

THE NORTH CAUCASUS: RUSSIA'S LONG STRUGGLE
TO SUBDUE THE CIRCASSIANS

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FOREWORD

At a recent conference on the Transcaucasus in London, a Georgian participant declared: "We had been taught that our history was all cast in concrete--petrified and dead. But it has come back to life. We are finding that exploring it is very exciting." The process has only begun. All ethnic groups in the fragmenting Soviet Empire, including the Russians themselves, are reexamining their history and drawing conclusions from it that contrast sharply with views that have been imposed upon them by communist dogma. Few areas have as rich a history as the North Caucasus, where Russian armies fought from the 1830s into the 1860s to subdue the indigenous peoples.

The present essay explores a neglected aspect of Russia's prolonged Caucasian wars: the effort to conquer the Circassians and their stubborn resistance which culminated in emigration *en masse* when they were finally defeated. It is a unique effort at historical research, since the Circassian story has never before been recounted. The essay has been prepared as a contribution to a book which will appear in 1991: *The North Caucasus Barrier, the Russian Advance Toward the Muslim World* (Marie Bennigsen Broxup (ed.), to be published by Christopher Hurst & Co., London. It is being issued as a RAND paper because of its timeliness for understanding current ethnic tensions in the Caucasus and its relevance to research efforts currently under way at RAND on related topics.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	iii
Introduction	1
Circassian Identity	8
Russia and the Circassians	15
Turkey and the Circassians	18
Russian Tactics in the 1830s and 1840s	24
Britain and the Circassians	27
The Caucasus in the Crimean War	37
Defeat	49
Aftermath	52

INTRODUCTION

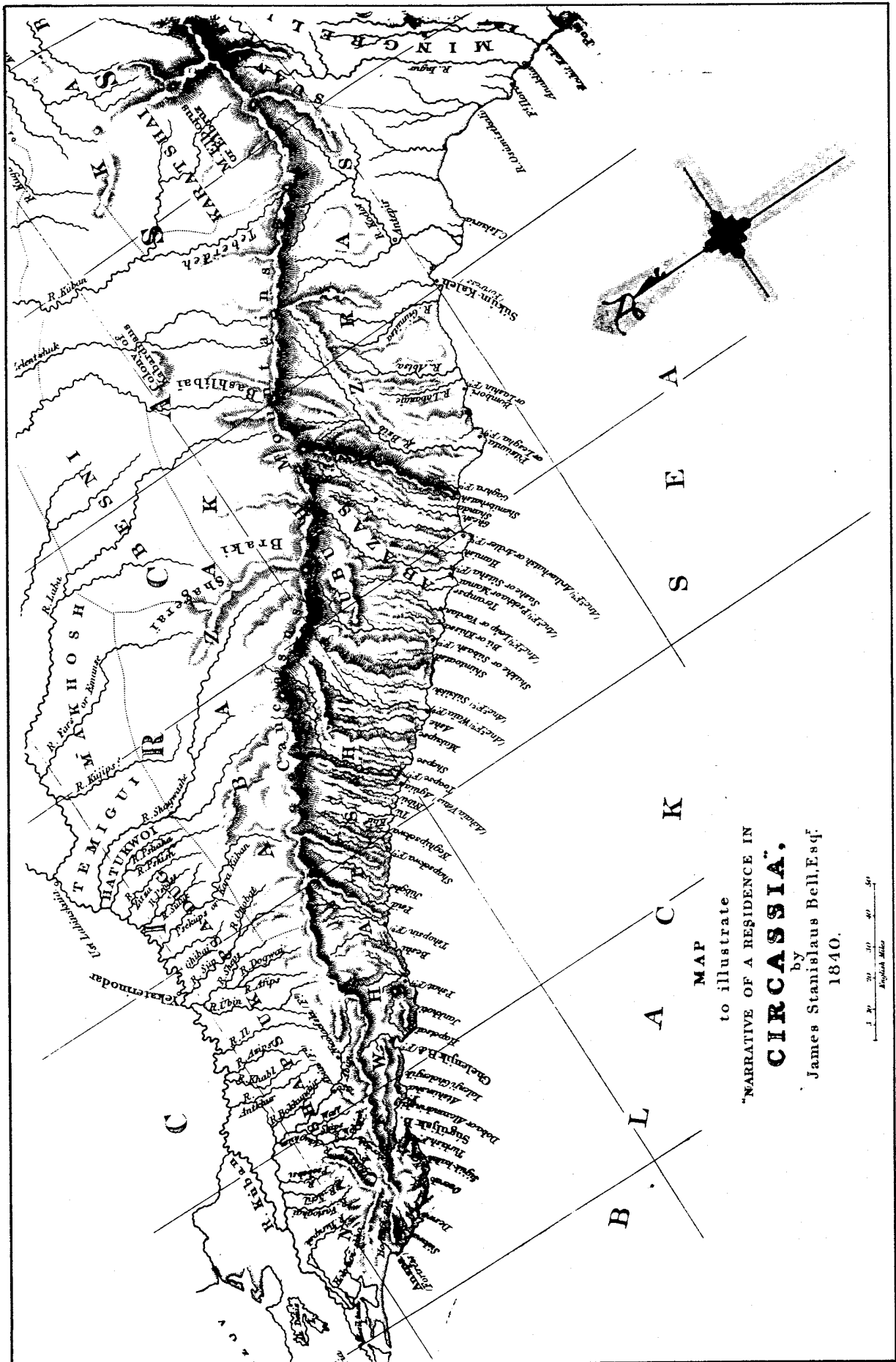
The long struggle of the North Caucasian Mountaineers against Russia in the mid-19th century attracted broad European sympathy and admiration. Among prominent writers who championed the cause of the Caucasian Muslims we find Karl Marx, whose writings about this and other freedom struggles of subject peoples in the Russian Empire, such as the Poles, have been a constant source of embarrassment to the Soviets.¹ Marx and even professional historians described the struggle primarily in terms of the leadership and personality of the Imam Shamil. Shamil is unquestionably one of the most colorful and effective anti-colonial resistance leaders of the 19th century.²

The late 20th century resurgence of Islam as a dynamic political force in many parts of the world, including the Soviet Empire, has generated new interest in Shamil's religious motivation and techniques of leadership. This is welcome and important. But Shamil is only part of the history of North Caucasian resistance. Shamil's successes were all in the eastern Caucasus. The resistance of the Circassians in the western Caucasus is at least as significant, for it began earlier, lasted longer and ended more disastrously for those who were fighting to defend their freedom. There are similarities and some interconnections between these two sides of the struggle. There are also important differences.

Why has the Circassians' long and stubborn resistance to the Russians attracted so little attention? Two reasons can be advanced. One is the fact that leadership among them was diffuse. They produced brave, intelligent, and colorful leaders, but no single personality dominated their struggle. More important, probably, is the fact that when the Circassians were defeated after a half century of hard fighting, the majority of them emigrated to the Ottoman Empire. The lands where they once lived were colonized by Slavs. The small groups

¹See Paul B. Henze, "Marx on Muslims and Russians," *Central Asian Survey*, VI/4, 1987, pp. 33-45.

²Paul B. Henze, "Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasian Mountaineers," *Central Asian Survey* II/1 (1983), pp. 5-44.



MAP

to illustrate

"NARRATIVE OF A RESIDENCE IN

CIRCASSIA.

by

James Stanislaus Bell, Esq.

1840.

0 10 20 30 40 50
English Miles

SOURCE: From Bell, James Stanislaus, "Journal of a Residence in Circassia," Edward Moxon, London, 1840.

of Circassians who remained in their traditional homeland were separated from each other and were less able to maintain their traditions and sense of cohesiveness than the tribes who had supported Shamil. Their dispersal has reduced awareness of them both in the Russian/Soviet Empire and in the West.

