guarantee of the compliance to the conditions of a treaty or an alliance. *Amanats* were normally treated with respect, like long-staying guests, although their lives and destinies were never certain. This custom of coercive diplomacy was practiced throughout Asia, including the Caucasian region and was adopted by the Russians in their dealings with the “Asian

returned, and for each Cossack horse stolen by you a sum of 25 rubles must be paid in compensation. If you dare to hide any of the captives at this time and they are later found, you will pay 1500 silver rubles for each such person as retribution (...)

I remind you once again of your pledge of allegiance to His Imperial Majesty and tell you that if you break it once again, you will draw upon yourselves a most severe punishment.³³

What kind of punishment Count Gudovich had in mind, becomes clear from another document dealing with the same Lezghi communities one year later. Apparently, the raids and slave trade continued to flourish there, which led to the following measures on the part of the Russian administration:

Since the Lezghins of Daghestan continue to plunder and trade in captives, I have ordered (...) to capture several of them from among those who trade in Kizliar. In accordance to my order 24 Lezghins have been arrested and are now kept in jail in Kizliar. I hereby order you to make it known to the villages where they come from that, unless all captive Georgians that are being kept there are immediately returned, there 24 Lezghins will be made run the gauntlet and sent to hard labor in Siberia.³⁴

The motives and ideas that moved the Russian military administration in the Northern Caucasus at the time were very clearly expressed later by a participant and chronicler of the Caucasian War R.A. Fadeev:

All the lands of the Caucasus (...) were in a state of chaos; the society here was disintegrating not because of any internal cause but because of unlimited and unprecedented external violence. All the Caucasus had become one grandiose slave market. It is enough to remember that whole armies of Mameliuks and Giurdzhis of Baghdad were comprised exclusively of Caucasians. (...) That all white slaves of Turkey and Persia were brought from the Caucasus, that Turkish harems were full of Caucasian women (...) to imagine from what situation the Russian army has rescued the Caucasus.

The highlanders, who were trained for slave hunt from their childhood, had become so accustomed to it that they began doing it in their own gorges. When they came back from their raids on other parts, they

natives". The *amanats* taken by Russians were often younger sons of local rulers who were usually sent to Russia for education in aristocratic boarding schools and military academies, or, sometimes, in religious seminaries. Later many of them entered the Russian civil or military service.

³³ Obrashchenie grafa Gudovicha k lezghinskim narodam. 16 Dec., 1806. AKAK, 3:366.

³⁴ Predpisanie grafa Gudovicha general-maioru kniazii Orbeliani. 7 Nov., 1807. AKAK, 3:371.

ambushed and captured their neighbors' children. (...) Transports of slaves were conducted from the Caucasus by land and by sea (...) ³⁵

Certainly, such an outlook is to be expected from a nineteenth-century Eurocentric ardent believer in progress. What was, for Russian officers and soldiers, brigandage and exploitation of the helpless, was, in the tradition of the highlanders themselves, noble behavior and proof of one's worth as man and warrior. Besides, most of the local trade and economy depended on slave trade for the procurement of such staples as salt, iron and cloth, and, what's more, had depended on it for generations. Evidently, no mutual understanding was possible under such circumstances, although the Russians themselves (including Mr. Fadeev in the same book) could not help but admire the highlanders' gallantry in battle and their contempt for death (their own and others'). Documents of the time communicate the disorientation and the feeling of being besieged, which was characteristic of the Russians in the Caucasus at the beginning of the Russian rule.

In the eighteen hundreds, plunder of the helpless inhabitants of the valleys was the main occupation of the highlanders. What kind of treaties could be possible with people like that who were, besides, divided into hundreds of independent communities?!. When (...) the Caucasian command demanded that the Kiurin community—which is one of the most civilized of the Lezghins—stopped their raiding and plunder, the elders of the Kiurins answered: "We are noble and honest people, we do not like to plow, we have lived so far by brigandage and we shall continue to live like our fathers and grandfathers before us."³⁶

The slave-trading institutions constituted the very foundation, on which all the economic and social structures of the local societies were built. These communities had no other established access to salt and iron and no alternative procedure for the socialization of the young males into the society, nor for the older men to maintain their status. The whole social and economic order depended on the ability of men to procure treasure: horses, valuables and, most importantly, slaves.

On the other hand, for the Russians the anti-slavery sentiment was the only stable, reliable and unquestionably noble cause that could justify not only the punitive measures against the natives but also the Russian losses and expenses of the war. For the most part, however, the actions of the Russian administration before 1816 (the year when General Ermolov was

³⁵ Fadeev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:11–12.

³⁶ R.A. Fadeev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, (St. Petersburg, 1889), 1:16.

appointed Commander-in-Chief) were cautious and at least tried to take into account local conditions. In most cases the Russian administration avoided involvement in the local disputes and assumed the position of impartial superiority. For example, the Russians demonstrated a cool reaction to the angry complaint of a local potentate in the Russian service, one Lieutenant-Colonel Kazbek, against an Osetin community from the upper reaches of the Terek. According to the complaint, the Osetins refused to pay their dues to the Russian Tsar, assaulted Kazbek's nephew, who was supposed to collect the money, and, besides, were guilty of wholesale banditry and slave trade. Lt.-Col. Kazbek asked for permission to organize a punitive expedition against the Osetins "as it used to be done in the past."³⁷

However, the Russian military officials demanded more substantial proof of the alleged rebellious acts:

Before we use the proper (punitive) measures, we must find out what the real situation of this people is, and whether the report of Lt.-Col. Kazbek is true. It is important to know if they have been driven to misbehavior by the collection of dues, or by Lt.-Col. Kazbek himself, as he governs them at present. I, therefore, order you to find a good trusted man from among the inhabitants of Ananur who might have some relations among the Osetins, and to send him there with a secret mission of gathering information about all the above mentioned subjects.³⁸

Two events put an end to such moderate policies. The first one was the appointment to the Caucasus of an illustrious and ambitious military commander who was determined to solve the "Caucasian problem" once and for all. That was General Aleksei Petrovich Ermolov, who assumed the post of the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian army in 1816. The second event was an accident, which now, in hindsight, appears by no means the most tragic or even the most important for the relations of Russians with the Caucasian peoples. It was, in fact, rather comical and even bordering on a farce, and caused the Russian command much more loss of face than military loss. It is quite possible, however, that it was exactly the humiliation that eventually triggered such a drastic change in Russian policies towards the Caucasian peoples in general and their slave trading practices in particular.

³⁷ Pis'mo ispravliaiushchego dolzhnost'Ananurskogo komendanta kapitanu Kumykovu. 17 Oct., 1811. No. 84, AKAK, 5:4.

³⁸ Ibidem.

The story began in 1816 when General Rtishchev was still in charge of the Caucasian corps and continued after the appointment of General Ermolov. A Major of the Georgian regiment of grenadiers, one Shvetsov, was captured by the Chechens on his way from Derbent, not far from Kazi-Iurt. He was accompanied by his servant, two Cossacks and by the son and four guards of the local potentate Shefi-bek, who was loyal to the Russians. The little party was attacked by about forty Chechens, the Cossacks and the guards were killed, Major Shvetsov, his servant and the bek's son were captured.³⁹

As soon as the news reached the Russians and the bek, several parties went in pursuit of the Chechens. When a Nogai detachment of sixty men finally caught up with the band, they did not engage in battle because, as they later explained to the Russian officials, Major Shvetsov himself begged them not to, since the Chechens threatened to kill him in case of any attack.⁴⁰

General Del'potso's letter to his Commander-in-Chief deserves a lengthy quotation:

It was not the moment to accuse Prince Shefi-Temirov of such weakness that the Chechens dare (...) to capture Major Shvetsov who was escorted by the Prince's son and guards; nor was it the moment to accuse the Major of cowardice because of which the Nogais could not get him from the enemy's hands; but it was necessary to take immediate measures to ensure the return of Shvetsov and to teach the Chechens a lesson they would never forget.

(...) But, while I was making an alliance with the Kumyk potentates against the Chechens, those wretches have pierced our lines not far from the stanitsa of Chervlennaia and, in spite of the resistance of the Cossacks on guard, killed the Cossacks working in the fields, captured five males, four females, 89 heads of cattle and crossed the river with their loot. (...)

Now, when it has become evident that the policy of mercy, kindness and caution have only encouraged these peoples to further brigandage and plunder, it is only just to use all might of the Russian army against these predatory bandits. I, therefore, am now asking your permission to organize a punitive expedition next spring. (...)

I shall use all brute force to intimidate them entirely, to avenge every drop of blood they spilled and to return all those captured and kid-

³⁹ Report general-maiora Del'potso generalu Rtishchevu. 11 Mar., 1816. No. 129, Georgievsk, AKAK, 5:874-875.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

napped by them. (...) I fully realize how contrary to the character and principles of the Russian army are such barbarian methods of war, but the Chechens have killed all humanitarian feelings towards themselves. There is no means to stop the murders and banditry, to return the unfortunate captives, other than by the suggested cruel measures. Otherwise, all other highlander peoples will consider our merciful approach as a sign of our weakness, and payments of ransom will only encourage them for further evil deeds.⁴¹

It is noteworthy that General Del'potso used similar language in his address to the Kumyk potentates soon afterwards and appealed to their honor and pride, while offering them a close alliance in achieving revenge over the Chechens. The document shows a great deal of knowledge about traditional Kumyk-Chechen relations and strikes all the right notes in closing the alliance.

This unprecedented event has covered you with shame. Major Shvetsov was captured on your lands, from your hands by the Chechens, by the very people the whole property and the very existence of which depends on you. By the people who should never dare oppose you in any way. (...) If you do not forget your petty feuds now, if you do not come together to avenge these bandits according to your rights as rulers of these lands, they will soon capture your own daughters, your wives and yourselves in hope that you will not resort to your arms but will rather pay ransom which is not at all in your character. (...) So, I ask, you, I advise you, I order you to form one command and to free Major Shvetsov from captivity immediately.⁴²

The problem of the captive Russian Major was one of the many, inherited by the administration of General Ermolov after his appointment as the Caucasian Commander-in-Chief. Ermolov was known as a strict opponent of any ransom payments for captives, calling it "paying tribute to the brigands."⁴³ However, in the case of the unfortunate Shvetsov who was still being kept in the Chechen captivity in March 1817, even he had to yield and make the necessary arrangements for the payment of 8000 silver rubles of ransom. The payment of this sum was to be made through the Khan of Avariia, who was trusted by the Russians. Strictest precautions were taken so that nobody would know that the money was actually paid by the Russian government. The whole affair had to look as if the

⁴¹ Ibidem, *AKAK*, 5:876.

⁴² Pis'mo generala Del'potso k Andreevskim, Aksaevskim I Kostiuovskim vladel'tsam, dukhovenstvu, uzdeniam I narodu. *AKAK*, 5:876.

⁴³ Predpisanie generala Ermolova general-maioru Tikhanovskomu. 04 Mar., 1917, No. 12; *AKAK*, 6-2:497.

Khan himself were paying the ransom for the Russian Major on his own account and with his own money.⁴⁴

Ermolov was convinced that any direct negotiations between the Chechens and the Russian officials would not only be humiliating and pointless for the Russians, but could actually encourage the highlanders to further assaults and raids. His reasoning was not devoid of logic, especially considering the enormous sum paid for Shvetsov, which was many times larger than the price the same man could fetch at any slave market. In fact, taking hostages for ransom was definitely becoming a profitable sub-division of slave trade or slave trade substitute, especially for the Chechens and for the *Zakubantsy*. Therefore, while captured women and children were still destined for slave markets, men, as the least profitable merchandise, were more and more often kept for ransom. As A.P. Ermolov pointed out,

These people stand no chance in a regular war against our army, but they consider it dashing bravery to assault our settlements; the more they plunder, the more they are encouraged; taking captives is for them the best way to become rich: this is the real cause of their raids, and only force can stop them. (...)

Since the Circassians have settled on the left bank of the Kuban, which had never happened before, they have become our closest and most dangerous neighbors; our borders have weakened because our settlements had to be removed further from the Kuban, and (...) the Cossacks could only timidly resist the brigands who were further encouraged by the loot they were taking.⁴⁵

Ermolov's arrival to the Caucasus marked the beginning of the permanent and massive Russian offensive in the Northern Caucasus. This new approach was first expressed only verbally on the relatively minor occasion of the capture of Major Shvetsov and was later developed into a systematic practical policy. It can certainly be explained to a large extent by the fact that the Russian government, encouraged by the recent military and political triumphs over Napoleon, Persia and the Ottoman Empire, could now pay much closer attention to the Caucasian affairs and could also spare larger military resources on the subjugation of the "heathen tribes."

⁴⁴ Predpisanie generala Ermolova k general-maioru Tikhanovskomu. 04 Mar., 1817, No. 12 AKAK, 6-2:498.

⁴⁵ Pis'mo Ermolova Dibichu, 19 Oct. 1823., AKAK, 6-2:489.

Furthermore, humiliation at the hands of obscure highlanders was twice as bitter for the heroes of Europe, not the least of whom was the new Caucasian Commander-in-Chief. He explained his attitude towards the matter of slave trade in his letter to General Zakrevskii in 1820:

We cannot treat prisoners that we take in our war with the highlanders according to the general rules of warfare because if *they* manage to take our men as prisoners, they either sell them immediately or use them for hard labor and profit immensely in both cases. Therefore:

1. we must use their prisoners to exchange them for our own captives and the extra ones must be sent to serve as soldiers to the northern provinces of Russia; (...)
2. those, who have been caught in the act of brigandage or robbery and who, due to their evil nature, should not be set free, should be hanged publicly or, as a gesture of mercy, sent to the Siberian mines under strictest supervision.⁴⁶

Along with changes in policy, Ermolov and his chief of staff General Vel'iaminov introduced new military approaches to the "highlander problem." Instead of *ad hoc* punitive expeditions against certain tribes or villages, they adopted a system of what in the twentieth century would be called "anti-guerilla warfare." Russian encroachments into the mountains were no longer undertaken as responses to specific raids or rebellions. Ermolov conducted a coordinated, sustained long-term strategy aimed at the ultimate control over the native polities. He was also prepared to destroy communities that did not readily fit into his designs. From that time on strictest adherence to the rules, established by the Russian administration, became the pre-condition for the very existence of the highlander villages and tribes:

Here is my answer to you: return the captives and the deserters immediately. Give amanats from your best families. (...) There is no need for any middlemen, and I shall not ask for anybody's advice. It suffices that I know that I am dealing with villains. Choose: captives and deserters returned or terrible retribution!⁴⁷

Lead a peaceful life, do not plunder, do not rob, do not kill; plow your fields and raise your cattle. Then you will be happy and calm. Otherwise, for your

⁴⁶ Otnoshenie generala Ermolova k general-ad'iutantu Zakrevskomu; 9 Apr., 1820, No. 401; AKAK, 5:32-33.

⁴⁷ Pis'mo generala Ermolova k oobshchestvu starshin Chechenskogo naroda, 30 May, 1818. AKAK, 6-2:499.

every uproar, for every robbery, raid or murder your amanats will answer with their heads.⁴⁸

To ensure sustained and consistent military control of the region, a chain of new Russian fortifications was created. In 1818 the fortress of Groznaia (the Terrible), later the city of Grozny, was founded; in 1819—Vnezapnaia (the Sudden); and in 1820—Burnaia (the Stormy).⁴⁹ A Russian fort was also built in place of the former famous slave market of Enderi, and slave trade was prohibited on pain of death. (The public executions, described by Griboedov, took place in the Enderi bazaar).