The majority of the Mountaineers in the central and eastern Caucasus stayed in their ancestral territories after Shamil's capture, accommodated to Russian rule, but never became fully reconciled to it. Whenever an opportunity to take their destiny into their own hands presented itself, e.g. at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution and during the German invasion in World War II, they revolted. In between, passive resistance persisted. The memory of the long fight which Shamil led remained vividly alive, passed on from father to son.³ Over and over again during 70 years of Soviet rule, intellectuals among these peoples have taken advantage of opportunities to write, lecture, debate and publish about the heroic events of the mid-19th century. Official Kremlin policy toward Shamil has wavered from relative benevolence early in the Soviet period through extreme hostility in the late Stalin era to uneasy accommodation during the past quarter century.⁴

Circassians who emigrated to the Ottoman Empire found it easier to assimilate when they settled in Anatolia among Turks than when they went to Arab lands. Consciousness of Circassian origin is nevertheless widespread among their descendants in modern Turkey and distinctive customs survive. As interest in roots, historic origins and, therefore, in *Dis Turkler* ("Outside Turks") has grown in recent years, scholars in Turkey have directed their attention to Caucasian history as well as that of Central Asia. In Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries which formed part of the Ottoman Empire, substantial compact communities of Circassians have retained their identity. In Jordan they exercise important functions as military officers and businessmen.

³See, e.g., Dmitri I. Trunov, *V Gorakh Dagestana*, Molodaya Gvardia, Moscow, 1958, pp.126-136.

⁴See Paul B. Henze, "The Shamil Problem" in Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Middle East in Transition*, London/New York, 1958, pp. 415-443.

These Circassians have maintained tenuous, though now expanding, links with kinsmen remaining in the Soviet Union. Like them, they have preserved their language and their traditions. All share pride in the bitter struggle their ancestors waged in the 19th century.

What lay behind the Russian advance into the Caucasus? Several distinguished historians see it as the natural result of the advance of the Princes of Muscovy against the Golden Horde which led to the capture of Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1554.⁵ The need to protect conquests already made and to secure trade routes kept drawing the Russians further on. This movement was only occasionally the result of consciously articulated strategic calculations by the people who participated in it. A major component of it in its early stages was the steady expansion of Cossack power and numbers in regions beyond the frontiers. Peter the Great was attempting to implement an energetic expansionist policy when he captured Derbent in 1723, but his forces were overextended and had to withdraw. Catherine the Great was less audacious and more successful.

Many motivations and interests usually combine to determine both the policies and the actions of expanding empires. It is possible to find evidence of a Russian imperial drive toward warm seas well before the 18th century.⁶ But the drive was based on more than strategic calculations. By the end of the 18th century Russian rulers and statesmen had become eager to emulate European colonial powers by expanding into new territories in search of land for settlers, raw materials, increased military security for existing frontiers, and greater political influence beyond them.⁷ The claim that Russia was

⁵W.E.D. Allen, *Problems of Turkish Power in the 16th Century*, Central Asian Research Centre, London, 1963.

⁶Alexandre Bennigsen & Chantal Lemerrier-Quelequejay, "La Poussee vers les Mers Chaudes et la Barriere du Caucase" in *Raiyyet Rusumu, Essays presented to Halil Inalcik...*, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, 1986, pp. 15-46.

⁷"There was an attitude toward expansion that affected the overall climate in which...decisions were made.... This had nothing to do with some legendary Russian drive to obtain warm-water ports or some grand design for the conquest of Asia. Instead, Russia, after a century of westernization, developed a colonialist outlook that was consciously imitative of Western overseas expansion. Exotic alien lands made

carrying out a divinely sanctioned civilizing mission was not always pretense, though it was sometimes expressed pompously and arrogantly.⁸

As they advanced southward the Russians faced unavoidable confrontation with two long-powerful empires which had dominated the Middle East since the 16th century: the Ottoman and the Persian. Territories under Ottoman suzerainty in the Caucasus were vaguely defined at their outer edges. They represented the northeasternmost extension of imperial holdings extending from Hungary across the Black Sea steppes to the Kuban and beyond, where the Ottomans were heirs of Turkic peoples extending back to the Cumans and the Khazars. Persian holdings in the Caucasus had even more ancient beginnings in ties to Georgians and Armenians that had their roots in pre-Roman times. The Persian-dominated Caucasian territories formed the northwest flank of an empire which extended deep into Central Asia. Though the Turkic element in Persia had been strong from the time of the Seljuks, Ottomans and Persians were more often rivals than allies and fought many wars along their frontiers both in the Caucasus and in the lands extending southward to the Persian Gulf. As both empires lost their dynamism in the 18th century this legacy of rivalry served to blind them to the danger which threatened both from the north: the expanding power of Russia.

The Russians succeeded in driving the Persians from the Caucasus more rapidly and decisively than they were able to do with the Ottomans. A series of decisive Russian victories leading first to the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 and culminating in the Treaty of Turkmanchay in 1828 established the border where it has remained ever since, splitting

attractive targets for colonization because it was believed that they could make their colonial master rich, and because the colonial master could in return benefit the subject peoples by introducing them to civilization. Furthermore, all of this would prove that Russia, too, was as great and civilized an empire as those of western Europe." Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1980, p. 163.

⁸E.g. by the poet Lermontov who predicted to the Circassians that they would one day say proudly: "We may truly be slaves, but at least we are slaves of the Ruler of the Universe!"--cited by Walter Kolarz, *Russia and her Colonies*, George Philip, London, 1952, p. 181.

Azerbaijan and leaving the historic Armenian centers, Erevan and Echmiadzin, under Russian control.⁹ The Ottoman Empire was not only an Asian power, but since the 14th century had been deeply involved in the power politics of Europe as well. The desire of European powers to prevent Russia from overwhelming and obliterating the Ottoman state was an important factor in its survival. Politically, developments in the Balkans often affected the course of events in the Caucasus throughout the 19th century. In the end, this interrelationship did not work to the advantage of the inhabitants of the Caucasus. By the early 20th century all the peoples of the Balkans had managed to exploit great-power rivalries to secure independence. Those of the Caucasus all fell under the control of the Russian Empire.

The Caucasian peoples with the most highly developed sense of national identity--the Georgians and the Armenians--became allies of the Russians in their southward advance. Their sense of nationality rested on several interconnected factors: language, religion and historic traditions. Of these, their Christianity was arguably the most important for, even when these peoples were politically fragmented, their ancient church organizations provided a durable national symbol and rallying point for popular sentiment. Though the relationship of these two peoples to the Persian and Ottoman Empires was for centuries characterized by at least as many positive as negative features, by the late 18th century both found the prospect of closer links with Orthodox Christian Russia increasingly attractive. This was not merely a question of Christians desiring to come closer to fellow Christians. There were profound tensions between Armenians and Georgians. Both peoples had found ways to cohabit successfully with Islam for a thousand years. Russia's attractiveness for them had more to do with the fact that the two great Middle Eastern Islamic empires had fallen into a

⁹Muriel Atkin's detailed study of these developments concludes: "The Iranian government was left defeated, humiliated and less capable than ever to deal with the great challenges of a rapidly changing world. A long process of decline had begun, and its aftermath is with us still." *Op. cit.*, p. 164. Russian ambitions to expand further into Persia did not, of course, end here.

seemingly irreversible decline. It was increasingly difficult for peoples on their periphery to manage a stable, calculable relationship with them. Georgians saw their monarchy threatened by neighboring Islamic principalities over whom distant Islamic capitals exercised little control. Armenians had long since ceased to occupy any extensive consolidated territory in the Caucasus and lived either as peasants among Muslims and Georgians or as craftsmen and traders in towns where they almost never formed a majority. When the prospect of living under the protection of a dynamic Russian Empire became a real possibility, both Georgians and Armenians welcomed it.

The dominant Shia Muslim inhabitants of Azerbaijan--who had long lived in khanates whose rulers acknowledged varying degrees of Persian overlordship--were much more equivocal about the Russian advance. The peoples of Daghestan and those who lived in the mountains and foothills to the north of the main Caucasus range were mostly Sunni Muslims, though some had been converted only in the 17th and 18th centuries. Speaking of themselves as *Dagli* or *Tawlu*--Mountaineers--they included more than a dozen tribal groups speaking languages which were for the most part not mutually intelligible. They had little sense of nationhood, but Islam and opposition to the imperial Russian advance gave them a sense of common purpose, though realization of interlocking mutual interests was often not strong enough to overcome traditional tribal rivalries and feuds or social strains within these tribes.