At the same time the Russians were cutting down the forests and making large lanes through it to facilitate access to the highlander villages for the regular army with its field artillery and trains of supplies and provisions. These lanes also made it easier to monitor the movements of the raiding parties and prevent any sneak attacks on the part of the Chechens.⁵⁰ Several Chechen villages were burned to the ground as retribution for raids and slave trade, their fruit orchards were cut down and cattle requisitioned for the needs of the Russian army. Similar military expeditions were carried out in Daghestan, which was proclaimed “pacified” (*umirotvoren*) in 1824.⁵¹

In Daghestan Ermolov resorted to policies, very similar to the ones, used in the Northern Caucasus. A combination of consistent military pressure with support of the loyal rulers and communities worked well in the multi ethnic area. However, the very multiplicity and diversity of the power structures, languages and local customs posed serious problems for the Russian military control there. In Ermolov’s words,

The mountains are inhabited by unruly nations who take orders from no one and where all sorts of traitors and outlaws can always take refuge under the cover of their ridiculous and alien tradition.⁵²

Here Ermolov, ever the Russo-centrist, speaks of the custom of hospitality, which was mentioned earlier and which made it all but impossible to achieve cooperation of the local peoples in search of persons wanted by the Russian government, if these people had the status of “guests”. In

⁴⁸ Obrashchenie generala Ermolova vsem mullam, starshinam i pochetnym liudiam dereven’ Bragunskoi, Atagi, Turgaevskoi, Malogo Kulary, Arbul-aula i Zakan-iurta, 24 July, 1818; AKAK, 6–2:499.

⁴⁹ *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, 36.

⁵⁰ A.P. Ermolov, *Zapiski*, 2:87.

⁵¹ *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, 37.

⁵² Vsepoddaneishii raport generala Ermolova 7 Jan., 1820; AKAK, 6:11.

his proclamations to the tribes and communities of Daghestan, Ermolov put forward conditions, very similar to the ones for the peoples of the Northern Caucasus: “(...) 5. It is forbidden to buy, sell or keep as slaves any Russian subjects regardless of their origin. Violators of this rule will be severely punished according to Russian law.”⁵³

As it was the case in the Northern Caucasus, the text of the addresses was standardized to cover all the most important subjects and spheres of potential tensions. Such was, for example, Ermolov’s address to the tribe of Karakaitag, much too lengthy to be placed here.⁵⁴ Generally, the period of Ermolov’s command was marked with unprecedented military activity and ruthlessness in carrying out the Russian anti-slavery and “civilizing” agenda. For the first time in the course of the Caucasian war the highlanders found themselves fighting in their own territory, defending their own communities and property. It was obvious that the strategy of “scorched earth” was slowly putting the native population in a desperate situation, pushing them further and further into the mountains, literally cornering them in the least accessible (and least inhabitable) parts of the Caucasus. The results, however, were not quite what General Ermolov expected.

First of all, in spite of all the tremendous military, diplomatic and administrative pressure, slave trade was still going on after A.P. Ermolov left his post in the Caucasus in June 1826. According to some estimates, up to 4000 slaves were still sold off the Caucasian coast yearly in the 1830s.⁵⁵ Ermolov’s successors—Count Paskevich, Baron Rozen, General Golovin, General Neidgardt—still had to deal with this problem, which they did, however, without Ermolov’s passion and certainly without much progress.

A second very important and totally unforeseen and undesirable result of Ermolov’s ruthless military strategy was the development of the *Mürid* movement in mid-1830s. It was a religious and military Islamic order, which became the leading force of the highlanders’ resistance to the Russian expansion. It became especially important after 1830, when the spiritual leader of Daghestani Muslims Shaikh Gazi Mukhammad

⁵³ Izveshchenie generala Ermolova obshchestvu Gamri-Iuzenskomu, 26 Jan., 1820 goda; AKAK, 6:12.

⁵⁴ Obrashchenie generala Ermolova Karakaitagskomu narodu, 26 Jan., 1820, AKAK, 6:63.

⁵⁵ N.A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI–XIX vekakh* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1958), 191–192.

was proclaimed *Imam* (religious ruler) and declared *Jihad*⁵⁶ on the Russians.⁵⁷

Generally speaking, the Russian Caucasian administration found itself in a deep crisis after Ermolov's departure. Apart from Ermolov's personal charisma, which went a long way to support the morale and high spirits of the officers and soldiers, the administration was now lacking almost everything that was necessary to introduce any order into the war-torn region, or, at least, prevent senseless daily losses and small but humiliating defeats at the hands of the highlanders. It was quite obvious that after the external borders had been consolidated, measures in order were the establishment of internal peace and civil reforms for the incorporation of the Caucasus into the Empire. It was, however, easier said than done. The status of the "warm Siberia", which the region acquired in the late 1820s did nothing to boost the morale of the Russian troops.

Meanwhile, the Caucasian committee in St. Petersburg could not come to any conclusion as to which policy could be adopted for the incorporation of the Northern Caucasus. Several plans were discussed and rejected. The Caucasus acquired the reputation of the "career buster", since not a single Caucasian commander seemed to be able to deliver any significant improvement, and all of them ended their term in disgrace. Those administrators who were already in the Caucasus were left to their own devices, and their policies towards the local population varied according to their personal ideas and ambitions. Even the highest position related to the Caucasian affairs was no longer seen as a potential for a great career. The examples of Senator Baron P. Gan, author of a plan of reforms for the Caucasian region; Mikhail Pozen, an executive secretary of the Caucasian committee; Commanders-in-Chief of the Caucasian Corps Generals Rozen, Golovin (and his Chief of Staff Grabbe) and Neidgardt proved that such an appointment usually guaranteed failure, the Emperor's displeasure and an inglorious end of service.

Additional strain on the Russian administration was imposed by the fact that all Russian actions in the Middle East and in the Caucasus were at that time subject of close scrutiny by the British, French and Ottoman governments. The continuing plight of the Circassians and

⁵⁶ Jihad, which has unexpectedly become a household word all over the world, is usually understood as a holy (religious) war of Muslims against the infidels, although more refined theological interpretations distinguish between the lesser, external, Jihad against the infidels and much more important greater, or internal Jihad, taking place in the soul of each true believer against sin and temptation.

⁵⁷ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 50–51.

their resistance to the Russian expansion suddenly became the focus of international attention. The already on-going anti-Russian guerilla war turned into a well-organized military campaign under the banner of Islam and reached its pinnacle after 1834, when a Daghestani *Mürid* by the name of Shamil was elected *Imam* and leader of the anti-Russian resistance.

Shamil not only caused unrest and disturbed minds in Daghestan and on the left flank of our Caucasian Line, but he also induced mistrust for the Russian government among all the highlanders, from the Caspian to the Black Sea. That made many a peaceful, loyal to Russia Circassian (...) abandon their homes and the graves of their ancestors and escape to the mountains, losing everything they had.⁵⁸

This escalating war provided all interested parties with a convenient pretext for interference in what would have otherwise been considered a domestic problem of the Russian Empire. Support for the gallant Circassians served at the same time as a means of destabilizing the Russian position in the Caucasus, thus reducing the perceived threat to British India and the Ottoman Empire. Obviously, it was the ever-present fear for the safety of India that lay behind the British sensitivity to the Russian policies in the Middle East and in the Caucasus. The general presumption of the day was that, having conquered the Caucasus and bent the Turks to their will, the Russians were going to annex Persia, and then nothing would stop them in their march to India. Elaborate networks of spies and informants were created by all parties involved in this geo-political game, and most dramatic steps were taken to prevent Russia from any further advance in the south-eastern direction.

One of such steps was the famous “affair of the *Vixen*”, organized in 1836 by the then Secretary of the British Embassy in Constantinople David Urquhart. The purpose of this enterprise was to create strong anti Russian sentiment in Great Britain and to test how far the Russian government was prepared to go in defending its interests in the Caucasus. The *Vixen* was a private ship carrying the cargo of salt, which was deliberately sent to Sudzhuk-kale during the Russian naval blockade of the coast in hopes that the Russian navy would capture it, thus creating an international scandal. Aboard the *Vixen* were two Englishmen, Longworth and Bell, who went ashore in Circassia and spent a few months among the highlanders. In his note to Admiral Lazarev, who was then the Comman-

⁵⁸ Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-istoricheskii Arkhiv (RGVIA). Fond VUA, No. 6448, 8.

der of the Russian Black Sea fleet, Russian Ambassador in Constantinople Buteneev described Longworth and Bell's activities in Circassia, as they were represented in the Ottoman Empire

(...) Bell and a journalist of the London Morning Chronicle Longworth, live in Circassia not far from each other. They were joined later by two more Englishmen. Longworth lives in Pshad and poses as a *divan-efendi* (a secretary) who has been sent by the King of England and by the Parliament in order to get detailed information about events in Circassia. Bell calls himself an English Ambassador. He presented the Natukhays, the Shapsughs and the Abazins with a banner which ostensibly also had been sent by the King of England, and calls this banner the "sandjak of independence."⁵⁹

Bell and Longworth, as well as the principal supporter of the Circassian cause, David Urquhart, later contributed a great deal to the campaign of support for the Caucasian nations in their resistance to Russia.⁶⁰ They also helped to create the romantic image of gallant and noble Circassian warriors fighting against the abominable Russian Bear. The democratic customs of the Circassian tribes were compared to the Parliamentary system of England in contrast to the Russian autocratic rule. All these themes were later put to good political and diplomatic use before and in the course of the Crimean War. Quite soon the Russian authorities became uncomfortably aware of the subversive potential of such visits, and measures were taken to tighten the naval blockade. The Russian envoy in Constantinople wrote in one of his reports to Prince Vorontsov:

(...) les S-r Bell et consors ont imaginé envoyer un autre bâtiment Anglais à Sinop et à Trebizonde avec une cargaison de sel et peut-être aussi quelques munitions pour essayer de-là de les faire passer en Circassie, en louant quelques barques de pêcheurs ou caboteurs. A la bonne heure! Il n'en résultera pas de complication politique, et si m-r Bell se fait prendre encore une fois, il peut s'attendre à ne plus trouver un aussi bon accueil chez nous qu'il s'est vanté de l'avoir éprouvé la première fois.⁶¹

However, Ottoman emissaries and British Russophobes⁶² still managed to visit the Circassian tribes clandestinely. They offered them support

⁵⁹ Kopia s zapiski, poslannoi admiralu Lazarevu, 9 July, 1837. *AKV*, 39:285.

⁶⁰ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, 156–162.

⁶¹ Buteneev—Vorontsovu, 28 May, 1837. *AKV*, 29:282.

⁶² It is necessary to mention that, although the followers of Urquhart, Longworth and Bell were quite numerous, vociferous and politically influential (King William IV himself shared Urquhart's ideas), the British government did not approve of their methods.

and encouragement and promised them monetary and military aid. The Russian envoy wrote shortly after the “Vixen” affair:

Mr. Urquhart, who served here as a Secretary of the British Embassy, has finally departed for London via Philipopol and Belgrade. Before his departure he requested written evidence and letters from the local Circassians with their seals, and tried to assure them that his absence would be a short one, and that he would return soon in order to support the Circassians.⁶³

Weapons, gunpowder and other supplies were delivered to the highlanders by small Ottoman-owned smugglers’ ships that could avoid Russian naval patrols much more easily than large vessels.

I learned that our ship’s cargo was ammunition and salt destined for the independent tribes of Circassia, to carry which was a sin of the blackest dye against the laws of the Russian blockade. (...) In conjunction with a Turkish merchant in Constantinople, he (the captain) invested the whole of his property in the purchase of this vessel, and has been carrying on for some time a most lucrative commerce with the independent tribes of Circassia, whom he furnishes with ammunition, salt, light cloths, calicoes, muslins, etc; and receives, in return, occasionally a cargo of beautiful girls to replenish the harems of Constantinople together with the produce of the country, which yields the most profitable returns.⁶⁴

Traders of this kind were quite numerous. European travelers admired their courage and their picturesque attire “... turbans, mustachios and red shawl girdle filled with pistols and poignards ...”⁶⁵ and simply accepted the fact that these people were slave traders and also, most likely, pirates.⁶⁶ The Russian administration regarded such activities as a source of foreign interference into Russian affairs, not to speak of trade in slaves. In response, the Russians imposed a strict naval blockade of the northern Black Sea shoreline. The same traveler who admired his lovable pirate captain commented on the Russian anti-slave trade effort (note that the Black Sea slave traders are tenderly described as “industrious mariners”):

According to the Russian envoy Buteneev, the British Ambassador in Constantinople Lord Ponsonby was very happy to get rid of Urquhart and called Longworth and Bell “... *de méchants brouillons et de ridiculs aventuriers qui prostituent le nom Anglais pour leurs spéculations ou plutôt pour les impuissantes intrigues du parti qui les pousse en avant.*” AKV, 39:280.

⁶³ AKV, 39:280.

⁶⁴ Edmund Spencer, *Travels in Circassia*, 164, 168.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 167.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 167.

I understood from the captain that, previous to the strict blockade established by the Russian government, a very active commercial intercourse was carried on by the inhabitants of Trebizond, and the other Turkish ports in the Euxine, with the Circassians; but now, owing to the infringement of the right of nations, by which Russia assumes to herself the navigation of these seas, numbers of industrious mariners have been reduced to extreme poverty. Some few daring spirits, *encouraged by the immense profits derived from a Circassian cargo (my emphasis—L.K.)* continue to visit the country in defiance of the Russian cruisers: their numbers, however, have much diminished of late. Many of their vessels have been captured at sea and others burned in the little ports of Djook and Pshad.⁶⁷

The Russian government was painfully aware of the smugglers' activities, as well as of the movements of the foreign travelers who were interested in visiting the highlanders of the Caucasus. Painstaking investigations were undertaken on any suspicion of slave trading activity, as is witnessed by the following account:

A skipper residing now in Redut-Kale by the name of Iani Nikola, having appeared in the Sukhum-Kale Department of quarantine and customs on January 17 1853, declared that he had recognized one of the sailors serving at the time on one of the ships then anchored in the Sukhum harbor as one Ali Memed, a Turk, who had been among the crew of (a Turkish captain) Ali Ibraghim, who had clandestinely approached our shores in November 1852 close to the village of Drand, and who had taken from there to Turkey up to 20 captives: women, children and men ...⁶⁸

A detailed inquiry into the matter (which took almost a year and during which the Turkish sailor was kept under arrest) cleared the accused of all suspicion in slave trade, but his fate remains unclear. In the last document of the file, the officer in charge of the case was requesting permission to free him from custody, indicating that no charge could be proven against him, but, in spite of that, no decision from the upper levels of the Russian administration had been made in the case.⁶⁹ Apparently, as far as slave trade was concerned, "better safe than sorry" was the accepted policy of the Caucasian bureaucrats.

Such caution was quite understandable. Slave trading remained in the center of attention even at the highest level of the Russian government. The commander of the Black Sea Coastal Line of Defense General

⁶⁷ Edmund Spencer, *Travels in Circassia*, 162.

⁶⁸ Delo Shtaba nachal'nika ChBL (Chernomorskoi Beregovoi Linii) po chasti sudnoi "O turke Ali Akhmede, obviniaemom v vyvoze za granitsu zhenshchin i muzhchin". GAKK, Fond 260, Opis' 1, # 1908, list 1.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, list 9.

Budberg was accountable to the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army for all the developments regarding slave trade in the area of his jurisdiction, as is confirmed by his reports on the subject.

Regarding your request for information # 551 (...) I have the honor to report to Your Excellency that the smugglers' slave trade has been eliminated in the area of my command since the year 1846, and all the Circassians traveling abroad are now required to go through the custom-house in Sukhum-Kale where all their papers are carefully examined. (...) To this I have the honor to add in explanation that, having taken all possible measures against the smuggling of the peaceable highlanders abroad as slaves in the area under my control, I cannot do anything about such activities in the areas, which are not yet subjugated to our power.⁷⁰

Even though such reports made it painfully clear that no amount of military or bureaucratic activity could effectively stop the slave trade, it was also obvious that mistakes in this matter could cost a Russian official his career. Under such circumstances it seemed more prudent, if any error was made, to err on the side of caution.

Since the demand end of the trade remained, obviously, located in the Ottoman Empire, Russian diplomats there were kept busy trying to monitor the developments on their side of the Black Sea and keep the Russian government as well informed as possible about the latest events regarding it. Reports of the Russian envoy in Constantinople Buteneev not only dwelt upon recent diplomatic occurrences, but also contained secret notes with information about slave trading off the Caucasian coast. Due to the instability of the administration of the Caucasian region, these reports were sent not to the current Commanders-in-Chief, but to the then Viceroy of Novorossiia and Bessarabiia Count Vorontsov, who was at that time by far the highest ranking official in the Black Sea region. These reports deserve a generous quote:

Here are the names of the Circassian traders, belonging, for the most part, to the tribes of Natukhai and Abadzekh, who live in Anapa and conduct slave trade with Constantinople: Ali Büyük, Advay Hadzhi (these Circassians serve as commissioners in slave trade for certain Pashas), Agmay Tagir, Boruk Ibrahim, Daud Keshis, Megmed Veli from Daghestan, Gandar Ibrahim, Hadzhi Beglenei, Hadzhi Oglu Said, Irioglu Akhmet (he is expected to arrive here shortly), Karma Idris, Karma Mustafa, Negmu

⁷⁰ "Raport Komanduiushchego Chernomorskoii Beregovoi Linii General-Ad'iutanta Budberga gospodinu Komanduiushchemu Voiskami na Kavkazskoi Linii I v Chernomorii ot 1 apreliia 1851 g.;" Delo Shtaba Nachal'nika Chernomorskoii beregovoi linii. GAKK, Fond 260, Opis' 1, #1013, list 7.

Enokh, Kimki Osman, Said Veli, Iramek Izmail. All above mentioned traders have commissioners in Circassia and go there twice a year, namely in spring and in autumn; they bring from Constantinople salt, silk and cotton cloth, etc. for exchange for the captives. In each Turkish port they visit on their way back they have to pay dues for each of the captives. That's why the price of slaves in Constantinople is rather high. When a certain number of captives is collected and ready to be shipped, the commissioners go to the mountaintops and wait for a convenient time. If there is no Russian sails on the horizon, they give signals with gunshots to the traders, who are already aboard the ships and ready to depart; the traders weigh anchor immediately and take their merchandise away, using the favorable wind. It is remarkable, also, that the Chechens and other highlanders, living far from the sea, sell, for the most part, only prisoners of war or captured people; while the Circassian and the Abazin tribes seldom make war with each other. Male and female slaves acquired from them are usually sold according to their own will, or, rather, to the will of their relatives. Sometimes families even offer their children for the Turkish slave markets for free, in hope of bringing relief to their terrible poverty and offering a new, happier destiny to their offspring.

A few days ago a ship with a cargo of thirteen Natukhay slaves, beeswax and honey arrived here. (...) the Princess of the Begleney (Besleney) tribe (...) has recently sent a seventeen-year old boy as a present to her husband Zan-OgluSafer-bey.⁷¹

The persistence of such traders was understandable. According to another letter of Ambassador Buteneev, results of successful trips to Circassia were well worth the risks. Profit from salt, even if exchanged for beeswax or other common goods, could reach 100 %, and was five or six times that if it was exchanged for slaves. Slave trade was encouraged by the local Pashas, contrary to the formal restrictions and bans imposed by the Ottoman government. According to Buteneev's estimate, the number of slaves purchased in Circassia averaged at that time about 4000 a year.⁷² In Buteneev's opinion, there was little hope of putting an end to the slave trade only by means of the naval blockade and through anti-slave trade regulations in the Ottoman Empire:

There is a weekly transport of kayuks (small boats) between the Anatolian ports and Circassia, for such trips are especially profitable for Turkish merchants. (...) Many important Turkish officials have in-laws in Circassia. That is why smugglers and slave traders are secretly encouraged by local officials in spite of all the prohibitions and firmans, issued by the Porte. Osman-Pasha of Trebizond has been accused of encouraging such

⁷¹ 21 Apr., 1837, AKV, 39:278–280.

⁷² Kopia s zapiski, poslannoi admiralu Lazarevu, 9 July, 1837. AKV, 39:287.

activities. His brother Abdullah-bey is a smuggler himself; the Muselim of Sinop participates in slave trade. But even if the Turkish officials wanted to introduce any strict measures against smugglers, most likely they would not be able to supervise all the kayuks and all the merchandize that is transported from Anatolia to Circassia. The merchants' profits are too high, and there are a lot of ways to avoid any control. Besides, as we all know, the Turks have neither any coast guards, nor the means to establish anything of the kind.⁷³

Apparently, the Ambassador was right, and the naval blockade alone did not put an end to slave trade off the Circassian coast, especially in time of an ongoing war and instability of the local Russian administration. The reason for this lay not only in the high profits of the Turkish slave traders and their local commissioners, but also in the highlanders' demand for the goods these traders had to offer and in the very economy of the Northern Caucasus.

Salt was a product of utmost importance for the Caucasian peoples, and access to it was a vital economic matter. The Russian administration understood the importance of the issue from the very beginning of the Russian annexation of the region, and the first Russian Commanders of the Caucasian Corps included clauses concerning access to salt deposits in their treaties of allegiance with the highlander tribes. However, as we have seen, most of such treaties were short-lived and remained insignificant in economic matters. The Russian side used the political clauses as pretexts for punitive expeditions, while the promised trade benefits remained, for the most part, on paper.

In the 1830s, some of the Russian military administrators in the area realized the potential of a well-organized Russian trade with the highlander tribes and began to encourage it. Local officials, such as the Commandant of Anapa, Colonel Rot, believed that such trade, if it became regular and stable, could eventually substitute for the traditional commerce with the Anatolian merchants and, if carried under Russian control, could eventually make slave trade obsolete. A contemporary pointed out the success of this policy and contrasted it to the unnecessary cruelty of other Russian commanders in Circassia:

(...) Commander Rot (...) chose a completely different system of dealing with the highlanders. He approached them kindly and gently, thus appealing to their better feelings. He also showed them all the advantages of trade as the best way of dealing with the more civilized Russian people ... the

⁷³ Kopiaia s zapiski, poslannoio vitse-admiralu Lazarevu, 9 July, 1837. AKV, 39:288.

highlanders even sent their representatives to him with sincere and naïve offers of an alliance against General Zass (*a particularly cruel Russian commander in the Northern Caucasus at the time—L.K.*), so that he would help them by sending his Cossacks and artillery against the latter.⁷⁴

There were other Russian officials, who realized that the best way of incorporating the Northern Caucasus into the Empire lay through consistent civil reforms and development of mutually profitable trade. One of them was Nikolai Raevskii, who was appointed the Commander of the First Detachment of the Black Sea Coastal Line in 1837 (*Nachal'nik pervogo otdeleniia Chernomorskoi beregovoi linii*). In 1839 he became the Commander of the whole Black Sea Line, and his jurisdiction included the most troublesome parts of the new Russian possessions.⁷⁵ Most of the smuggling operations, including slave trade, were conducted there. In addition, these parts presented significant problems for the Russian settlers and for the army because of the notoriously bad climate, scarcity of fresh water, malaria and frequent epidemics of the plague. According to the data, collected by Raevskii in 1839,

In the fortress of Novorossiisk out of 247 men of the garrison on average 41 a month become ill and 9 die. This mortality is rather low compared to the other forts on the coastal line. (...) In the fort of Bombory, two versts from Pitsunda, the climate is so bad that an average of 111 men a year dies out of the garrison of 748. (...) In the fort of Aleksandriiskii out of 151 men an average of 38 a month become ill and 10 of them die. (...) In the fortress of Gelendzhik, out of 596 men 64 a month become ill 13 of them die.⁷⁶

The coastal fortifications, mentioned in this report were considered posts of hardship not only because of the unfavorable climate and disease. They were also subjects of constant attacks of the Circassians, which sometimes assumed the form of full-scale sieges, leading to mass slaughter of the garrisons. As stated in the Ordinance of the War Minister of November 8, 1840,

The fortifications which have been established on the Eastern shoreline of the black Sea in order to put an end to the brigandage of the local tribes and, especially, to eliminate their vile custom of slave trade, have been under constant assault in the course of this winter and spring. The

⁷⁴ N.I. Lorér, "Iz zapisok dekabriista na Kavkaze", *Russkii Arkhiv*, No. 7–12 (1847): 670–671.

⁷⁵ *Arkhiv Raevskikh* (St. Petersburg, 1910), 3:III–IV.

⁷⁶ *Obozrenie vostochnogo berega Chernogo moria. Arkhiv Raevskikh*, 3:54, 57, 60–61, 63.

highlanders picked the time when the Russian garrisons could not receive any help due to the extreme difficulties of transportation, and attacked with all their force. (...) All these garrisons shrouded themselves with immortal glory. Especially the men of the fort of Mikhailovskii showed us all an example of rare gallantry, courage and selflessness ...⁷⁷

Stories of Russian soldiers taken prisoner and sold into slavery also circulated in the Caucasian Corps. Some of these stories were later published in their more romantic literary versions (a number of poems, stories and, especially, the famous novella by Leo Tolstoy named “The Prisoner of the Caucasus”). Other stories of captivity were told by the former slaves to their comrades. Some of these eyewitnesses’ accounts were later published in the memoirs of the veterans of the Caucasian campaign.

During the march one of our soldiers told me a story of how he was captured by the Lezghins. (...) He was sold for forty sheep and (...) kept in the worst imaginable conditions. He tried to escape three times, but was caught and brought back to his master who punished him severely. At last, his master died, and, according to some religious custom, manumitted him in his will. But the master’s son would not free him unless he converted to the Muslim faith.—“but no matter how cruel he was to me, how he beat me and starved me,”—the soldier said,—“I cursed him and spat into his face, and already I was ready to die and become a martyr who would inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. But then I heard that our (army) has approached (...) and decided to run away once again. (...) One night I dreamed of an angel who told me that, unless I escaped immediately, they would throw me off a precipice the next day. I started breaking my chain, which I had already cracked some, and it broke almost by itself. Then I walked away, very quietly, and I found our detachment at dawn. That’s how I was rewarded by God for my patience! And, then, what kind of life is it with the Heathen: one of our captives had been living in the same village for fifteen years, he had a *saklia* (a *hut*—L.K.), a wife and children. But each time I met him and scolded him for becoming a Muslim, he always cried his heart out and asked me to let him kiss my cross. He said that he would run away any minute, except that he loved his children and could not abandon them.”⁷⁸

It has already been mentioned that in the 1830s the Caucasus it became a place of exile for the undesirable or even criminal elements of the Russian military. Officers, expelled from their regiments for card-sharping,

⁷⁷ The defenders of the fort of Mikhailovskii set fire to their own powder magazine when the Circassians broke inside, thus blowing up themselves and most of their attackers. Semen Esadze, *Pokorenie Zapadnogo Kavkaza i okonchanie Kavkazskoi voiny*, (St. Petersburg, 1914), 60.

⁷⁸ Iakov Kostenetskii, *Zapiski ob Avarskoi ekspeditsii na Kavkaze 1837 goda*. (St. Petersburg: Eduard Pran, 1851), 100–101.

stealing, alcoholism or debauchery were sent to the Caucasus, where the need for men was always great. It is no wonder, therefore, that the morale of the Russian Caucasian Army was at an all-time low, the discipline was deteriorating, and the policies towards the local population were inconsistent and did not involve much intellectual effort on the part of most Russian commanders, including the Commander-in-Chief, General Golovin. Indeed, the example of the commander of the fort of Anapa Colonel Rot shows that most contacts with the local population were carried out on a personal basis. The Circassians simply couldn't see any connection between the honorable and just Col. Rot and General Zass, who introduced the practice of displaying the cut-off heads of killed Circassians on pikes on top of a hill.

However, among the steady stream of the drunkards, card-sharpers and other undesirables, there were significant numbers of officers who were sent away from the capitals for political reasons. Namely, there were many younger—or less prominent—members of the Decembrist circle. The already mentioned Commander of the Black Sea Line Nikolai Raevskii was one of them. For people like him, appointment to the Caucasus presented an opportunity to carry out some of their ideas in a place so remote that no strict supervision was possible. Unlike the majority of the Russian military administrators of the region, Raevskii was convinced that the cruel punitive measures against the local population were counterproductive and, in fact, resulted only in further aggravation of the atrocities. In his letter to the Russian Minister of war count Chernyshev, Raevskii wrote:

Our actions in the Caucasus remind me of all the disasters of the conquest of Americas by the Spaniards. But I see here neither gallantry, nor great success, similar to the one of Cortez or Pizarro. God forbid, this conquest is going to leave a bloody trail in Russian history, similar to the one in Spanish history.⁷⁹

Such ideas could not help but make Raevskii unpopular with his superiors, especially with the Commander of the Caucasian Corps Golovin and his Chief of Staff, Grabbe, who were both ardent believers in the punitive measures and in the policy of general offensive against the highlanders. Raevskii was forced to retire in 1841, in spite of being supported by Count Vorontsov and by the War Minister himself. The final decision lay with the Tsar, whose hatred for former Decembrists was common knowledge.

⁷⁹ Pis'mo Raevskogo k grafu Chernyshevu. *AKAK*, 9:504.

Just before his retirement, Raevskii wrote a policy plan for the incorporation of the Northern Caucasus, which, unfortunately, was not appreciated by most of his contemporaries:

My successor can have a brilliant career here and work wonders if he understands that punitive expeditions and destruction only delay the pacification of the region; and if he can overcome the general enthusiasm for imaginary military feats.⁸⁰

In his “Survey of the Eastern Shores of the Black Sea” written in 1839, Raevskii described his partly implemented measures for the pacification of the region and for the abolition of slave trade. He also showed why, in his opinion, the slave trade and smuggling could not be controlled only by military means and through the naval blockade:

Slave trade with the Eastern shores has always supplied slaves for the whole Turkish Empire; it supplied workers for the copper mines in Trebizond, wives for the harems. The stricter our measures against this trade, the bigger the profit. It came to the point when the Turkish smugglers say that even if they lose nine ships out of ten, the last one pays for the loss and still brings profit. Our naval patrols are risky because there are only two ports on the shoreline of 500 verst. The smugglers depart from Anatoliia to Kozlov, Feodosiia or to Kerch’ at night and turn to the Eastern shore with the first favorable wind. Fires on the mountaintops serve as beacons to them at night.⁸¹

Raevskii warned that strict military measures were powerless against spread of disease (it was likely that the plague epidemics were carried to the Caucasus by the smugglers from the Ottoman Empire, where the disease hit first). Also, these measures sometimes put even the lives of the captives at risk:

In all harems the smugglers have connections, and they even pass for martyrs for their faith. They bring the highlanders the products they need avoiding our control, they encourage trade in Russian captives and put our lands in danger of epidemics of plague. But this is not the end of it. In case our men-of-war pursue them, the smugglers, in order to avoid death, tie ballast stones to the necks of the Russian captives and throw them overboard. Those who have managed to escape from captivity confirm this, and they say that boats with a cargo of slaves, which were forced back by our warships, returned without any captives.⁸²

⁸⁰ Pis'mo Raevskogo k grafu Chernyshev, AKAK, 9:504.