The basic Russian tactic everywhere in the Caucasus was to co-opt indigenous elites and turn them into allies in gaining domination over their peoples. The tactic proved particularly effective in Georgia. Among the Mountaineers, however, it was much less successful, for traditional leaders who cooperated with the Russians often lost the confidence of their people. As Russian pressure increased, more and more Mountaineers were ready to take their defense into their own hands. The situation was ripe for Shamil, whose populist, purist Islam appealed to the majority of tribesmen in the central and eastern Caucasus.

Geography played a role, too. Advance into the Caucasus was easiest for the Russians along the Caspian littoral. The only militarily feasible route through the mountains was up the valley of the Terek and over the Daryal Pass. In advancing along this route the Russians had a further advantage, for here lived the Ossetians, least Islamicized of the Mountaineers, Iranian rather than Turkic or indigenous in origin, and to some degree already Christianized and amenable to cooperation with the Russians. It was through their territory and with their collaboration that the Georgian Military Highway was constructed.

By far the most difficult area to penetrate militarily was the long Black Sea coast. Geographically this region was extremely fragmented, consisting of a succession of lush valleys formed by short, non-navigable rivers leading back into the high mountains with steep sections of coast and only poor natural harbors in between. Rainfall was high, so forests grew luxuriantly. When cleared for agriculture and grazing, these valleys were a dependable source of food and could support a comparatively large population. The Circassian peoples who had inhabited these territories from time immemorial kept livestock, farmed, and lived in dispersed settlements linked by trails. No major highways existed. No cities developed. The Circassians were fragmented into many tribes and sub-groups who were often at odds with each other, raided each other's cattle, and made a sport of fighting. There was, nevertheless, a deep historical consciousness and sense of cultural unity among them.

CIRCISSIAN IDENTITY

After the Georgians and the Armenians, the Circassians came closest of all the Caucasian peoples to developing the prerequisites for nationhood. They had traditions of roots extending back to the dawn of recorded history.¹⁰ Their ancestors may well have greeted the first

¹⁰For an example of the scope and tenacity of Circassian traditions see Shauket Mufti Habjoka, *Heroes and Emperors in Circassian History*, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 1972. Though this book makes little distinction between myth and history and is chaotic in its organization, it is significant for the evidence it provides of the tenacity of traditions and national spirit prevailing, after five and more generations of exile, among Circassians living in the Arab Middle East.

Greeks who came to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece. Archaeological and linguistic evidence support the hypothesis that people speaking dialects ancestral to Circassian may have extended deep into the present area of the Ukraine in prehistoric times.¹¹ They appear to have been the dominant inhabitants along the northern and eastern Black Sea littoral from the Crimea to the mouth of the Rioni (the ancient Phasis) in Hellenistic times.

For the next 2000 years the Circassians lived on the edge of the Greco-Byzantine world and interacted with it. Greek trading colonies, followed by Byzantine traders and eventually by the Genoese, provided links with the Mediterranean. (In the 19th century Circassians still attributed all old fortifications along their coast to the *Ceneviz*, i.e., the Genoese). Nomads whose way of life had been formed in great open spaces showed little inclination to challenge the Circassians for possession of their rugged mountains and heavily forested foothills.¹² Only along the northern edges of their territory were the Circassians gradually pushed back--driven out or assimilated (probably a combination of both)--by the Turkic pastoral groups who came in across the steppes from the east. Circassian princes intermarried with the leading families of these groups and formed alliances. Through centuries of movement of peoples across the hills and plains directly to the north of the mountains, Circassians remained an important component in the population of the regions that came to be known as Greater and Lesser Kabarda.¹³

Christianity came to the Circassian lands from Byzantium. Ties were also maintained through Christianized Georgia, but as far as we know Christianity never became more than a veneer over traditional beliefs and customs. If a national church ever formed among the

¹¹See W.E.D. Allen, *Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings (1589-1605)*, Hakluyt Society, Cambridge, 1970, Vol. I, p. 24. (Hereinafter cited as *Embassies*)

¹²*Ellis's Memoir of a map of the countries comprehended between the Black Sea and the Caspian; with an account of the Caucasian nations and Vocabularies of their languages*, J. Edwards, London, 1788.

¹³Allen, *Embassies*, Vol. I, pp. 270-285.

Circassians, it was never strong and disappeared in medieval times. No separate priestly class developed to maintain literacy and preserve written records. The Circassian language remained unwritten and unstandardized. Thus Christianity was of only marginal importance in the survival of Circassian identity. Neither, until a very late period, was Islam. Islam appears first to have penetrated Circassian territories from the Crimea, where a strong Turkic dynasty, the Girays, who claimed direct descent from Genghis Khan, established control over broad steppe territories and had close relations with the northern Circassian tribes, especially those of Kabarda. After the Russian conquest of the Crimea in 1783, many Crimeans took refuge among the Circassians.¹⁴

A Circassian Muslim dignitary explained to the Englishman James Bell in 1837 that since it was only about sixty years since "general religious observances" and "social order" (by which he meant Islam) had been introduced into Circassia, a mixed situation had to be expected. Four books, he said, were recognized by Circassians as important for their system of religion and morality: the Bible (by which he seems to have meant the Pentateuch), the Psalms of David, the Evangelists, and the Koran. His own view was that the revelations which Mohammed had communicated were entitled to greater respect than those of Christ, which he claimed had come through the medium of the Archangel Michael.¹⁵

The attitude of the majority of the population toward religion was even more eclectic. Ceremonies honoring Tshible--the thunder-god--and Merem--the Virgin Mary--were important annual events and included feasting, prayers, and dancing in which both sexes participated together. Ancient crosses in sacred groves were still common in Circassian lands in the early 19th century and burial grounds were

¹⁴For background on the Crimea see Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1771-1783*, CUP, Cambridge, 1970 and Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, Hoover Institution, Stanford, CA, 1978.

¹⁵James Stanislaus Bell, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia*, Edward Moxon, London, 1840, Vol. I, p. 178. See also Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Voelker des Kaukasus und ihre Freiheitskaempfe gegen die Russen*, Verlag Lizius, Frankfurt/M, 1849, p. 125.

usually located nearby. Some of the crosses became the object of controversy, as Bell reported:

There is a great debate at Sashe about removing some ancient crosses, of which there are three particularly noted--one pendent from a tree and two erect--besides several others of iron, as these are, and some gilt. The people, in general, wish them removed for fear they should fall into the hands of the Russians, who might thereupon found some claim to the country as having been originally Christian; while the chief, Ali Achmet Bey--who drinks wine profusely, has never been known to say Mussulman prayers, and is suspected of a bias to the ancient faith of the country--protests against the profanation--by removal--of these relics of their forefathers; prefers defending them where they are, and claims the right of ordering that they shall be left intact.¹⁶

There was little differentiation of profession among Circassians. All farmed and most kept livestock. Those who acquired wealth kept large herds of cattle and many horses. Forests were rich in game and supplied more than enough wood for fuel and construction. People did not live in fortified villages with stone towers like the inhabitants of the central and eastern Caucasus. Isolated farmsteads were common, often surrounded by orchards and groves of walnut trees. Circassians seldom built in stone but preferred wood and thatch. In terms of the times, health conditions were good and there was usually surplus population. For hundreds of years, in fact, the main export of the Circassian lands was people. As dedicated as they were to their own traditions, Circassian men were always ready to venture into the wider world as soldiers. The Mamlukes of Egypt were largely Circassians and Georgians. The tradition of military service in the lands to the south continued into the 18th century. Even before their beauty became legendary in Ottoman times, Circassian women were sought after as slaves and concubines throughout the Middle East.¹⁷

¹⁶J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 24.

¹⁷See the introduction to Allen, *Embassies*, Vol. I, pp. 23-29.