⁸¹ Obozrenie vostochnogo berega Chernogo moria. *Arkhiv Raevskikh*, 3:52–53.

⁸² Ibiidem, 3:53.

In order to put an end to the slave trade as well as to the smuggling activities, Raevskii suggested to establish large-scale trade with the highlanders and to supply them with salt, iron and copper at low prices on the condition of peace.

There is no doubt that if we supply the highlanders with all the necessary products, the smugglers will not withstand the competition. They have to keep their prices high because of the risk they are running.

When the salt trade passes entirely into our hands, the highlanders will be totally dependent on us. One can definitely say that through the introduction of the salt trade the government has found a sure way to put an end to smuggling and, at the same time, to the Turkish influence. This is also a good way to incorporate the highlanders (into the Empire—L.K.) (...) I think that the government also has to start selling the highlanders two more products, namely, iron and copper. It is now prohibited to sell iron to the highlanders, but they need it as much as salt. I find it essential for us to take this trade out of hands of the Turkish smugglers and to bring it under our control. Iron is necessary for countless uses, and only a small part of it is going to be used for making arms. The highlanders have enough arms already and they even sell them to our Cossacks. Therefore, iron trade will present many more advantages than inconveniences. Equally, our copper will be in high demand in the mountains if we take this trade in our hands.⁸³

In the few years of his administration of the Black Sea Line Raevskii did implement some of his ideas. He insisted on peaceful measures for the incorporation of the highlanders into the Empire and had considerable success in some of the Russian forts on the coast:

To start the trade with the highlanders I brought two thousand puds⁸⁴ of salt to Gelendzhik. I let it be known to the highlanders, that we know about their need of salt and also about the high price they have to pay to the smugglers. I announced that I was going to sell salt ten times cheaper than they had been paying so far. But the trade was to be conducted only in those forts where there had not been any assaults on the garrisons in the course of last winter. This trade, therefore, was to be started as an encouragement and as a reward for their good behavior. (...) In other forts, especially in Anapa, there would be no salt trade until all raids stopped.⁸⁵

It has been rather peaceful in the fort of Vel'iaminovskii lately. The highlanders come and sell their wine and fruit to the soldiers, ask for salt and

⁸³ *Arkhiv Raevskikh*, 3:66–67.

⁸⁴ Pud—an old Russian measure of weight, equals 16 kilograms or approximately 35.6 pounds.

⁸⁵ *Arkhiv Raevskikh*, 3:63.

are ready to buy it. Obviously, they feel much less hatred towards us, and their disposition is much more peaceful.⁸⁶

According to Raevskii, this approach to the problems of the region, including the problem of slave trade, had a lot of potential for gradual and consistent reforms, which required time and consideration on the part of the local Russian administration. However, Raevskii's personal conflict with General Golovin resulted in the former's defeat and early retirement, and the policy of purely military subjugation was re-introduced in full force. Raevskii's prediction, expressed in his letter to Golovin not long before the retirement, was completely fulfilled:

Any system involving the abolition of slave will ruin any trust that the highlanders still hold towards us; it will show our weakness and all the inevitable countless abuses, inseparable from this dirty war, are sure to follow. This war, which is often described as frequent expeditions and punitive raids, will only delay the time when the Chechens are conquered.⁸⁷

After Raevskii's forced retirement in 1841 other Russian military administrators tried to follow in his footsteps and encourage trade and peaceful relations between the highlanders and the Russians. One of them was Grigorii Antonoviich Rashpil', the Commander of the Black Sea Cordon Line and acting Appointed Ataman of the Black Sea Cossack Host in 1844–1852. Contrary to the prevailing policy of total military suppression and often at great peril to his career he insisted that only free trade could put an end to the Caucasian War.⁸⁸

Some Conclusions

Engaging in exercises of imagined scenarios ("what might have been") is rarely profitable for a historian, even though passages like that make for excellent discussion topics. However, in case of the Northern Caucasus we seem to have a case of lost opportunities on a rather large scale. In spite of the fact that the military pressure was not bringing the Russian Administration any closer to either the goal of "pacification" of the area or to the suppression of the slave trade, the same strategy of the escalation of conflict was applied year after frustrating year as the Caucasian War dragged on. In the Northern Caucasus the Russian Empire got engaged in

⁸⁶ Ibidem, 87–88.

⁸⁷ Pis'mo Raevskogo generalu Golovinu, March 1840. *Arkhiv Raevskikh*, 3:137.

⁸⁸ I. Drozdov, *Obzory voennykh deistvii na Zapadnom Kavkaze s 1848 po 1856 gg., Kavkazskii sbornik*, (Tiflis, 1886), 10:57.

typical frontier conflict, when a large centralized state encounters multiple chiefdoms and gets bogged down in what amounts to guerilla warfare in modern terms. Conflicts like that are extremely difficult for an empire to win, since no battle, even if won, is “decisive” enough to end the war, there is no enemy capital to capture and no even proper partner for negotiations. All these conditions were present in the Northern Caucasus and were exacerbated by the difficult mountainous terrain and the disease-breeding climate.

As far as the abolition of slave trade was concerned, this task, although closely related to the military subjugation of the territory, presented separate difficulties for the Russian authorities. Slave trade in the Northern Caucasus was not the privilege of the elite, it constituted the basis of the whole economic system of the region. Lack of such important natural resources as salt or iron shaped local societies, dependent on slave trade for these and other life-supporting goods. This dependency, in turn, created the social structure, which included raiding and capturing slaves as ritualized activities: a boy had to participate in raids in order to be socialized as an adult; a young man had to procure slaves (or horses, or any other kind of marketable treasure) in order to acquire a bride; any man’s social status depended on his reputation as a warrior, raider and successful procurer of goods for his immediate family as well as for his clan.

In a situation like this, the experimental measures, taken by Nikolai Raevskii and to some extent Commander Rot, were, perhaps, the only ways to achieve any positive results, as far as the elimination of slave trade was concerned. These measures were aimed at the very root of the problem of slave trade: they attempted to change the millennia-old economic and social patterns of the local societies by the means of introducing new sources of the staple goods thus undermining the crucial importance of the Ottoman slave traders. These measures were somewhat similar to M.S. Vorontsov’s actions in the Southern Caucasus: it was an effort to transform the existing social and economic archetypes from within, by substituting traditional sources of wealth and power by new ones. However, unlike Vorontsov, who had almost unlimited financial resources and had only to win the sympathies of the ruling elite of Georgia, Raevskii had to deal with various tribes with sometimes contradictory interests, plus he had to conduct his administrative experiments with the minimal support of the government and minimal financial backing. It is not surprising, therefore, that Raevskii achieved much less spectacular results than Vorontsov: in order to bring fruit such a policy had to be

implemented consistently and patiently for a long time, so that the new economic and social patterns could replace the old ones. Unfortunately, this socio-economic experiment was never given a chance. As we will see quite soon, the war in the Northern Caucasus had already acquired such a great momentum that even the all-powerful Viceroy Vorontsov had no choice but to yield to the pressure and begin his tenure there with a military expedition.

A Case of Failure: Vorontsov in the Northern Caucasus

As we have already seen, an enlightened liberal approach towards the problem of the incorporation of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire remained an exception rather than the rule. While the Caucasian committee in St. Petersburg continued to consider different plans, the military officials on the spot again resorted to the strategy of scorched earth and were methodically burning the highlanders' crops in hopes of putting an end to their resistance. As Raevskii and his fellow liberals had predicted, the result was just the opposite. The Jihad against the Russians spread like a wild fire. By the time another believer in trade and peaceful incorporation, Count Vorontsov, was appointed viceroy of the Caucasus, it was too late. By 1845, the situation in this region could be resolved, for better or worse, only by military measures.

In 1844, the post of the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian army was offered (much in the way of an offer one can't refuse) to Count Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov. The new Viceroy came to the Northern Caucasus at the time when this territory was as far from being under Russian control as it had ever been before. Shamil's political and military influence spread far and wide, bringing under his control not only the territory of Daghestan and Chechnya. A series of successful campaigns against the Russians had allowed him to strengthen his power base among the local traditional ruling elites. Ideologically, he demanded that all the local potentates abide only by the laws and practices of Islam as opposed to the *adats* (traditional common law). In practice, however, he was rather pragmatic and shrewd, punishing and deposing local rulers when he could do so and trying to win their alliance by intrigue when he could not. An example of Shamil's attitude towards the highlander aristocracy was set by the fate of the ruling house of Avaria. All male members of the family of the Khans of Avaria were slaughtered on Shamil's orders, except for one baby boy who was saved by nothing short

of a miracle and who was smuggled by his nurse to the Russians for safety. The Circassian tribes, which for a long time had resisted Shamil's growing influence, were brought to obedience in a similar manner:

Shamil, who resisted the Russians in Daghestan tenaciously, decided to send his lieutenants to the unruly tribes of the Western Caucasus, which had not been paying tribute to him, nor sending him any help. To this end he chose a very able and clever man whom he appointed his Naib⁸⁹ [...] This Naib managed to make all the adyghes pay tribute to Shamil and to field an army for him. [...] Circassians were not all Muslims at the time, most of them were idolaters. The Naib taught them Islam and preached the Holy war. These lands were ready for his teachings at the time, because all of the Princes had already been converted to Islam due to their contacts with Turkey. [...] The Naib and his bodyguards traveled in the mountains, collected the tribute and called everybody to prayer. Those who resisted were killed on the spot without any mercy, and all orders of the terrible Naib were carried out immediately.⁹⁰

Such policies showed Shamil's confidence and apparent strength but they also created potential for his future weakening by driving a wedge between the Imam and the traditional local aristocrats, whose privileges and customs he had abolished.

As far as slave trade was concerned, it was definitely conducted on as large a scale as before in spite of all Russian attempts at controlling it by military measures. According to Shamil's regulations, one-fifth of all proceeds as well as all spoils of war belonged to him personally.⁹¹ An American traveler remarked in 1850:

Everyone will naturally ask if this traffic [in slaves] has ceased. As far as Anapa and all other Russian ports are concerned, I am authorized to say it has. Yet, I am aware that the transportation of Caucasian maidens to Constantinople is a thing of almost daily occurrence, and cannot be restrained. Several hundred, on their way to the great capital, have been captured within a few years. This is probably a very small portion of the number of people who embarked. They were taken in Turkish vessels—the Circassians having none of their own—and were distributed as convenience dictated.⁹²

⁸⁹ In Shamil's theocratic state, a *Naib* was a military commander and territorial governor, a representative of the Imam (Shamil) himself.

⁹⁰ A. Fonville, *Poslednii god voiny Cherkessii za nezavisimost', 1863–1864 g. Iz zapisok uchastnika-inostrantsa*. [1876] (Reprint, Severo-Kavkazskii filial traditsionnoi kul'tury: M.Ts.T.K "Vozrozhdenie", 1990), 20.

⁹¹ Zapiska, sostavlennaia iz rasskazov I pokazanii Khadzhi-Murata gvardii rotmistrov Loris-Melikovym. *AKAK*, 10:526.

⁹² George Leighton Ditson, *Circassia; or, a Tour to the Caucasus* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1850), 176.

The popular and successful measures taken by Vorontsov for the incorporation of the Transcaucasian territory were, quite obviously, impractical for the Northern Caucasus. At the insistent requests of the Tsar, Vorontsov had to begin his term as Viceroy with a massive expedition against the highlanders in 1845, which ended ambiguously: both Shamil and the Russians claimed victory, but neither was crowned with ultimate success. From that time on, Vorontsov changed the Russian strategy towards Shamil and resorted to the policy of gradually taking over the rebels' resources and undermining their base of support. This "less offensive system, more systematic war"⁹³ was comprised of three equally important elements: the military strategy proper; diplomacy and the ideological warfare and the economic policies. As far as the military side was concerned, Vorontsov commenced the construction of the "Advanced Chechen Line" which was supposed to facilitate Russian operations in Lesser—and later—Greater Chechnya and eventually subjugate the Chechen territory as a result of several smaller-scale campaigns in the course of a few years.⁹⁴ It was clear to everybody that, if Shamil was cut off from his communications with Chechnya, which supplied a large part of the foodstuffs for his army as well as a significant number of warriors, the *Imam's* eventual defeat would become just a matter of time.⁹⁵ By the gradual encirclement and strangulation of Shamil's strongholds and by denying him the possibility to re-assert his influence, Vorontsov weakened the *Imam's* power to such extent that he could not feasibly assist the Ottomans and the European powers at the Asian theatre of the Crimean War of 1853–1854.

Another important part of Vorontsov's anti-guerilla policies was the ideological warfare against the *Imam* and the diplomatic effort, aimed at the traditional elites of the Northern Caucasus and Daghestan. In a surprising move, the Russian Viceroy attacked the leader of the *Jihad* on his own turf by spreading the testimony of Shamil's former *Naib* Suleiman Efendi about the *Imam's* deviations from true Islam.⁹⁶ A detailed article about these deviations (seven altogether) was published in the *Kavkaz* newspaper, was widely circulated among the population of the Northern Caucasus and was further elaborated by some prominent Muslim schol-

⁹³ Vorontsov's letter to Ermolov, January 2, 1846. In Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*; 175.

⁹⁴ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*; 176.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

ars. Vorontsov cultivated his personal contacts with the Muslim leaders, as well as with the traditional local aristocrats, many of which (both among the former and the latter) had been deposed by Shamil and his *Naibs*. Quite a few potentates in Daghestan were restored to their rights and power by the Russian Viceroy, thus becoming his allies and supporters.⁹⁷

He also supported the Circassian nobility in the conflict with their own commoners. As a result of a long struggle for power and privileges which started in the 1830s, some of the Circassian tribes had ousted their Princes and nobility and confiscated their property. The potentates appealed to the Russian Viceroy in December of 1846 and offered their loyal service to the Tsar if the Russians would restore their traditional privileges.⁹⁸ In his response, Vorontsov welcomed the nobles' overture and assured them of the support and protection of the Russian state:

Although the highlanders' nobility has been stripped of its rights by the commoners, it still has influence over the popular assemblies and, therefore, it would be advantageous to deny the Shapsugh and the Natukhays the support of their nobility and, at the same time, to acquire for our service these brave people who know these lands so perfectly.⁹⁹

Vorontsov also encouraged the Chechen tribes to move to the Russian side of the defensive Line, offering them protection from the *Naibs* and economic and trade advantages. Apparently, his efforts had some success, according to the *Moskovskie vedomosti* of 1845:

The people of Lesser Chechnya keep sending their envoys to express their desire to pledge allegiance [to Russia] in spite of the fact that the rebels take all measures to prevent them from doing so. It is impossible to predict for how long the *Naibs* will be able to bend the people to their will.¹⁰⁰

Vorontsov managed to gain support among some of the Caucasian nations and masterfully used the already existing tensions between Shamil and the traditional local rulers. He also took economic measures for spreading the Russian influence and enticing the highlanders into pacification. He favored the development of regular communications between the Caucasian province and other Russian Black Sea ports. He also

⁹⁷ Anthony L.H. Rhinelander, *Prince Mikhail Vorontsov, Viceroy to the Tsar*; 149.