Circassian society was originally hierarchical with four classes: princes (*pshe*), nobles (*vork*, *uzden*), freemen (*tokav*, *thfokotl*), and serfs (*pshilt*), but there were many regional variations. By the time of the great resistance struggle in the 19th century, a great deal of differentiation in social structure had developed with and among Circassian tribal groups. There had apparently been decisive changes in the 17th century. Bell was told by elders:

...about two centuries ago there was a fierce struggle between the free men and the nobles of Circassia, and...the power of the latter, who were then much more numerous...was then first effectively broken. Mohammedanism farther reduced it. Its renovation, and the reduction of all below to a servile equality, have been distinctly promised to individuals of that class by the Russians in the event of their success. But although the liberty now enjoyed appears thus to have been wrenched from the hands of the nobles, there remains enough of respect and precedence allowed to those of that class to evince the forbearance and good feeling of the rest; and the expression in common use [for] done genteelly is *vorkhi khabse* (*a la noble*). Nobles boast of Arabian or Crimean ancestry.¹⁸

Traditional princes remained strongest among the tribes of Kabarda who were the first to have extensive contact with the Russians. They had lost much of their authority--if, indeed they ever had it--in the mountain and coastal tribes.

Islam was most readily accepted initially by the upper classes and in some cases, in spite of its theoretical leveling effect, bolstered the authority of princes and nobles. Crimean influence in the north from the 15th century onward and the influx of Crimeans after 1783 strengthened the position of Islam. So did deliberate Ottoman efforts to encourage its consolidation and spread. But, like Christianity, Islam, too, remained a veneer. Circassia differed sharply from the eastern Caucasus. Muridism had very limited appeal. Conflict between *adat* (customary law) and *shariat* (Muslim canon law) seldom reached serious dimensions among Circassians. Islamic law tended to be observed

¹⁸J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 219.

only when it did not come into direct conflict with *adat*. The German Moritz Wagner reported a discussion among an assembly of *uzdens* in the 1840s about whether grain should be burned in case of a Russian attack:

One chieftain remarked: "Our book forbids this." "Oh," rejoined another, "a good deal of nonsense is written in our book." A remark of this kind would hardly have been ventured by [Turks].... It would never occur [to them] openly to reject the language of the Koran, whilst the principal grounds for resistance to Russia among the Circassians are an innate love of freedom and independence together with, perhaps, the hope of plunder and booty.¹⁹

The factors which made for divisiveness among Circassians were also part of their heritage from the past: rivalries among the tribes and among clan and family groups within the tribes. There were patterns of feuding which had persisted for generations. Tribal groups did not readily submit to centralized leadership or accept unified command in military operations. Successful offensive action was frequently not sustained and defeats of the enemy not effectively exploited. Individual warriors preferred to charge the enemy in the open on horseback but were reluctant to take time to fortify defiles, build defense lines, and plan either sustained attacks or defense in depth. There was little coordination between groups in battle, and careful preparations for a continual campaign was a concept Circassians found hard to accept. These shortcomings were not absent among other Caucasians, but Shamil's strong leadership mitigated them.

In a sense, therefore, the Circassians seem to present an anomaly-- a people with a common language, common pride in their history, and fierce adherence to traditions, but without a written language or recorded laws, and with an absence of administrative structure or of organization to provide for their own defense. It was not only their classical education that caused many of the Europeans who visited the

¹⁹Moritz Wagner, *Travels in Persia, Georgia and Koordistan with Sketches of the Cossacks and the Caucasus*, Hurst-Blackett, London, 1856, Vol. I, pp. 259-60.

Circassians in the 19th century to compare them to the ancient Greeks and see among them survivals of classical Greek customs and habits. Classical Greeks were never united politically, even though they had developed urban culture to a much higher degree. Individual city-states fought bitter wars against each other. Still, Greeks were all conscious of belonging to a Greek nation which was sharply differentiated from the barbarians around them. Like the ancient Greeks, Circassian tribes raided each other and took prisoners and hostages and then met in councils on neutral ground to regulate relations between tribes and clans, debate political issues, and then hold games and festivals, but their feeling of common nationality was not institutionalized beyond this level.

The Circassian dialects were all mutually intelligible, especially those grouped under the heading *Adyge*, which came to be used by almost all Circassians as a common name not only for their language but for themselves as a people and for their country.²⁰ Circassian is phonetically among the most complex languages in a region notorious for language variety and intricacy. It is extraordinarily rich in consonants, with its basic dialects featuring nearly 60 consonantal phonemes. The grammar permits many unusual forms of expression. The vocabulary is unique to this Caucasian group, though it became infused with many Turkic loanwords.²¹ Circassians had a rich tradition of oral poetry. Oratory was a highly developed art. Leaders gained as much renown for their speechmaking ability as for their skill in battle.

Few outsiders learned Circassian and not many, except occasional Armenian traders, regularly penetrated into Circassian territory until the Russian advance began. The *lingua franca* of the entire Caucasus was Turkish, then termed Tatar. It was widely understood among Circassians on the coast because of regular trade with Turkey and contacts with

²⁰The subject is treated in the introductory chapters of a classic Circassian historical work originally composed in the 1840s: Shora Bekmurza Nogmov, *Istoriya Adygeiskovo Naroda*, reissued by the Kabardino-Balkarskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, Nal'chik, 1958.

²¹Dr. L. Loewe, *Dictionary of the Circassian Language*, George Bell, London, 1854.

Ottoman administrators. Men who had been to Turkey or had extensive contact with Ottoman officials spoke Ottoman Turkish well. Of the situation prevailing in Circassia in the 1830s Bell commented: "The number of persons I have met who can speak Turkish has...been considerable; many can also read and write it."²² Knowledge of Arabic was much rarer among Circassians than in the eastern Caucasus, where it was maintained by adherence to Koranic traditions and religious links with Iran and Arab lands. When religious schools began teaching small numbers of children in the 19th century, Turkish was more frequently used than Arabic.

RUSSIA AND THE CIRCASSIANS

The first Russians to come into regular contact with Circassians were Cossacks who established themselves in the steppes north of the Kuban river in the 16th and 17th centuries and advanced up the Terek valley. This region, Kabarda, has a complicated history. Circassians and several other steppe and mountain peoples have interacted and mixed. Some Kabardan princes traced their ancestry back to an original leader named Inal, believed to have returned from Mamluke service in Egypt. The country was divided among several local princes. Cossacks, who included men of very diverse origins, struck up alliances with these leaders and married and intermingled with both Circassians and Nogay Tatars, adopting many of their customs and style of life which was in many respects of a higher quality than that which the Russians had attained at the time.²³

In common with most Ottomans, the Circassian princes of Kabarda did not originally perceive the expanding power of Moscow as an immediate threat to them but looked upon the still distant Russians as potential allies against rivals and enemies nearer at hand. Circassian envoys from the Besleney tribe who dominated the strategically important region of Besh-tau (*Pyatigorye*--the Five Mountains) sent envoys to Moscow as

²²J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 87.

²³"Commentary 12, The Princely Families of Kabarda" in Allen, *Embassies*, Vol. I, pp. 270-285.

early as 1552. In 1556 these Circassians aided the Russians in attacking territories of the Crimean Khan. Other Kabardan princes soon made approaches to Moscow and the most powerful of them, Kemirgoko, who was known to the Russians as Temryuk Aydarovich, succeeded in 1561 in getting Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible) to accept his daughter Kucheney in marriage. Baptized Maria Temryukovna, she died in 1569 without issue and her father's fortunes, which had for a few years prospered because of the Russian connection, took an abrupt turn for the worse when he was defeated by the Crimean Khan in alliance with the Nogays in 1570. Other Kabardan princes who allied themselves with the Russians fared better, over time, and became founders of several Cherkassky noble lines which eventually played a prominent role in Russian politics during succeeding centuries.²⁴

The Russian state was still too preoccupied with consolidating its control over territories nearer to Muscovy to be interested in gaining direct control of Caucasian territory during the 17th century. Kabardans began to feel direct Russian state power pressing upon them only at the beginning of the 18th century when Russia began making serious military efforts to gain full control over the approaches to the Caucasus. The basic Russian approach was to develop alliance relationships with as much of the Kabardan aristocracy as possible, gain their acquiescence in a permanent Russian presence in the region, and construct chains of fortified settlements. Over time, they achieved considerable success, but there were repeated rebellions, for, like all Circassians, the Kabardan freemen did not acknowledge the dominance of any single prince and some princes resented favoritism shown to rivals. The bulk of the people seldom saw much gain for themselves in Russian domination. This history has been particularly difficult for Soviet historians to deal with and resulted in a great deal of controversy and sophistry about the "voluntary" incorporation of Kabarda into the Russian Empire and which groups among Kabardans actually favored it.²⁵

²⁴Allen, *Embassies*, Vol. I, pp. 282-283.

²⁵N.A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI-XIX vv.*, Sotsekgiz, Moscow, 1958; E.N. Kusheva, *Narody Severnogo Kavkaza i ikh svyazi s Rossiei*, Akademia Nauk, Moscow, 1963.

The Ottomans were reluctant to withdraw from steppe territories over which they had long exercised predominant influence, often in conjunction with the Crimean khans. They attempted to rally the Kabardans during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 to block Russian access to the Caucasus, but Tsarist forces made further advances. In the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynardji which ended this war, the Ottoman Empire was forced to surrender claims of sovereignty over both the Crimea and Kabarda. Russia agreed to recognize the independence of local rulers in both regions. The treaty was ambiguous about the status of the Black Sea coast, which included both Circassian and Georgian lands. Meanwhile, in 1769-70, General Todleben had brought the first organized Russian military force through the Daryal Pass and met with Georgian King Irakli II who ruled the two eastern Georgian kingdoms of Karthli and Kakheti. This expedition marked the beginning of Russia's direct involvement in the affairs of the Transcaucasus. In 1783, by the Treaty of Georgievsk, Irakli accepted Russian protection. In this same year Russia annexed the Crimea, and large numbers of Crimeans began to emigrate to Ottoman territory.

Open war broke out between the Ottoman and Russian Empires again in 1787 and lasted until 1791. There was heavy fighting between Russian and Turkish forces over the fortress of Anapa at the northern end of the Circassian coast. The Russians succeeded in capturing it in 1790 after defeating a large Turkish force which had invaded the Kuban. During this same war, Russian advances against Ottoman territories in the Balkans disturbed Britain and Prussia. For the first time Russia was thwarted in the Caucasus by developments elsewhere in her Empire and by pressure from the European powers--a pattern that would recur frequently in the 19th century. The Poles had risen to oppose partition, and Empress Catherine was ready to make concessions to secure peace with Turkey in order to be able to concentrate her attention on Europe. The Treaty of Jassy of 1792 returned Anapa to Ottoman control.

In the years that followed, Russia advanced most successfully against Persian-held Caucasian territories. The European powers were relatively unconcerned about these. In 1796 Russian forces captured

Derbent and advanced through Baku as far as Karabakh. The death of King Irakli II in 1798 brought about a situation favorable to Russian interests in Georgia. The new king, Georgi XII, "slothful, weak and gluttonous, devout and middle-aged,"²⁶ was unable to rule successfully. He died two years later and competing claimants to the throne fought each other. The Russians took advantage of this confused situation to proclaim incorporation of the two eastern Georgian kingdoms into the Russian Empire in 1801 and advanced against western Georgia, where the Kingdom of Imereti was still oriented toward the Ottoman Empire.

Once again developments in the Caucasus were affected by the course of events in Europe, where Napoleon was ascendant. He succeeded in maneuvering the Ottoman Empire into open war against Russia again in 1807. As a result, after temporary losses on the Caucasian front, Ottoman control over Anapa, Poti, and Akhalkalaki in western Georgia was confirmed in the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812. The Georgians revolted during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in the same year, but Russian control over central and eastern Georgia was eventually reestablished. The Circassians, as a result of all these events, became more consciously oriented toward Istanbul.

TURKEY AND THE CIRCASSIANS

After the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynardji in 1774, the growing power of Russia and the threat of further losses convinced the Ottoman Government of the need to strengthen its position in the North Caucasus. Sultan Abdulhamid I decided to establish a formal governmental structure in the Circassian territories and appointed Ferah Ali Pasha *vali* of Sogucak in 1780. By origin a Georgian slave, he was a good choice, for he understood Caucasian conditions. He developed a coherent program involving several complementary actions: (a) strengthening Ottoman positions militarily; (b) introducing regular administration in the Circassian territories; (c) encouraging the consolidation of orthodox

²⁶W.E.D. Allen, *A History of the Georgian People from the Beginning down to the Russian Conquest in the 19th Century*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1932, p. 214.

Sunni Islam. With great energy he set about renovating and extending fortified positions along the Black Sea Coast, building a major new fort at Anapa. He facilitated the settlement of refugees from the Crimea along the coast. He persuaded the major Circassian tribes of the interior to submit to Ottoman authority and mediation of disputes between them. He took measures to control piracy and began construction of a port at Gelincik. Though Ferah Ali Pasha died in 1785, his successors continued his program, and the Turkish hold on Circassia was substantially strengthened for the tests of strength to come in the early 19th century.²⁷

In 1785 a new force appeared on the North Caucasian scene--a dynamic religious leader who rallied all the native peoples against the Russians: Sheikh Mansur. He has since been seen as a precursor of Shamil's Muridist movement, for his basic religious message and his methods of mobilizing support were very similar.²⁸ At the time, however, to both Turks and Russians he was somewhat of a mystery and until recently he has been erratically treated by historians.²⁹ He was neither a renegade Italian Jesuit nor an Orenburg Tatar serving as a Turkish agent, as many Russians maintained at the time and Soviet historians as late as the 1960s still tried to claim. Recent research in Ottoman archives demonstrates that he was regarded with a good deal of reserve, and at times hostility, by the Ottoman authorities, for Sunni clerics were suspicious of the Nakhshbendi Sufi doctrines which motivated him and his followers.

Born about 1748 in the Chechen village of Aldi and originally called Ushurma, he had led the life of a typical North Caucasian farmer.

²⁷Cemal Gokce, *Kafkasya ve Osmanli Imparatorlugu'nun Kafkasya Siyaseti*, Samil Vakfi, Istanbul, 1979.

²⁸Aytek Kundukh, *Kafkasya Muridizmi (Gazavat Tarihi)*, Gozde Kitaplari Yayinevi, Istanbul, 1987.

²⁹E.g. by W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff in *Caucasian Battlefields*, CUP, Cambridge, 1953, p. 47. The late Alexandre Bennigsen on the basis of both Russian and Ottoman archival sources put this movement in historical perspective in an important article, "Un mouvement populaire au Caucase au XVIIIe siecle" in *Cahiers du Monde russe et sovietique*, V/2 (1964), pp. 159-197.

He took the name Mansur--Victor--when he launched his offensive against the Russians at approximately the same age as Shamil. His mission had been revealed to him in a dream in which the Prophet ordered him to lead a holy war--*gazavat*--against the encroaching unbelievers. Like Shamil, he reached far beyond petty tribal loyalties and preached unity of all North Caucasians. After his first victory over the Russians at his native village, warriors from as far away as Daghestan came to join his forces. During the first period of his *gazavat* Sheikh Mansur repeatedly defeated Russian contingents sent to hunt him down. He assembled an army reputed to contain more than 20,000 men.³⁰ He besieged the Russian fortress of Kizlyar on the Terek, where it forms a delta and flows into the Caspian Sea, but was unable to reduce it. Eventually his forces were defeated in Kabarda and driven from the Kuban, but he fought on for six years, receiving very little Turkish help until the final stages of the war which began in 1787.