⁹⁸ B.M. Dzhimov, *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe i politicheskoe polozhenie Adyghov v XIX v.* (Maikop, 1986), 74-75.

⁹⁹ *Tsentralfnyi gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv Gruzinskoi SSR*, fond 108, op. 6 delo 677, 1, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Moskovskie Vedomosti* of Dec. 16, 1846. Quoted in: Sergei Ivanov, *Ocherednaia pobeda s chechenskoi voine. Itogi* (Moscow), (June 25 1996): 8.

encouraged the development of trade with the Caucasian tribes, even allowing the Ottoman merchants to take part in it under the condition of Russian supervision and the strictest prohibition of trade in captives. In this he was quite close in his general approach to what Nikolai Raevskii and Colonel Rot tried to implement ten years earlier. Vorontsov never underestimated the importance of the economic stimuli and of the social environment.

In order to undermine the illegal trade of the Turks with the highlanders, it is necessary to develop legal trade by creating a set of rules for such commerce in accordance with the policies of our Government. To this end, it has been allowed to bring Turkish goods to the Eastern shore line tax free in November 1844. [...]

It is impossible to estimate the price of salt, which the highlanders buy from the smugglers even roughly. This salt is not sold for cash but is exchanged for different highlanders' goods, mostly for their women; it is possible, however, to say that this salt is much more expensive than that sold by the [Russian] government. At present the supply of the smugglers' salt continues only because of the highlanders' need for other products which we do not sell them and because in this way they have a market for their slaves in exchange for salt. If we maintain the price of salt at a level much lower than the one sold by smugglers, foreign trade will not be able to hurt our interests or the interests of our merchants if they desire to open trade here.¹⁰¹

However, in spite of some progress in the gradual incorporation of the Northern Caucasus, Vorontsov's success there was modest. The new policy of the economic stimuli could only bear fruit after several years of consistent application, and even more time was required for the structural changes in the local societies, similar to those, accomplished in Transcaucasia. In the absence of homogenous and well-organized traditional elites, which could be co-opted and incorporated by the Russian nobility, any attempts at cardinal reforms were extremely hard to implement. According to reports of the Russian local commanders, raids and slave trade continued in spite of changes in the political and military situation.

[...] the fall of the ruling family of Avaria and its elimination; the treason of the Sultan of Elisiu; the establishment of Muridizm in the neighboring district of Rysur and the influence of Shamil and Daniel-bek over the close-by communities; and, at the same time, the incompetence of our local

¹⁰¹ Otnoshenie stats-sekretaria Vronchenko k grafu Vorontsovu, May 24 1845. AKAK, 10:651.

authorities and the impunity of the native traitors [...] have brought this district to such pitiful condition. For example:

In 1844 there were 27 people killed during raids, 38 wounded and 63 taken into captivity; in 1845 there were 28 killed, 23 wounded and 11 taken into captivity [...]¹⁰²

This piece of information from Daghestan was matched by reports from Chechnya:

The inhabitants of the awul of Dakhin-przau, also called Uzun-tala, which is situated in Greater Chechnya, have long caused us damage both by their participation in the acts of banditry and by assisting other bands, which were piercing our lines. They participated in the raids in the Nogai Steppe and at the Astrakhan highway at the beginning of this October. Since they were doing that, they were richer than their neighbors and spread their bad influence in the entire area.¹⁰³

Khadzhi-Murat (Hadji Murat), formerly Shamil's Naib who had defected to the Russians, gave a detailed account of his activities as one of the *Imam's* lieutenants. Apparently, much of the warfare conducted by the *Murids* under the banner of *Jihad* was aimed at their fellow-Muslims just to acquire food, supplies for the army and cash. Taking captives for ransom or sale was one of the most profitable enterprises of the *Murids*.

Shamil's share consists of one-fifth of all we get plus gifts and presents from his Naibs or petitioners. I do not know how large is his fortune [...] and I have heard that in one of his hiding places he keeps about 150 thousand silver rubles. [...]

Since I was a sworn enemy of the family of Akhmed-Khan [of the Dzhangutay community], I attacked the Dzhangutay village with a party of two hundred men in 1846 and captured the khan's wife, Nukh-bike. She lived in my house for three months and was later freed for ransom by Akmed-bek's son-in-law, Daniel-bek. [...] I captured the sister of one of Shamkhal's relatives with all her servants. They paid ransom for her promptly. I destroyed Durgeli, the village of Ali-sultan, ruined its inhabitants and took their property and many captives. [...] In 1850 I wanted to capture Khadzhi-aga of Elisu but he learned about it and escaped; then I [...] went to the village of Dzhalut, took some captives and returned home.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Raport general-maiora Gorskago kniazuiu Vorontsovu, May 20 1846, N 1095. Sekretno. AKAK, 10:350.

¹⁰³ Raport general-maiora Kozlovskogo general-leitenantu Zavadovskomu, Nov. 21 1851, N 1948. AKAK, 10:523.

¹⁰⁴ Zapiska, sostavlennaia iz rasskazov I pokazanii Khadzhi-Murata gvardii rotmistrom Loris-Melikovym. AKAK, 10:525-528.

Shamil's practice of taking prisoners for ransom or sale drew a lot of attention at the very beginning of the Crimean War, in 1854, when he captured Princesses Orbeliani and Chavchavadze with their children during a raid to Kakheti. Both ladies were granddaughters of the late King Georgii XII of Kartli-Kakheti and both were married to high-ranking Georgian aristocrats in the Russian military service. Shamil set their ransom at an unheard-of level: a million silver rubles in cash, plus the return of his elder son, who had been taken as an *amanat* fifteen years previously, had graduated from a military college and was at the time an officer of the Russian army in Warsaw.¹⁰⁵ Russian officials in charge of the negotiations reasoned quite correctly that the return of Shamil's son was, most likely, the most important condition, which could be fulfilled quite easily. They even expected some long-term advantage for the Russian interests to follow from this return in hope that, after Shamil's death his sons' rivalry for leadership would split the forces of the highlanders.¹⁰⁶ As far as money was concerned, the general understanding was that it was much more of an Oriental way for bargaining than a realistic demand. Indeed, after the matter of Shamil's son had been settled, the ransom was fixed at forty thousand silver rubles and the Princesses were returned to their relatives.¹⁰⁷

This episode damaged Shamil's image in the eyes of his potential allies quite seriously. The misadventure of highborn ladies was described in a widely popular novel, *The Prisoners of the Caucasus*, by Verderovskii. It contained blood-chilling details, such as how the children's nanny was hacked to death by the *Murids* with their sabers; how the Princesses had to walk in icy-cold water of the mountain streams, denied food and warm clothes; how they were insulted and abused by Shamil's lieutenants.¹⁰⁸

Although, most likely, in this case Shamil was not personally responsible for his *Murids*' rudeness and cruelty, it caused outrage not only in St. Petersburg (the Tsar himself expressed his personal concern for the fate of the captured Princesses and followed the ransom negotiations closely) but also in the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and France. The idealized image of a gallant and noble warrior fighting for his faith was shattered.

¹⁰⁵ Pis'mo generala Reada k kniazii Dolgorukovu, October 6, 1854, N47. AKAK, 10:566.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁷ Izvlechenie iz otnosheniia generala Muravieva k kniazii Dolgorukovu ot 8-go oktiabria 1855 goda.—Lager' pri selenii Chivtli-chai. AKAK, 10:570.

¹⁰⁸ Verderovskii, Kavkazskie plennitsy. In; M.N. Chicagova, *Shamil na Kavkaze I v Rossii* (St. Peterbourg: Muller & Bogelman, 1889), 79–80.

As it often happens in politics, a common fear (in this case, of the growing Russian influence) brought together unlikely bed-fellows who used each other only as long as this alliance did not damage their own reputation. The Ambassador of Britain issued an official reprimand to Shamil for “fighting with women and children”, and so did the Ottoman Sultan, apparently, at British request.¹⁰⁹ This incident partly explains the lack of cooperation between Shamil and the Western powers on the course of the Crimean War.

The aggravation of conflict of interest in the Middle East between Russia on the one side and the Ottoman Empire, the Great Britain and France—on the other, resulted in the War of 1853–1856, also known as the Crimean War. This conflict bore most serious consequences for Russia in general and for the Russian policies in the Caucasus in particular. Nicholas I always considered the protection of Greek Orthodoxy one of the most important goals of his foreign policy and, at the same time, continued to cherish the idea (originally belonging to his grandmother, Catherine II) of putting the Cross back on the dome of St. Sophia’s cathedral in Istanbul. Nicholas I always referred to Istanbul by its old Slavonic name *Tsar’grad*—the Tsar-city, and, after all, the idea of restoring the Byzantine Empire under the aegis of the Russian Tsar had been his family’s pet project for almost a hundred years. Emboldened by the extremely stable and powerful position of Russia in the European affairs and by the signs of progress in the Caucasus, the Tsar was not averse to the idea of another Russo-Turkish war, especially in the light of the brilliant successes of the Russian army in the previous wars with the same foe. Therefore, when the Russo-Turkish negotiations concerning the protectorate over Orthodox churches in Constantinople and in other sacred places of worship on the Ottoman territory failed, the Tsar sent Russian troops across the border and occupied the Danubian principalities. This action was an open challenge, and it was accepted. To the British and French governments, it provided a long-awaited pretext to interfere, and even inspired some geopolitical daydreams in otherwise practical British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, who wrote in March 1854:

My beau ideal of the war which is about to begin with Russia is as follows: Aland and Finland restored to Sweden. Some of the German provinces of Russia on the Baltic ceded to Prussia. A substantive Kingdom of Poland re-established as a barrier between Germany and Russia. Wallachia and Moldavia and the mouths of the Danube given to Austria. Lombardy and

¹⁰⁹ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*, 273–274.

Venice set free of the Austrian rule and either made independent States or incorporated with Piedmont. The Crimea, Circassia and Georgia wrestled from Russia, the Crimea and Georgia given to Turkey, and Circassia either independent or connected with the Sultan as Suzerain.¹¹⁰

Anti-Russian sentiment was widespread in Britain, and the image of the brave Circassians fighting against the invading army of Russian aggressors was restored in popular imagination. In a traveler's account published at the height of the Crimean War, a visitor to the Caucasus clearly expressed the essence and *raison d'être* of the British policies in the Black Sea region:

The Circassians and the other mountain tribes resemble us in many particulars: they debate every great affair in a national council; they venerate the ancient usages and ordinances, which form their Constitution; and they have the same graduation of ranks and aristocratic feelings, which distinguish ourselves.

Above all points of resemblance to us, they have clung to their independence with Anglo-Saxon tenacity; and shall we, when peace shall be made, allow their rude and gigantic enemy to surround them with her liberated forces, till she exterminate them by brute power, and no memorial be left of unsuccessful virtue save that which history will assuredly record in their favour? [...]

We may rest satisfied that the freedom of the Caucasus will form an important element towards the diminution of Russian influence in the East.¹¹¹

Russians, however, also had a strong argument in this propaganda debate on moral grounds. It was the British patronage of the continuing slave trade off the Circassian coastal line. In January 1854 the newspapers *Kavkaz* and *Zakavkazskii Vestnik* published a story about three steamboats, which had come openly to the Circassian coast under the command of Osman-Pasha. The Pasha promised the Ubykhs that eighteen more Ottoman warships were going to arrive soon with artillery and Turkish reinforcements. However, the Russian naval victory at Sinop upset these plans, and the steamboats departed with a few smaller Circassian vessels in tow. The cargo on the boats was "a large number of women and children of both sexes".¹¹² The article further said:

¹¹⁰ Philip Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1928), 360–361.

¹¹¹ Henry Danby Seymour, *Russia on the Black and the Sea of Azov* (London: J. Murray, 1855), IX–X.

¹¹² Neskol'ko slov o Turetskom prosveshchenii, *Zakavkazskii Vestnik*, #2, January 14, 1854.

Such are the very first fruits that are borne by the protection and the alliance with Turkey of some civilized Powers [England and France]. There Powers ban slave trade in other parts of the world, but refuse to see that here they're encouraging an ancient Muslim world with all its fanaticism and [...] they're now fighting against the Power which aspires to enlighten and civilize its Asian subjects.¹¹³

At the government level, a somewhat milder version of the same idea was presented to the British Secretary of War Sidney Herbert¹¹⁴ by the newly appointed councilor at the Russian Embassy in London, Baron Nikolai:

[...] You must admit that it is rather an anomaly in our days that so many millions of Christians should be at the mercy of Infidels whose religion approves of any persecution they may think proper to lavish on their conquered subjects ...¹¹⁵

The British were hard put to argue with this line of reasoning, and that's why Shamil's continuing practice of taking prisoners made it increasingly awkward to support him financially and militarily. By the end of the war it became obvious that as soon as the atrocities should end, Shamil and his *Murids* could no longer count on any feasible military intervention on their behalf from the Ottoman Empire or the Allies. From that time on, Shamil could only receive support in the form of encouraging letters from the Sultan, shipments of guns and, of course, wide campaign of moral support in the British press (of which he may or may not have been aware). The eventual defeat of the highlander Murid state became just a matter of time.

This was also the time when the first voices denouncing slave trade were raised in the Ottoman Empire. Considering how important the institution of the *kul/harem* slavery was for the everyday existence and—to a large extent—for the reproduction of the Ottoman elite, these voices were quite extraordinary in their Western approach to the problem of slavery and slave trade and in their ability to understand and embrace the inevitable change in the Ottoman society. According to Ehud R.

¹¹³ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴ Incidentally, Sidney Herbert was Prince Vorontsov's nephew, son of his sister Catherine, neé Vorontsova, married to Lord Pembroke. The news of the war with England upset the Viceroy of the Caucasus most profoundly. Brought up in England, he was convinced that an alliance between the two Empires was in the best interests both of Russia and Great Britain. It was rumored that the sad developments of the Crimean War undermined the already declining health of the elderly Prince to such extent that he died soon after the beginning of the military action.

¹¹⁵ Anthony L. Rhineland, *Prince Mikhail Vorontsov*, 192.

Toledano, the Grand Vizier Kibrisli Mehmet Emin Pasha made an impassioned speech against slave trade as early as 1854, and his views were supported by Mustafa Pasha, commander of the Batum army.¹¹⁶ These two dignitaries expressed their support of the abolition of slave trade in Circassians, while a few years later another high-ranking Ottoman administrator, Pertev Efendi, the governor of a Red Sea port of Massawa, spoke against slave trade off the Horn of Africa.¹¹⁷ However, in spite of the strong support of the British and of the other European governments and their representatives, such voices remained a rare exception in the Ottoman society until much later in the 19th century.

The end of the Crimean War also had other consequences for the Caucasian affairs. Under the conditions of the Treaty of Paris, Russia lost her exclusive right of keeping navy in the Black Sea, which made any effective control of the Circassian shoreline next to impossible. With British frigates and Ottoman steamships providing convoys for the Turkish traders, the problem of slave trade presented itself once again to the Russian Caucasian administration as an ultimate bureaucratic challenge of an almost mythical enormity and complexity.

Some Conclusions

The Northern Caucasus presented the Russian military administrators with two quite distinct regions, where the anti-slave trade efforts had different results even though the methods of implementing them were the same in both cases. In the North-East, where the Russian Empire had at least some support among the local potentates, the result was achieved by the application of sheer military pressure in the course of many years. It eventually became possible to put an end to the military resistance of the local chiefdoms to a large extent because they had been united into a single theocratic state by Imam Shamil in the course of his anti-Russian Jihad. Once the multiple principalities of the North-East, previously each conducting its own policy and trying to achieve its own ends, were put under a centralized control, the eventual victory of the Russian Empire became just a matter of time and effort. With the creation of Shamil's theocratic state the Russian military finally acquired exactly what they needed in order to function to their best ability: one main opponent who had to be eliminated in order to achieve victory. After Shamil's capture his

¹¹⁶ Ehud R. Toledano, *Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression*, pp. 117–121.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 206.

state disintegrated, his forces were dispersed and many of his *Naiibs* were even willing to enter the Russian service as local administrators. After that it was possible to proceed to the administrative incorporation of the area and with the measures to control slave trade. Since slave trade, too, was more or less centralized and controlled by Shamil and his lieutenants, the Russian authorities could now exercise more effective control over it as well, although they were still far from being in total command of the situation.

The Northern Caucasus after the Crimean War

Control of the coastal line of the Northern Caucasus remained among the top priorities of the Russian administration in the Caucasus at all times: before, during and after the Crimean war. Major concerns of the Russians also remained unchanged: prevention of smuggling armaments for the highlanders, enforcement of the ban on slave trade and sanitary measures for prevention of plague epidemics. In 1855 the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army, General Muravëv, received a report, which convincingly showed the impossibility of any effective control by the means of the naval patrols of the coast.

[...] Initially, the government considered the naval patrols and cruising sufficient to prevent trade and other contacts between the Turks and the highlanders. In practice, however, it was proven that large sail ships were incapable of cutting off these contacts. Besides, the steamships were so rare in the Black Sea Navy and their upkeep was so expensive that the very idea of using them for the coastal blockade never occurred to anybody. [...] The only means to effectively prevent Turkish vessels from reaching the North-Eastern coast was to supplement cruising with a rowing flotilla, manned by the Cossacks of Azov who have been historically renowned for their naval raids on the Turkish coast.¹¹⁸

Apparently, the flotilla had been created and proved to be effective in 1845, but the vessels (*lad'i*, the historic name of the Cossack sea and river boats similar to the Varangian *drakkar*), were burned at the beginning of the Crimean War.

Excellent service of the Azov Cossacks proved them to be worthy of their heroic origin. They sank all Circassian vessels without exception and made

¹¹⁸ Doklad general-leitenanta Bebutova generaly Muravëvu, March 1855. AKAK, 11:936.

the Circassians abandon their former piracy when they assaulted merchant ships on their way to Abkhazia with cargo of foodstuffs. Cossack ships with only twenty men aboard attacked vessels with crews of sixty to eighty men and were always victorious.¹¹⁹

In 1855 the flotilla was rebuilt. It consisted of ten vessels armed by light guns and manned by three hundred Azov Cossacks. It might have been effective against the small vessels of the Turkish smugglers, but it was obviously inefficient against British and Ottoman steamships and men-o'-war. The Russian administration was trying to take other than military measures for the control of the coastal line, including the enforcement of laws considering customs and quarantine in the ports and using diplomatic channels for crisis situations. The instructions of the Viceroy of the Caucasus Prince Bariatinskii to the Governor-General of Kutaisi province stated:

Issues [...] concerning the pursuit of criminals and bandits, return of stolen goods, kidnapping of our subjects of either sex abroad, requisition of smuggled goods or measures against spread of disease should be reported by the district administrators to our consuls or other agents in order to gain time. At the same time, they should inform the Governor-General of the province promptly and wait for his orders for further action.¹²⁰

Developing steamship communications between Turkey and the Caucasian ports presented another problem for the Russian authorities. Circassians went to Turkey aboard Ottoman and British ships and many times large parties of people, intended for sale on the Ottoman slave markets, were taken along as family members (which they sometimes, but rarely, were). Russian administration was powerless against such covert transportation of potential slaves, but was fully aware of its existence and of the ways in which it was conducted. Therefore, when the question arose as to whether Circassians should be allowed to use Russian steamboats, it became a matter of much controversy and most careful consideration. The Chief-of-Staff of the Caucasian Army expressed his concern in a report to the Head of Chancellery of the Caucasian Viceroy:

All their [Circassians'] relations with the Turks are aimed against us; and, lately, they have begun clandestine contacts with some of the most important officials of the Porte. Their trade is based almost exclusively on

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁰ Instruksiia kniazia Bariatinsgogo Kutaiskomu General-Gubernatoru. *AKAK*, 12:242.

selling slaves. Therefore, any encouragement of the rebellious highlanders' contacts with the Turks is harmful for us and is bound to encourage slave trade also [...]

If, by developing trade through the means of steamships, we could hope to abolish smuggling and channel all their trade through our ports, we could desire no more at present. But, on the one hand, it is hard to determine, whether the highlanders go to Turkey on business or for any other purpose, especially if they come from remote parts; and it may easily happen that we may, unbeknownst to ourselves, help in sending a [political] deputation of some kind to the Turkish government. On the other hand, smuggling, cannot be stopped unless we allow traffic of people for sale by our steamships, which is certainly out of the question, even if it is done covertly.¹²¹

The situation in the North-West of the Caucasus did not improve after Shamil had been captured in the *aul* of Gunib in summer of 1859. By that time he already had little personal influence in the Caucasian affairs, and the confrontation between the *Murids* and the Russians was reduced to local, although fierce and bloody, battles or sieges of fortified *auls*. Gradually it became obvious to the Russian officials, that even the end of the most important campaign of the Caucasian war (the war was proclaimed officially over in 1864) did not solve the problem of the incorporation of all of the Northern Caucasus into the Empire, nor did it facilitate control over the ongoing slave trading activities of its population. If anything, in the North-West of the region the slave trade was booming more than ever.

Moreover, another problem presented itself to the Russian administration: the inhabitants of the pacified areas (the so-called peaceful highlanders, or *mirnye gortsy*) now expected to be kept safe from the raids of those who remained hostile to the Russians. Therefore, they petitioned the military commanders of their respective areas, asking them to help them return their relatives who had been taken and sold as slaves. Such petitions were numerous enough for the Russian administration to have a special officer of Staff appointed to investigate such claims and report what measures could be taken to the Commander of the Black Sea Defense Line in person.¹²²

¹²¹ Otnoshenie nachal'nika glavnago Shtaba Kavkazskoi Armii k nachal'niku Glavnago Upravleniia Namestnika Kavkazskogo, June 12, 1859, N 1337, Tiflis. AKAK, 12:247.

¹²² Delo Shtaba Nachal'nika Chernomorskoii Beregovoi Linii "O nepropuske v Turtsiiu cherez porty na Chernomorskoii Beregovoi Linii mirnykh gortsev, zakhvachennykh v plen nepokornymi tuzemnymi zhiteliami dlia prodazhi"; GAKK, Fond 260, Opis' 1, Delo #1014, #1018, #1021.

A plan for a transformation of the region into a pacified province of the Empire was suggested even before the Caucasian War was over by General Miliutin in February 1858. His report to the Tsar, under the title “Concerning Granting Free Trade Rights to the Highlander Peoples Now Coming under Our Rule in the Western Caucasus” became a seminal document which shaped the policy of the Russian government in the region for years to come and finally put an end to slave trade off the Caucasian coast in a way that had never been imagined before.¹²³

In his report to the Tsar, General Miliutin once again drew his Sovereign’s attention to the fact that the results of the Crimean War had drastically changed the situation on the Black Sea in general and on its Eastern shore in particular. The loss of Russian naval superiority made most methods of control of the shoreline that had been used before, insufficient, and, for the most part, ineffective. Meanwhile, in Miliutin’s opinion, it was crucial for Russia to put an end to this ambiguous situation and to take measures to reduce foreign influence on the Caucasian coast to the minimum. He pointed out that strict naval blockade was, at present time, not only impossible, but also undesirable because it could only create further conflict with the highlanders and, at the same time, cause negative reaction on Europe, which, as Miliutin stressed, “could not be always ignored.”¹²⁴

At the time when the Black Sea Defense Line existed, we abided by the following two rules concerning the highlanders’ trade: 1) we tried to make them get all their necessary products from us and, therefore, make them dependent on us; 2) we prohibited slave trade, which allows the people that derive their living exclusively from it, to receive all the products too easily, makes work redundant and ever prevents the highlanders from abandoning their semi-savage state.

But these rules can be only applied if there exists a chain of fortifications on the coast.

At present we cannot introduce our own trade in those parts of the shore where we do not have any fortifications, and we have, therefore, to yield to the foreigners on the long expanse between Novorossiisk and Gagry. But, having allowed foreign trade, we will be forced into letting the highlanders to sell women and children as well, both because they have nothing else

¹²³ Zapiska svity ego Velichestva general-maiora Miliutina ot 14 fevralia 1858 goda, # 3. O dozvolonii svobodnoi torgovli pokoriaiushchimsia nam gorskim narodam na zapadnom Kavkaze. *AKAK*, 11:502.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, 502.

to offer, and because a ban on such trade would be useless without a strict enforcement. Meanwhile, any measures against such trade would inevitably lead to unpleasant confrontation with foreigners.¹²⁵

Miliutin proceeded to remark that before the Crimean War trade relations with the highlanders were developing in an encouraging direction. The local population could offer their agricultural products, cattle, fowl, honey, wax, hides and leeches to Russian traders, settlers and garrisons and receive the necessary goods from them at the prices much lower than those of the smugglers. Trade was steadily growing and was beginning even to bring profit just before the war. The Turks, who were largely pushed out of the salt business and could not continue their smuggling operations, were buying only palm wood and some raw materials. Miliutin notes also that in the absence of illegal trade, legitimate commerce was booming and the highlanders were beginning to look for opportunities to earn money “by honest means”. After this system was abolished, however, the Turks were no longer interested in buying wood or wheat in the Caucasus and would undoubtedly return to slave trade, which had always been the most profitable commerce in the region.¹²⁶

Miliutin also carefully considered the moral side of the issue of the Caucasian slave trade. In his opinion, the ban on slave-trading operations was most of all supposed to contribute to the civilizing effort of the Russian government in the colonized area. According to Miliutin, the original intention of the Russian mission in the region was to help the highlanders develop “higher moral standards” and make them understand the “basics of citizenship” in order to be able to incorporate them into the Empire within two or three generations. And, if such was the goal, slave trade certainly could not be permitted under any circumstances. At present time, however, Miliutin remarked, the Russian government had neither means, nor time to engage in such a lengthy and costly project. Having said that, Miliutin admits further that the Russian administration clearly understands the difference between the Circassian slave trade and its Transatlantic counterpart:

We have never seen the highlanders’ trade in women and children as identical to the African slave. We understand that the two have nothing in common; so we have even turned a blind eye to the transport of the highlanders’ slaves abroad under the pretext of pilgrimage to Mecca. But, after the main reason for the ban on this trade had been abolished, we no

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 502–503.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, 503.

longer have any motive for its further enforcement. Besides, if we could not accept the responsibility for the morals of the highlanders of the East, at least we should have some advantage from this slave trade because it reduces the population.

The analysis of our present situation on the East coast of the Black Sea suggests, therefore, that our own needs and interests force us to allow foreign trade with the highlanders, and not to stand in the way of selling women and children from this coast for further sale in Turkey. But, since any highlanders' trade with foreigners may be harmful to our interests, we have to find ways to make it harmless.¹²⁷

General Miliutin considered a number of measures, suggested to him by General Filipson that could reduce the disadvantages of the new system of trade on the Black Sea for Russia's interests. This plan could be described as an introduction of tax-free trade in the specially designated areas of the coast (the estuaries of Pshady, Chuepsen, Tuapse, Pshezuaple, Shakhe, Sochi and Mzynty rivers), where the forests had been cut down and effective supervision of the trade operations was possible. According to this plan, all other areas of the Circassian coast were supposed to be closed for foreign trade, and all trespassers were to be arrested and sent to the penal battalions for life. (General Miliutin, quite in the spirit of the time, remarked that this measure would be embarrassing to use (*neudoboprimerimo*) against Europeans). It was also suggested that all Circassians, pacified and non-pacified alike, should be allowed to receive their passports (the pacified peoples had the advantage of getting the passport free, while the non-pacified ones had to pay 50 kopek charge per male passport holder). So, all highlanders were allowed to travel abroad, be it pilgrimage to Mecca or a business trip to the Ottoman Empire.¹²⁸

Military commanders of the coastal forts should have passport blanks; it should be their responsibility to fill out names and descriptions of the persons who travel abroad according to the petitioner's own words, without demanding any proof of his relationship to these other persons or whether they are really going on a pilgrimage to Mohammed's tomb.¹²⁹

Miliutin also noted that General Filipson's plan was not without its drawbacks. The most obvious of its disadvantages was total loss of control over the middle part of the Eastern Black Sea coastal line. Besides, Miliutin reasoned, if the Russian government allowed the slave trade

¹²⁷ Ibidem, 503.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 503–504.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, 504.

earlier, the highlanders would have understood it as an act of goodwill and appreciated it as such. But under the present circumstances they were much more likely to take it as a sign of weakness and a concession.

The highlanders, who judge any authority according to its ability to collect dues or according to the amount of presents that have to be given to influential persons in exchange for their protection, will not respect our laws and officials if they find out that all [foreign] merchants are conducting their trade tax-free.¹³⁰

In Miliutin's opinion, the plan, suggested by General Filipson, could be put to excellent use if it were applied more selectively, only to the pacified tribes of the Circassian coast. He drew the Tsar's attention to a small tribe of Dzhigets who, according to Miliutin's information, had been pacified long ago, remained loyal to the Russians and were given certain privileges as compared to other Circassian tribes:

Their most influential Princes received ranks and pensions from us, but, most importantly, the Dzhigets enjoyed the right of obtaining passports and conducting foreign trade. They were taking women and children for sale in Turkey under the pretext of a pilgrimage to Mecca with their families and, when returning home, brought various goods tax-free to the sum of up to 300 rubles per each passport. Not only were they using these passports themselves, but sometimes they received such passports for the Ubykhs under their names, or took Ubykh women and children for sale in Turkey. These privileges were significant enough to make the Dzhigets rich and to make a well-known and influential people out of this small tribe, formerly despised by its neighbors (they even used to pay tribute to the Ubykhs). [...] This situation continued while the Dzhigets were getting their passports without difficulty, but, once the passports were no longer issued, the advantage of the Dzhigets over other tribes was eliminated and the Ubykhs, who no longer needed their services [...] decided to conquer them by force.¹³¹

Miliutin further reasoned that, if the example of the Dzhigets could be applied to other Circassian tribes, then free trade might become a very useful tool in gradual subjugation of the highlanders. To this end, the right of free trade, including slave trade, should be given only to the pacified tribes of the region, while keeping the Russians in control of the situation on the Eastern Black Sea coast. This, according to Miliutin, would create a strong incentive for the highlanders to seek peace and cooperation with the Russian authorities.