If the Turks had been less equivocal about Sheikh Mansur's holy war, they might have gained a good deal by coordinating their military operations against the Russians to take his capabilities into account. Until it was too late they regarded the Sheikh as disruptive of their aim of ending rivalries among competitive Circassian princes and consolidating Sunni Islam among the Circassian rank-and-file.³¹ The Sheikh happened to be in Anapa when the fortress was besieged by Russian forces in 1791 and, after 61 days, surrendered. Captured, he was sent to St. Petersburg and imprisoned in Schlüsselburg, where he died in 1794. If it had not been for this accident, he might well have continued his holy war for years, for he had only reached his mid-40s. The fact that the Ottomans regained control of Anapa in the Treaty of Jassy ensured a Turkish presence in this strategically important region for another generation.

³⁰Tarik Cemal Kutlu, whose recent study *Kuzey Kafkasya'nin İlk Milli Mucahidi ve Onderi, Imam Mansur*, Bayrak Yayimcilik, Istanbul, 1987, is based on careful review of all available primary and secondary sources, concludes that his army probably numbered 6000.

³¹Gokce, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-253; Kutlu, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-45.

Nevertheless, Sheikh Mansur remained alive in legend. Nearly 50 years later a Tatar bard with the distinguished name of Kaplan-Giray was singing a ballad about "Elijah Mansour" who unified the Caucasus to fight against the Russians:

He was born to tread the Moscoff's pride
Down to the lowly dust;
He fought, he conquered, near and wide,
That northern race accursed...³²

Moving through the defile of Gagra, a party of Circassian warriors halted to pray in a cottage said to have been a favorite stopping place of Sheikh Mansour:

No situation could have been better adapted as the headquarters of a guerrilla chieftain: the only approach was by a drawbridge over a deep chasm that once passed, there was an easy communication opened with the whole of the surrounding mountains and glens, capable of serving as a secure retreat to a numerous population, and from whence they could at any time issue and deal destruction on their enemies.³³

Thus, though neither a Circassian nor a Tatar, Sheikh Mansour became for the Circassians a symbol of their resistance struggle--but with many characteristics of a national as well as a religious leader.³⁴

The Russians made no lasting gains in Circassian territory during the first quarter of the 19th century, though they pursued a policy of carrot-and-stick with the Circassians: encouraging disaffection and tribal rivalries, tempting the common people to become dependent on

³²Edmund Spencer, *Travels in Circassia, Krim-Tartary, etc.* Henry Colburn, London, 1839, Vol. II, p. 290. For an appraisal of his influence in the 1840s and another example of a ballad celebrating Sheikh Mansur see Bodenstedt, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

³³Spencer, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 294.

³⁴For a measure of the extent to which Sheikh Mansur's memory remains alive among Circassians, though with a great many distortions and accretions, see Shauket Mufti Habjoka, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-119. For a contemporary comparison of the importance of Islam in the western and eastern Caucasus see Bodenstedt, *op. cit.*, pp. 522-23.

overland trade, threatening attack, offering rewards to princes and nobles for collaboration. Ottoman policy remained unchanged--reduce tribal rivalries, spread Islam, ensure order and promote trade by sea--and Circassian orientation toward Turkey increased during this period, especially in the coastal districts. The Ottomans gave highest priority to preservation of long-held positions in Abkhazia and western Georgia.³⁵

The Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29 came about primarily because of developments relating to Egypt and Greece. The Balkans were the main theater of hostilities and here, though operations at first went well for the Russians, they soon experienced reverses. Things went better on the Caucasian front, where the Tsar's forces captured Anapa in June 1828 and made important advances on the Georgian front in the south: Akhaltsikhe and Kars were captured by the end of the summer. The next summer Russian forces penetrated deep into Ottoman territory and captured Erzurum.³⁶ Circassian territories south of Anapa saw no significant action, but in the Treaty of Adrianople (Edirne) in 1829 Turkey agreed to give up all positions and claims on the Circassian coast in return for restoration of Kars and Batum. The implication in this treaty was that Turkey was transferring her suzerainty over Circassia to Russia--but the situation was not spelled out specifically. Lack of clarity caused a great deal of legal and diplomatic debate during the next two decades.³⁷

³⁵Ali Arslan, "*Rusya'nin Kirim ve Gurcistan'i Ilhakkindan sonra Osmanli Devleti'nin Cerkes Kabileleri ile Munasebetleri (1784-1829)*," in *Kafkas Arastirmalari*, Acar Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1988, pp. 46-51.

³⁶See "The Russo-Turkish Campaign of 1828-29" in W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields, a History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921*, CUP, Cambridge, 1953, pp. 23-45.

³⁷See, e.g., the appendix in J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, "Abstract of treaties between Russia and Turkey relating to Circassia," pp. 460-481. Bodenstedt argued in the 1840s that whatever interpretation might be given to various treaties between the Ottoman and Russian empires, the Turkish sultan had no right to surrender Circassian sovereignty to anyone, since they had never conceded it to any outside power: *op. cit.*, p. 290.

Diplomatic niceties were of little concern to the Circassians. They had not submitted to any outside power. The only one to which they felt any affinity was Turkey. The formal withdrawal of Ottoman power from their coast marked the beginning of more than three decades of intense resistance to Russian attempts to establish complete hegemony over their lands. The Ottomans had weakened their claim to suzerainty over Circassia by agreeing to the terms of the Treaty of Adrianople but Ottoman merchants were still interested in trade and there were many other links between Turks and Circassians which were actually becoming stronger during this period. Turkey had by no means abandoned interest in the Caucasus, and the Circassians were an integral part of the Caucasian scene.

The tactics which the Russians now adopted--establishment of strong points on the coast and eventual linkage of these overland to territory firmly under their control north of the mountains--took 35 years, tens of thousands of lives on both sides and heavy material investment to produce success. Even then the great bulk of the Circassian population refused to accept Russian rule and emigrated.

Why did the intensity of Circassian resistance mount as the Russians pressed harder and prospects for sustained foreign support waned? How important were expectations of foreign support? Would more coherent Ottoman military and diplomatic policies have made a difference? To what extent did the Circassian resistance struggle and that led by Shamil in the eastern Caucasus reinforce each other? Would the Circassians have been better off following Lermontov's advice, surrendering and accommodating themselves to being "slaves of the Ruler of the Universe" after 1829?

In the remaining sections of this essay, while describing the main stages of the 35-year Circassian fight for freedom, I will provide some basis for answering these questions.

RUSSIAN TACTICS IN THE 1830S AND 1840S

For almost two decades Russia pursued a war of attrition in Circassia which appears to have been at least as costly to her as to the Circassians. Until the very end, following the defeat of Shamil, the balance of forces was little changed from what it had been at the beginning. Spencer described the situation as of the end of the 1830s:

...along the whole line of coast from Kouban-Tartary to the port of Anakria [Poti] in Mingrelia, the Russian government does not possess a foot of land, with the exception of the forts, or rather mud entrenchments we visited, and these are constantly besieged by the indefatigable mountaineers.³⁸

Wagner reported an expedition of 600 Russian regulars accompanied by 2,000 Georgian auxiliaries against the Ubykhs in October 1841. They were transported by sea to the fortress of Ardler from where they attempted to penetrate inland. An aged Circassian prince, Barzek Haji Dokhum-oku³⁹ led the Circassian defense. The Russian force succeeded in making its way overland 20 miles to Sochi, but at a cost of 500 men lost. Little, if anything, was gained from it:

...the only advantage derived from this operation was a more accurate survey of the section of coast between Ardler and [Sochi].... Though the loss of the natives was, according to all appearances, greater than that of the Russians, yet the facts of the case prove that the expedition against the Ubiches, which is the last military operation of any importance that has taken place on the coast of the Black Sea, did not terminate favorably to the Russians.⁴⁰

³⁸Spencer, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 336.

³⁹Bell called Barzek Haji "a Circassian Washington" and judged him one of the most capable of all leaders he encountered in Circassia: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 344-46.

⁴⁰Wagner, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 33-34. J.S. Bell reported that Georgian and Abkhaz auxiliaries used by the Russians often sympathized with and sometimes deserted to the Circassians: *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 168, 286.

This was the last of the energetic forays that had begun with General Veliaminov's 12,000-man expedition against the Abkhaz and Circassians in 1835. First threatening scorched-earth tactics and resorting to deliberate brutalities,⁴¹ Veliaminov later tried to persuade the Circassians to submit to "pacification." Neither approach worked. A decade of fort-building along the coast did not greatly advance Russian control of it. Nor did the naval blockade the Russians tried to maintain. Turkish vessels from Samsun and Sinop maintained a brisk trade with Circassian ports.⁴² A steady supply of weapons, lead, and gunpowder flowed in from Turkey, along with consumer goods such as salt and cloth. Thus a boycott of Russian commerce over the Kuban was feasible.

During the early 1830s the Russians had made some inroads into Circassian solidarity by pursuing a policy of peaceful enticement of the northern tribes, gaining the collaboration of some of the princes and nobles as they had done earlier in Kabarda, and enticing the free peasantry by trade. By the end of this decade, however, efforts of Circassian leaders encouraged by Turks and Englishmen created a greater sense of national solidarity among the Kuban tribes. Wagner observed in 1843 that the Russians had made no real progress but concluded that they were probably not unduly concerned with the failure of their policy, for the Kuban and northern Black Sea region were at least quiet and Tsarist generals were thus able to concentrate all their military strength in the eastern Caucasus.⁴³

By refraining from sending expeditions into the Circassian heartlands, the Russians were able to achieve some degree of *modus vivendi* with some Circassian leaders--but even Circassian collaborators, while accepting Russian tolerance, gave very little in return for the favors accorded them, as Wagner observed in Tbilisi in 1843:

⁴¹E.g., decapitation; see J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 158-160. For a discussion of the futility of scorched-earth tactics, still being used in the 1840s, see Bodenstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

⁴²J.S. Bell estimated that 150 vessels were continually involved in this trade: *op. cit.*, Volume II, p. 72.

⁴³Wagner, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 102-3.

The Circassian warrior is seldom seen in the streets of Tiflis, and is immediately distinguished in the crowd by his knightly form, the noble profile of his countenance, whose expression bespeaks manly boldness and energy.... With firm and haughty step, the Circassian stalks through the crowd, and all, including the drunken Cossack, make way for him.... The majority of Circassians whom I saw at Tiflis consisted of chieftains, or of influential Usdens, of confederate or subdued tribes, who had come down to pay their respects to, and obtain, perhaps, some presents from the commander-in-chief of the Russian army.⁴⁴

An American, George Leighton Ditson, one of the first of his nationality to visit the region⁴⁵ came to the Caucasus in 1848. He was unreservedly sympathetic to the Russians and dedicated the published account of his travels to Prince Michael Vorontsov, then in his fourth year as Viceroy of the Caucasus. Though he had no contact with independent Circassians and most of his book deals with the Crimea, Georgia, and reports of Shamil's struggle, Ditson's choice of title⁴⁶ demonstrates the extent to which the Circassians as a people had come to symbolize Caucasian resistance to the Russians. Ditson's book confirms the existence of a stalemate in the western Caucasus at this time. Approvingly he cited Prince Kochubey:

These Circassians are just like your American Indians--as untamable and uncivilized...and, owing to their natural energy of character, extermination only would keep them quiet, or...if they came under Russian rule, the only safe policy would be to employ their wild and warlike tastes against others.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Wagner, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 146-47.

⁴⁵The first Americans in the Caucasus appear to have been the young missionaries Eli Smith and H.G.O. Dwight who made their way across Anatolia to Tbilisi in the summer of 1830. See James A. Field, *America in the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882*, PUP, Princeton, 1969, pp. 155-165.

⁴⁶*Circassia, or a Tour of the Caucasus*, Stringer-Townshend, New York (T.C. Newby, London), 1850.

⁴⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 31.

By this time Prince Vorontsov had made his mark on Russian strategy in the Caucasus.⁴⁸ His great expedition against Shamil in 1845 had been disastrous, but it had been undertaken against his better judgment in response to pressure from Tsar Nicholas I. Elated at having humiliated the Russians, Shamil moved into Kabarda in the spring of 1846, hoping to establish a permanent link with the Circassians. The Kabardans failed to rise, and the Circassians farther west were not responsive to Shamil's appeal. At least two factors appear to have contributed to this lukewarm response: (a) parochialism--since they were not under heavy pressure from the Russians, the Circassians felt little need to mobilize to join Shamil; and (b) lack of enthusiasm for Muridism, the austere militant Sufi religious faith that inspired Shamil's followers in Chechnia and Daghestan. Subsequently, Vorontsov was able to take strategy into his own hands and deliberately eased pressure on the Circassians to be able to concentrate on Shamil.

BRITAIN AND THE CIRCASSIANS

There is much still to be learned about foreign interest in, and involvement with, the Circassian (and entire Caucasian) resistance struggle. Ottoman archives should eventually broaden our understanding.⁴⁹ What we already know permits tentative conclusions: both British and Turkish efforts to encourage and support resistance in the Caucasus were almost entirely outside the margin of conventional diplomacy. In late 20th century terminology they would be called covert action operations or low intensity warfare. They were intended to keep hopes of resistance alive, to harass a potential enemy, and to preserve options for more vigorous future action if international developments made it desirable and circumstances favored it. If Lord Palmerston had not in some degree approved of the activities of the Englishmen who went

⁴⁸L.H. Rhineland, "Viceroy Vorontsov's Administration of the Caucasus," in Ronald G. Suny (ed.) *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1983, pp. 87-104.

⁴⁹A good beginning has been made in publication of 61 documents in the original and Latin transcription as an appendix to Mehmet Saray (ed.) *Kafkas Arastirmalari I*, Acar Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1988.

to Circassia in the 1830s, they would not have persisted for so long. There were many men among Ottoman officialdom who abetted what their countrymen were doing to help the Circassians. But neither Palmerston nor the Ottoman government was willing to risk the overt consequences of their sympathies or their ultimate hopes. Views which Palmerston expressed in a letter to Lord Russell during the Crimean War are probably not far from those he held in the 1830s:

[to expel the Russians from the Danubian principalities and leave them in full strength] would only be like turning a burglar out of your house, to break in again at a more fitting opportunity. The best and most effectual security for the future peace of Europe would be the severance from Russia of some of the frontier territories acquired by her in later times, Georgia, Circassia, the Crimea, Bessarabia, Poland and Finland.... She could still remain an enormous Power, but far less advantageously posted for aggression on her neighbours.⁵⁰

Bell recounted how in 1837 a Circassian prince

pointed out the sacred spot (as they justly esteem it) where Daud Bey [David Urquhart] had held (just three years ago) [in 1834] his meeting with the chieftains of this neighborhood, and first inspired them with the idea of combining themselves with the other inhabitants of the mountain provinces as a nation, under one government and standard.⁵¹

The Englishmen who were active among the Circassians in the 1830s urged closer coordination with Shamil's movement and tried to develop a sense of common purpose among all the North Caucasians resisting imposition of Russian rule. Some even convinced themselves that this latter effort had succeeded, but Circassian particularism was difficult to overcome. These men, and the Turks who played the same role (though we know much less about them, for their memoirs, if written, have not come to light), were more successful in inspiring the Circassians to a

⁵⁰Palmerston to Russell, 26 May 1854, as cited in Herbert C.F. Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, Longmans, London, 1936, Vol. II, p. 105.