¹³⁰ Ibidem, 504.

¹³¹ Zapiska svity Ego Velichestva general-maiora Miliutina ...; AKAK, 11:505.

[...] Granting exclusive rights of free trade, including, most importantly, the trade in people, can give us a powerful tool for taking control over the coastal tribes. [...]

If we keep the right to ban trade with the rebellious tribes and the right to allow or to curtail free trade with foreigners in various locations on the coast, we will clearly have proven to the highlanders that it is not a forced concession, but an act of our free will, and that, in order to obtain the right of free trade, they should seek our favor, not that of the foreigners.¹³²

Miliutin's plan, therefore, provided for free trade, implicitly including slave trade, for all the pacified Circassian tribes on the condition that they take an oath of allegiance to the Tsar, give *amanats* and avoid any contacts with emissaries of foreign powers.¹³³ The only type of merchandise that was strictly forbidden in this trade was "smuggled armaments and other military goods". All ships were supposed to come to designated market places on the shore and submit to a search. If any "military goods" were found on board, the ship was confiscated with all its cargo. All crew members and passengers were supposed to carry passports, signed by a Russian consul in their country of origin, otherwise they were not allowed ashore.¹³⁴

General Miliutin's report became a turning point in Russian policy towards the Circassian slave trade. Ironically, the document that appeared to proclaim the capitulation of the Russian administration before the millennia-old custom of slave trade, inadvertently designed the path of its eventual elimination. Although Miliutin obviously could by no means foresee the events of six years later, his report and the consistent policy of turning a blind eye to the Circassian slave trade and allowing free travel abroad for the highlanders to some extent prepared the way for the mass migration of the Circassian tribes to the Ottoman Empire after the Caucasian war had been proclaimed over.

Even before the territory of the Northern Caucasus was completely incorporated to the Empire, the Russian authorities had adopted a new policy of the colonization of the region. Starting in 1861, lands in the foothills of the Western Caucasus were allotted to Cossacks in large numbers, pushing the native tribes from their lands and forcing them to move. By the end of 1864, 111 new *stanitsas* were founded and peopled with

¹³² Ibidem, 505.

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Ibidem.

142,333 families of settlers.¹³⁵ When allotting lands, unquestionable priority was given to the needs of the Russian settlers and Cossacks, while Circassians were sometimes moved more than once to new locations in order to provide the “reliable” population with good agricultural land. At the same time, the Russian administration tried to eliminate the privileges and hereditary rights of the highlander nobility. Quite contrary to Vorontsov’s policy towards the local elites, Circassian nobles and Princes were not equal in rights with Russian nobility. The Russian government did not guarantee their status and was even inclined to acknowledge all tribal lands as property of the communes, thus undermining the nobles’ rights over their land.¹³⁶ It came as no surprise, therefore, when, after the Caucasian war came to an end, a large number of Circassians expressed their desire to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire rather than move to the lands designated for them by the Russian administration.

[The Circassian elders] were received [by the Caucasian Viceroy] in the name of their tribes. They all expressed their obedience and readiness to follow all orders with only one request—to allow them to emigrate to Turkey, since they knew that land better than the lands designated to them beyond the Kuban river. The Grand Duke answered that their own lands were given now to Russian settlers, that he granted their request and gave them one month to get ready for the immigration with their families. [He also stated] that the poorest of them could receive financial help to aid them in their travel, and that after that period those who would not obey the orders would be treated as prisoners of war.¹³⁷

Apparently, the mass emigration became the focal point of many contradictory interests and much political speculation. It was also used (predominantly by the Ottoman sea merchants and smugglers) as a source of considerable personal gain. On the one hand, the Russian administration encouraged and even partly financed the Circassian emigration, on the other hand, the Ottoman authorities appealed to the Circassians as well, calling to them for obedience and duty in the service of their “only true Sovereign”, the Sultan and Caliph.¹³⁸ The situation generated masses of contradictory rumors, such as that the Russians were going to emancipate all bonded people without compensation to their masters, or

¹³⁵ *Istoriia Severnogo Kavkaza*, 202.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, 203.

¹³⁷ Semen Esadze, *Pokorenie Zapadnogo Kavkaza i okonchanie Kavkazskoi voiny*, (Tiflis, 1910), 108–109.

¹³⁸ *Istoriia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, 204.

that the Circassians were going to be recruited into the Russian army, or converted to Christianity by force. Other rumors said that the emigration was not going to be allowed at all, or that it would be conducted only during one month.¹³⁹ Such rumors and growing tension heated the atmosphere and contributed to what turned out to be one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the nineteenth century.

It is impossible to estimate precisely the number of the Circassian emigrants in 1858–1865. Since both the Russian and the Ottoman governments were partially financing the immigrants, local officials on both sides quite routinely falsified the numbers of immigrants in order to receive more money, which could later be embezzled. According to Russian official data, the Russian government paid 289,678 rubles as transportation costs and monetary subsidies to the Circassian immigrants.¹⁴⁰ Other sources were not absolutely reliable, either, for political reasons. Some of them were deliberately reducing, others—enlarging the numbers of immigrants. However, an approximate figure for the Circassians, who emigrated to the Ottoman Empire in 1858–1865 has been established at five hundred thousand people, almost half of which died on their way or in Turkey due to storms, disease, starvation and exposure.¹⁴¹ According to the Russian consul in the Ottoman Empire Mr. Moshnin, out of 110 thousand Circassian immigrants in Samsun 50 thousand died by the end of their first year in Turkey.¹⁴² According to another eyewitness, the Ottoman ships with Circassian immigrants were “a terrible sight of corpses and hungry people deformed by smallpox”.¹⁴³ The routes of such ships could be traced in the sea by floating corpses, thrown overboard. Slave traders in the Ottoman Empire were taking full advantage of the situation:

The merchants were awaiting them [the Circassian girls] like hunters [...] there were also agents of some magnates from Constantinople who used the opportunity to get excellent merchandise at cheap prices. How many young and beautiful girls did they get at that time! This abundance was so great that it will last for at least two generations.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁰ Delo Kavkazskogo Gorskogo upravleniia po opisi #1, 1862. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Gruzii, fond 416, op. 3, Delo 154, 1. 1–11. In: G.Kh. Kумыков, *Vyselenie adyghov v Turtsiiu—posledstvie Kavkazskoi voiny*. (Nalchik: El'brus, 1994), 41.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem, 17–18.

¹⁴² A.Kh. Kasumov, Kh.A. Kasumov, *Genotsid adyghov* (Nalchik: Logos, 1992), 166.

¹⁴³ Ibidem, 167.

¹⁴⁴ *Otechestvennye zapiski* 2–3 (1874): 351–352.

Prices for Circassian slaves fell accordingly. In 1865 young girls could be bought for 60–80 rubles, according to Consul Moshnin. He also noted that Circassians were taken to Constantinople for sale by the hundreds and that even the English took part in this trade. He wrote:

While in Constantinople magazines write all the time that the slave trade has been abolished, they sell captives in Arzingen, and in Trapezund there exists a whole establishment of Circassian female slaves, which belongs to Emin-Pasha and is administered by Mrs. Mareni, who is the sister of the English consul Reberin.¹⁴⁵

Having experienced the hardships of immigration, some of the Circassians made attempts to return to Russia, even on the condition of baptism. In 1872 eight thousand five hundred families petitioned the Russian envoy in Istanbul General Ignat'ev for permission to return.

It has been almost eight years since our beys have been treating us *like slaves* [my underline—L.K.], committing thousands of cruelties against us and oppressing us in every way. [...] we have been deprived of freedom, property, family, of everything that is dear to every man's heart because our beys take from us half of everything we can earn. They are not satisfied with that, so they take away our children, boys and girls, and sell them to slavery. They take away our cattle and sheep, empty our houses. [...] In the name of God and for humanity's sake we plead to you to deliver us from such tyranny. If you do not listen to our appeal, we are all going to die here with the connivance of the Ottoman government.¹⁴⁶

The Russian government, however, was quite opposed to the idea of the Circassians' return. Petitions similar to this one were routinely returned with the answer that the return was "absolutely out of the question". The Ottoman government, in its turn, also took measures against their possible departure from Turkey. Petitioners were often arrested. When, in 1865, 1200 Circassians in Ardagan tried to move to the Russian border, the Ottoman government sent its regular army against them and pushed them back into the hinterland.¹⁴⁷ Very few Circassians eventually returned back to the Caucasus illegally.

With the mass migration of the Circassians to the Ottoman Empire, slave trade off the Caucasian coast stopped. The ancient phenomenon ceased to exist when the peoples that were conducting it were dislocated. In a way, it did not stop altogether, it continued on a large scale within the Ottoman Empire for many years in spite of the official bans

¹⁴⁵ *Genotsid adyghov*, 168.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 172.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 172.

and countermeasures of the Ottoman government. The influx of the Circassian refugees made the Ottoman government finally face the problem of Circassian slavery and slave trade. Interestingly enough, when trying to explain the persistence of slavery and slave trade, the Porte used the same “Orientalist” approach as St. Petersburg a few decades later, blaming Circassians for their “wild, savage, vile and uncivilized nature”¹⁴⁸ But this topic, exciting as it is, lies beyond the scope of this book, and constitutes quite another story. The Caucasus, however, stopped supplying slaves for the world market.

Some Conclusions

The North-West of the Caucasus presented the Russian authorities with a rather unique problem. Although some of the Circassians did join Shamil in his anti-Russian Jihad, they did so under pressure from his Naibs, by choosing between the two evils (of which the greater was certainly the Russians). However, the societies of the North-West preserved their democratic social order, and, even after the end of Jihad each of the able-bodied males of these societies remained a warrior, responsible for the well-being of his family and community. Speaking of which, we have now to remember that in this area of the Caucasus the wellbeing and the very existence of the local population heavily depended on the imports of such staples as salt and iron (not to speak of less basic goods, such as cloth). It was possible to procure these imported goods only by exchanging for some local merchandize, of which slaves were the most valuable and in constant high demand. Therefore, for the Circassian societies of the North-West, slave trade became a matter of survival and had to be continued at all costs. A possibility for a peaceful resolution of this problem existed in the 1830s, when some of the Russian military administrators were left to their own devices and tried to establish a Russian monopoly of salt trade with the native population. These administrative experiments certainly had good potential, but they were not given enough time to bear fruit, and the course of pure military subjugation of the region was

¹⁴⁸ Letter of the Porte to the president of the Immigration Commission, 29 Ramazan 1283/4.2.67, Basbakanlik Arsivi/Ayniyat/vol. 1136; Enclosure 3, Osman Pasha to the High Council for Judicial Ordinances, 21 Rebulahir, 1283/25.4.79, Basbakanlik Arsivi/Irade Beclis-I Mahsus/1407; Letter of the Porte to the Ministry of Justice, 12 Nisan 1295/25.4.79, Basbakanlik Arsivi/Ayniyat/vol. 1011. In: Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, p. 106.

adopted once again by the central administration. After that, there was no turning back to attempts of peaceful resolution.

Since the slave trade constituted the economic foundation of the societies of the Caucasian North-West, it could not be eliminated even by the time of the end of the Caucasian war. The only way for the Russian administration to stop it was to somehow “get rid of” the societies conducting it. This very purpose was achieved by the mass migration of the Circassians to the Ottoman Empire. The “problem” societies were moved in a body and took their social structure, economic base and system of values with them. From that time on, they were no longer a Russian administration’s concern. The Ottoman bureaucracy had to deal with them: all in all, a typical example of a bureaucratic way of dealing with a Gordian knot.

CONCLUSION

EXPLAINING AN UNLIKELY ABOLITIONISM

In their quest for parsimony, social scientists usually seek a single, preferably falsifiable cause. In reality, however, things usually happen because many different institutions and human agencies produce synergy, which is fraught with surprises and revealing ironies. The Russian Imperial abolitionism is one such example. It was brought to life first and foremost as a by-product of Russia's empire-building process and continuing southward expansion in the 18th and the 19th centuries. The events that influenced the destiny of the Caucasus most were the annexation of the Crimea and of the territory of the Great Steppe during the rule of Catherine II and the Treaty of Georgievsk of 1783, which brought the Kingdom of Georgia under the Russian protectorate. After these developments further Russian expansion in the Caucasus became, from the point of view of geopolitics, a foregone conclusion. Just as predictably, the Russian government proceeded to "civilize" the newly acquired territory and make it "manageable" by the Imperial bureaucracy. The abolition of slave trade was one of the first logical steps a colonial administration could take within the framework of such a program.

Russian abolitionism may appear exotic, if not aberrant because it was pursued by a state, which, at the same time, kept the majority of its own population in the condition of serfdom often equaled by the contemporaries to slavery. And yet, as this book sought to demonstrate, the Imperial authorities fought to abolish slave trade in the Caucasus with extraordinary commitment and vigor. In pursuing this cause, the Russian imperial bureaucrats, both military and civilian, enjoyed full and often enthusiastic support of their society. The support flowed equally from the top of the military and from the rank-and-file of the army, making the anti-slavery sentiment perhaps the strongest ideological motif in the longest and dreariest war in Russian history. The key to this puzzle lay in the peculiar position of the Russian Empire in the space of the contemporary geopolitics and of the emergent geoculture of the European imperialism.

Ever since the beginning of the 18th century, from the time of the Petrine reforms Russia perceived its place in the concert of the European powers as its due. From the Western standpoint, however, the quick

transformation of Muscovy, seen essentially as the epitome of Asiatic backwardness and uncouthness, could not be regarded but as superficial and unconvincing. The patina of European culture acquired by the Russian elite could not outweigh the persistence of the institution of serfdom, Russia's profoundly aristocratic legal system or the complete absence of civil liberties. Moreover, the momentum of the Russia's Imperial expansion, receiving a considerable boost after the defeat of Napoleon, was getting stronger. It was only a matter of time before the colonial interests of Russia would clash with these of its former allies in the Napoleonic wars. It is no wonder, therefore, that the status of Russia as that of a "Great European Power" was seen as suspect by the West.

There was another factor, making the European status of the Russian Empire even more questionable. Ever since this new power from the East came to play a significant role in the affairs of Europe, it could not avoid associations with another large imperial presence there, the Ottomans. It was a much older player in the European geopolitical game, and also one which, due to its Islamic religion, was explicitly treated as the cultural "other". There were, indeed, significant similarities between these two contenders for a place in the European concert of powers, especially when observed from the Western viewpoint.

Conscious of their precarious position between Europe and Asia, the Russian elites found themselves constantly triangulating their geopolitical and cultural strategies against two major examples: the positive example of the West (the highly desirable affinity) and the negative example of the East embodied in the Ottoman sultanate, a despotism to be distanced from at all costs. The abolitionist policy served both these goals to near perfection. Since the Caucasian slave trade was firmly based on the demand of the Ottoman market for its merchandise, the Russians could in this case literally kill two birds with one stone: establish beyond any possible doubt their own place in the exclusive club of the European powers and, at the same time, remove themselves from any association with such Asiatic phenomena as slavery or despotism that drives it. In this case, as we have seen, the ambitions of the Russian government coincided with the hopes and ideals of the country's liberal intellectuals: both groups of the ruling class, each extremely influential in their own way, tried to associate themselves as much as possible with the Western political ideals and to remove themselves from the shadow of the Orient with all its attributes.

Moreover, in the wake of the new Age of Enlightenment the ruling classes of Russia actively sought different ideological strategies to sup-

port their self-perception and claims to recognition as equals in the Western system of the Imperial politics. The struggle against slave trade immediately put Russia in the vanguard of Europe's humanitarian causes and even allowed for some feeling of superiority towards such Western states as fell behind in the cause, as was the case of the American South. Although Russia's participation in the intercepting of the slavers' ships in the Atlantic was mostly symbolic, it was important as a political statement. As in case of the abolitionism in the Caucasus, the goals of the government coincided with the ideals of liberal intellectuals. As a result, stories of how the Russian sailors saved Africans from slavery became extremely popular with the Russian public.

Yet, it is very important to keep in mind that the emotional energy of the Russian anti-slavery effort could not be attributed to the elites alone. Popular tradition dating back centuries and the folkloric imagery of the Tartar raiding played a role that could not be overestimated. Since the predominant majority of the Russian peasants remained illiterate well into the 20th century, most of their historical representations and ideas came from the oral tradition. In the historical songs and ballads, the events of the "Mongol Yoke" of the 12th–14th centuries remained just as fresh and important as the more recent Tartar raids of the Russian South, wars with "Turks" or even the invasion of Napoleon's armies. In this way, the historical trauma of captivity and slavery retained its central place in the popular concepts of Russian history long after the real danger of such events was removed from the hinterland. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Russian soldiers (who were recruited from the peasant class) perceived the slave trade in the Caucasus as a thoroughly evil thing. This idea was, of course, strengthened by the fact that many of the soldiers were themselves taken prisoner by the natives or knew of someone who was. Romantic representations of these folkloric images became extremely popular in the mid-19th century and inspired works by Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy and a number of less known Russian writers. It stands to reason, therefore, that the strong anti-slavery sentiment served as an additional powerful factor, which supported the Russian abolitionist movement in the Caucasus in spite of all the significant difficulties in its way.

When we look at the driving forces of the Russian abolitionism, we see a unique amalgam of Imperial geopolitical aggrandizement, colonial racism of the Western kind, romanticized folkloric tradition and the enlightened ideals of the liberal elites. Each of these components had serious reasons for being part of the elimination of the Caucasian slave

trade. But what brought all these forces into direct contact with the phenomenon of the Caucasian slave trade and started the inevitable chain reaction of resistance, suppression and the rest of political and military developments was, of course, the Imperial expansion of Russia. The geopolitical goals of the growing Empire were quite clear—it was building its position at the expense of the declining Ottomans. The annexation of the Crimea, Novorossia and the Steppe led to a massive feudal colonization as serf agriculture was extended into the vast new fertile lands, bringing unprecedented prosperity and glamour to the ruling elites of the Catherinian era. The momentum of expansion, once gained, could not be lost, at least not if the elites could help it—therefore, the policy of abolition of slave trade became the ideological banner for the Imperial expansion. This part of the Russian anti-slave-trade campaign was easily seen in the West and, for the most part, it was the only one that was ever noticed there.

It is not surprising that the Western public failed to see much in common between the European and North American abolitionism and its Russian Imperial counterpart. If anything, these two phenomena could be compared to mirror images: they were opposite in every respect in spite of superficial similarity. Apart from an “Orientalist” approach to all the peoples and cultures beyond the borders of Europe/USA, they shared no other features in their ideology. First, unlike the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which was established and run by the Europeans in the first place, slave trade in the Caucasus was an ancient and essential part of the Caucasian as well as the Ottoman social and economic structures, morals and customs. Second, due to its strong roots, slavery in the Caucasus was tenacious and extremely resistant to all attempts of its abolition. Also, unlike the European and American slave owners and slave traders, Russian subjects were themselves quite often sold into slavery until as late as mid-19th century.

We all know what happens when an irresistible force meets with an immovable object. Such a confrontation could be observed when the Russian government began its effort to eliminate the slave trade in the Caucasus. Even if the comparison of the Russian Imperial bureaucracy to an irresistible force may seem a bit exaggerated, the Caucasian slave trade as an example of an immovable object answers quite well. It was a really formidable phenomenon with historical roots thousands of years deep on its both ends: that of the supply and that of the demand.

The key to understanding the enduring character of the Caucasian

slave trade lay in the social and economic structure of the local societies and in the long-running incorporation of the region into the Eastern Mediterranean realm. The Caucasus has long functioned in the peripheral position to the Mediterranean centers such as Constantinople, Cairo, and Venice. Ever since the first Greek settlements were established on the Northern shore of the Black Sea in the 6th century BC, the region of the Caucasus became involved into a network of commercial and political relations with them, as well as—eventually—with the rest of the Greek Mediterranean. The growing colonies experienced constant shortage of slave labor, which was needed in all spheres of their expanding economy. As soon as it was discovered that the Caucasian societies could seriously alleviate this shortage by selling prisoners of local wars to Greek slave merchants, the pattern of mutual dependency was established for centuries to come. The successor-states of the Greek colonies (including such giants as Parthia or Byzantine Empire) grew to rely on the constant supply of the Caucasian slaves as one of the most basic needs for a well-functioning society. Caucasian slaves became an institution sanctified by tradition, and their unique role in the Mediterranean world was further enhanced by legends told about their native land. In the course of centuries slaves from the Caucasus acquired the reputation for being the most beautiful, graceful and loyal, making them the elite of the slave market, always much sought after and commanding top prices. As other sources of slaves, such as sub-Saharan Africa, became more available, the position of the Caucasian slaves was, if anything, getting only stronger. By that time the Ottoman ruling elite was dependent on constant supply of European young women for its own reproduction, since for generations such women (mostly slaves from the Caucasus or from the Balkans) were selected as favored concubines in the harems of the rich and powerful. This dependency was openly admitted by the Ottoman administration in the late 19th century, when the abolition of slave trade in the Ottoman Empire became a topic of discussion for the first time.

Such incorporation of the Caucasian societies into the Mediterranean systems of social and economic exchange explains the long-lived and never declining demand for the unique merchandise the Caucasus could offer. If anything, its role became only more important, as other sources of high-status slaves (such as the Balkans or the Southern Great Steppe) eventually dried out by the 19th century.

The supply end of the Caucasian slave trade was even stronger than that of the demand. It had its own reproductive mechanism, a kind of socio-economic *perpetuum mobile*, which generated energy for all the

political, social and cultural processes in the area. In all Caucasian societies slave trade played an important social and economic role. It provided a way of acquiring otherwise inaccessible life-supporting goods and served as means of establishing and maintaining varied social structures. However, the degree of its importance was different in different areas of the Caucasian region.

In the Georgian kingdoms, slave trade was the privilege and status symbol of the highest nobility. By conducting slave trade, the princely houses asserted their exclusive rights to wage war and take captives, and by selling these captives they acquired the luxury items and sums in cash they would have never been able to get for the agricultural products of their lands. At the same time, slave trade was for them only one of the many sources of their wealth and power, no matter how lucrative and traditional.

In the societies of the North-East, slave trade was conducted by (or in the name of) the noble elites of the local chiefdoms. Since the mineral and agricultural resources of this region were much more limited than those in the Southern Caucasus, the dependence of the local societies on the slave trade was much greater. Although the potentates and their retinues were as interested in the luxury items as their Georgian counterparts, they also depended on imports for such staples as salt and iron, which made a lot of difference in their attitude towards slave trade. Here, the supply of slaves for the merchants had to be constant in order to satisfy constant demand in staples, which could never be otherwise met by other local exports, such as products of animal husbandry. Therefore, raiding activity became one of the most important occupations of the local nobility and by far the most important source of its wealth. This warrior culture of ritualized warfare became also the most important way of maintaining one's social status: it was unthinkable for a young man of noble birth not to prove his worth by participating in raids for slaves and other valuables (horses, money, and precious metals). This way slave trade became the main privilege and obligation of the nobility of the North-Eastern Caucasus.

Much of what was just said about the North-East is applicable also to the North-West of the Caucasus, only on a broader base and in more dire circumstances. Here, as we have seen, the agricultural and mineral resources were almost non-existent; to such extent that even fresh water was scarce in some areas. The possibilities of profitable trade were significantly less than in the North-East, since there were no trade routes or trade centers close to this area. The coast was inhospitable, and

only small sea craft could find a way to anchor there. All this made slave trade practically the only resource, available to the local population in order to satisfy the demand in the imported staples, such as salt, iron and cloth. Unlike the North-East, however, the societies of the North-West were “democratic”, i.e. what was the privilege and obligation of the nobility in the North-East, was an expectation which every adult male in the North-West was supposed to meet. Therefore, slave trade here was the most important economic activity of all able-bodied males, who knew that the survival of their family and community depended on their ability to acquire slaves for exchange for salt and iron. These societies, precariously located in a place almost totally devoid of anything humans need for life, were literally built upon the foundation of slave trade, since nature provided them with no other building material.

However, no matter what different roles slave trade played in the three different large regions of the Caucasus, there was one feature that was common to all of them: everywhere slave trade was strictly separated from the local systems of slavery/dependence. Nowhere the owners (except in very rare cases of dire need or total collapse of the social structures, as it happened after the immigration to the Ottoman Empire) sold their own dependents into slavery, since such a practice contradicted the patriarchal nature of the Caucasian societies, no matter what their social particulars. Therefore, raiding was the only means of acquiring slaves for sale all over Caucasus, and that was what the Russians encountered when they arrived there.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that it was the easiest to eliminate slave trade in the areas where it served mostly as a supplementary economic activity predominantly related to high social status and the acquisition of luxury items. As soon as alternative sources of luxury, different ways to achieve high status and attendant new cultural norms were introduced, slave trading became redundant and, as such, easily abandoned. Viceroy Vorontsov’s success in Georgia can be explained exactly in this way: by inducing and inducting the Georgian feudal elite to the European culture, Vorontsov by the same token marginalized and supplanted the older Persia-oriented cultural values and tastes. At the same time he made sure Georgian nobility had the means to support themselves in their new lifestyle by affording them preferential treatment by the Imperial administration. The attitude towards slave trade in Georgia drastically changed in the course of less than a decade, from being seen as a symbol of high status and wealth to that of backwardness and barbarianism.

A similar, although a more lengthy and difficult process went on in the principalities of the North-Eastern Caucasus. The abolition of slave trade was more difficult there because the Russian administrators had to deal with not one, but many hierarchically structured elites, many of which were conducting ritualized warfare with each other for generations. Assimilation of these elites into the ruling classes of the Russian Empire was more complicated also because most of them were not Christian and saw no advantages in becoming subjects of the Tsar. Ironically, along with some military pressure, Russians received unexpected help from the fiercest enemy they ever had in the Caucasus. In building his Imamate, Imam Shamil treated the aristocratic elites of the North-East with such cruelty, subjected them to such humiliation and imposed on them such discipline, that many of them began to see Russians in a completely different light. The Tsar's administration, after all, offered its allies a status of Russian Imperial nobility, it gave them opportunity for military service as high-ranking officers and, most importantly, confirmed their status as potentates of their respective domains, while Shamil was known to depose rulers and even eliminate whole noble families on a mere suspicion of disobedience. Between the stick of military pressure and the carrot of all the advantages of being part of the Russian Imperial ruling class, the elites of the North-East eventually turned to Russia, finding the egalitarian ideals of Shamil's theocratic state even less compatible with their interests, than serving the Tsar. As in case of Georgia, after that the elimination of slave trade became just a matter of dealing with "exceptions" from the rule, which took a little more time and effort.

Things were very different in the societies of the North-West of the Caucasus, where slave trading was the most important single source of life's necessities. Here, it became the very foundation of all the social and economic activity. It became, for all practical purposes, the bearing structure for the society itself, the single most important institution, defining its every function. If, in case of Georgia and in most principalities of the North-East slave trade was the privilege of the nobility, in the democratic tribes of the North-West, it was the right and, indeed, the obligation of every adult male. Only through participation in raids could a man assert his social status, acquire property and prove his ability to support a family. Only through slave trade could the inhabitants of the North-West get access to such economic staples and salt and iron, not to mention manufactured goods, such as cloth or guns. Such system of heavy dependency on imported staples had been established long before the Russian conquest became an even remote threat. It was, therefore,

impossible to change one of the factors in this dependency without critically altering another. No matter what severe methods were used by the Russians against slave trade, as long as the social structure of the local societies remained intact, nothing could be done to eliminate it, save the elimination of its source.

Here again the Russians received help in their mission from the state-building practices of Imam Shamil, who effectively did what they could never achieve, while organizing his *Jihad* against the Infidels. He created a centralized state where none had existed before and drastically changed the social structures in most of the societies of the North-West. Jihad was proclaimed as the only moral value of Shamil's Imamate, and participation in the Holy War became the only acceptable way to achieve fortune and glory for any man. At the same time, Shamil dispensed with all the democratic liberties and institutions of the societies, which comprised the Imamate. He created a strictly disciplined hierarchy of command where dissent or even hesitation was punished swiftly and cruelly. Where once the Russian military had encountered dozens of tribes which were engaged in complex mutual relations, and where it had been almost impossible to pinpoint the center of resistance, there now stood a solid state structure, easily understandable to any able bureaucrat and easily crushable by the military means, given enough time and resources. The outcome of the Caucasian war became predestined from the time Shamil became the sole leader of the anti-Russian resistance. Ironically also, the network of Shamil's administration—*quadis* and *naibs*—was almost wholesale incorporated by the Russian bureaucracy once the conquest was complete. Once the traditional social structures were broken by Shamil, the Russians had no problem suppressing the slave trade and substituting other means for procuring staples through the new post-Imamate system of administration.

The problem of slave trade, however, was not solved with Shamil's defeat. There remained a few societies, which withstood the pressure to join the Imamate, or joined it later and were not yet drastically transformed by it. These were the tribes the Russians despaired of, as it became obvious by the 1870s. The only solution to the slave trade problem was to get rid of it most literally—by getting rid of the population that was the source of it. To the credit of the Russian bureaucrats, they did not adopt the practice of sending small-pox infected items of clothing to the offending societies, but found a way which promised to satisfy everybody. The great population exchange of the 1870 was designed to provide the Russian empire with the loyal co-religionists (Greeks and Armenians), while

ridding it for good of the discontented Circassian tribes together with their slave-trading habits. Needless to say, schemes like that, when carried out by large bureaucracies, always go wrong even when no conscious malicious intent is involved. Money, allocated for the project, gets stolen, local authorities overstep their boundaries in their zeal to report success, rumors circulate and general panic adds to the disaster. The tragic loss of life of the *muhajees* can be attributed to just such circumstances. Bureaucracies failed them on both ends of their journey—the Russians did not organize their proper and timely departure, the Ottomans were not prepared for their arrival. Thousands of deaths at sea and, later, from disease, exposure and malnutrition were the tragic result of this bureaucratic failure.

Yet, from the standpoint of the Russians the mission of ending the slave trade in the Caucasus had been finally—seventy years after its launch—accomplished. The last piece of the incomprehensible puzzle resisted its place in the picture too long, so it had to be swept under the table by a covert motion of a practiced hand. It was not fair play, but as far as the Russian government was concerned, in this war everything was fair.

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ISSN 1877-9484

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