⁵¹J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 166.

stronger sense of national unity and cooperation. A great program of "oathing" was carried out with good results. The leaders of each tribe gathered their men together and had all swear to keep faith with the cause of resistance to the Russians, to avoid cooperation with Russian officialdom or trade with Russian merchants, and to come to the assistance of neighboring tribesmen under attack. Shirkers or collaborators were ostracized or driven out; some were killed. The populace was alerted to spies. Circassian groups along the Kuban who had accepted Russian protection were raided and their cattle carried off. Joint expeditions against the Russian forts on the coast were mounted and word of successes spread into the interior. Britons and Turks, working together in Constantinople, helped Circassians draw up a declaration of independence which served both to encourage resistance and to publicize their cause abroad. On arrival in Circassia, Edmund Spencer reported:

I was shown...several copies of the *Portfolio* containing their declaration of independence, translated into Turkish, one of which every prince and noble carries about with him, whether he can read it or not, and regards with the same veneration as the Turks do the Koran. Whenever they sally forth on a warlike excursion, the national banner is carried at the head of the party, and at every general assembly it is exhibited in some conspicuous place.... This circumstance, alone, has given an accession of moral strength, and a confidence in the justness of their cause, with the certainty of ultimately triumphing, that the Russians will find extremely difficult to overcome, and renders the final issue of the contest more than doubtful, even should the mountaineers be left to their own limited resources.⁵²

Portfolio, a private journal alleged to enjoy the favor of the British Foreign Office, was the creation of a remarkable Scot, the first Briton to become a Circassian enthusiast, David Urquhart. Born in 1805, he had first gone to Greece to help that country consolidate its independence. He arrived in Turkey from Greece in 1831 and was employed by British Ambassador Stratford Canning as a confidential aide. He had

⁵²Spencer, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 265.

been transformed into an ardent Turcophile by the time he returned to England where in 1833 he published a book entitled *Turkey and its Resources*. This book so pleased King William IV that he sent it to all his ministers and urged his foreign minister, Viscount Palmerston, to make further use of the young activist author. A plan was developed to send him on an 18-month reconnaissance of the East, as far, perhaps, as Central Asia and Afghanistan. It never materialized, for he found plenty to do on the Caucasian fringes of Europe. Urquhart arrived back in Turkey at the end of 1833. He visited Circassia in July and August 1834 ostensibly to investigate the possibilities for British trade, but his interests extended far beyond the commercial field. Meanwhile, Canning had been replaced by John Ponsonby as British Ambassador at the Porte. Ponsonby, like his predecessor, seems to have taken a considerable liking to the energetic young Scot.⁵³

The international situation was in ferment at this period with many of the same ingredients as in the 1980s, 150 years later. The Poles had revolted in 1830 against Russian oppression. The European powers were still upset about their inability to do much for them and eager to find ways of easing both their consciences and the Poles' lot. Palmerston had a strong personal interest in Poland.⁵⁴ The Middle East, a region in which several of the European powers had interests, was unstable. The Ottoman Empire, in the wake of the loss of Greece and defeat by Russia a few years before, was now beset by internal strains. The Ottoman Sultan's Egyptian vassal, Mehmet Ali, had invaded Anatolia itself, and the Russians had opportunistically exploited the crisis to send their forces to protect Constantinople. Britain was determined to preserve the integrity of Turkey against Russian encroachment and was also becoming concerned about Russian designs on Central Asia which could threaten India.

⁵³G.H. Bolsover, "David Urquhart and the Eastern Question, 1833-37: a Study in Publicity and Diplomacy," *Journal of Modern History*, 1936, pp. 444-67.

⁵⁴H.C.F. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 165-86, 256-71.

Students of the diplomatic interplay of the era and of the ideas that motivated the men who were the main actors at the time--Palmerston in London and Ponsonby in Constantinople--differ in assessing their motives and intentions.⁵⁵ Further investigation of the subject could well focus on Urquhart, himself. When he arrived again in Constantinople early in 1836, having been officially appointed secretary to the British Ambassador, he made little effort to behave as a conventional diplomat. While in England Urquhart had created a sensation by publishing in *Portfolio* a collection of Russian documents brought from Warsaw by Polish exiles who fled following the suppression of the rebellion of 1830. The documents exposed Tsarist expansionist ambitions and lack of intention to abide by the normal rules of great-power diplomacy.

It is possible that Palmerston had personally encouraged Urquhart's enthusiasm for the Circassian cause. Whatever his confidential instructions may have been, Urquhart quickly became a focal point for the Circassian exile community in the Ottoman capital. His fortunes took a bad turn when a small British vessel, the *Vixen*, was captured late in 1836 by the Russians trying to run their blockade of the Circassian coast with a cargo of salt. It became a diplomatic incident embarrassing to all the powers involved. Urquhart had persuaded another Briton, James Stanislaus Bell, who had chartered the vessel as a merchant, to dispatch it contrary to the advice of Ambassador Ponsonby--or so at least it was said. In the ensuing *contretemps*, Urquhart was expelled from the embassy and then recalled to London in 1837.

Bell, ostensibly a merchant but whose interests also extended far beyond commerce, remained active in the Circassian cause until 1840. He stayed in Circassia for long periods during the years 1837-1839, accompanying the Circassians on raids behind the Russian lines and publishing in 1840 the most comprehensive first-hand account of the

⁵⁵Compare, e.g., H.C.F. Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-284 and Edward Ingram, *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, pp. 272-76, 279 ff.

Circassian resistance struggle available. At least four other Englishmen spent long periods in Circassia in the late 1830s. *Times* correspondent J.A. Longworth stayed a year together with Bell and published an informative two-volume work describing his experiences, as did Spencer.

The most prominent Circassian with whom Urquhart and all these other Englishmen were in contact in Constantinople was a prince of distinguished lineage, Zann-oku Sefir Bey, who had gone to Turkey as representative of the Confederated Circassian Princes to organize support for Circassian resistance.⁵⁶ Much about his background and status remains unclear and should eventually be learned from Ottoman archives or memoirs. He appeared to have been promised, and given, support from the Ottoman Government. For a time he enjoyed the *de facto* rank of ambassador at the Sultan's court and participated in the diplomatic life of Constantinople. For example, he was rewarded by Sultan Mahmut for his skill in archery at a competition in the Okmeydani. The Russian ambassador, who was present, provoked a diplomatic incident and declared that the Tsar had been insulted by such honor shown a renegade. He threatened to leave his post if the Circassian "ambassador" was not banished from Constantinople. The Ottoman authorities acquiesced and moved Sefir Bey to a small town near Edirne where, during the late 1830s, he received emissaries from Circassia and from time to time sent messages of encouragement to his countrymen.

The unofficial British representatives in Circassia regarded Zann-oku Sefir Bey as a potential leader around whom the highly

⁵⁶According to J.S. Bell (*op. cit.*, Vol I., pp. 269-71; Vol. II, pp. 232-34) Sefir Bey's father was said to have given Ferah Ali Pasha the property on which the new fort at Anapa was built. Numbering among his relatives the famous Prince Jambolet, he is said, nevertheless, to have suffered discrimination because his mother was of lesser ancestry. After his father's death, he was sold into serfdom, eventually escaped and made his way to Egypt. On returning to Circassia, he married a Nogay princess and served under the Pasha of Anapa until it was surrendered to the Russians. His Nogay wife was still living near Anapa in the 1830s.

individualistic Circassian princes and nobles could rally, but their effort to cast him in this role was abortive. How well he was actually suited for it is difficult to judge, for in the historical record he remains a somewhat hazy personality. After Urquhart's departure, the British embassy in Constantinople kept the Englishmen who were dealing directly with the Circassians at arm's length. This may have made Sefir Bey more skeptical than most of his countrymen about the likelihood that substantial British support--either diplomatic or military--would ever materialize.⁵⁷

Men such as Spencer, Bell and Longworth became great enthusiasts of the Circassian cause but were more realistic than Urquhart about the Circassians' shortcomings as well as their virtues:

The congress was held on a green.... The first message was...that union and the appointment of some species of government were certainly most requisite, and that if the people could have accomplished these things themselves, there would have been no need of their seeking external aid; but that in the present position of affairs, it was beyond their power to attempt any change and, that there was reason, moreover, to believe that any chief elected from among themselves would not obtain sufficient respect and authority. "One must be sent us," they said, "either from England or Turkey, and then everything he orders will be cheerfully performed."⁵⁸

These unofficial British representatives were eager to persuade both the British public and Her Majesty's Government that support for Circassian independence would be in the interest of both British commercial endeavor and British political ideals. They saw Russia's actions in the Caucasus as unworthy of a nation that aspired to be considered one of the civilized powers of Europe. They argued that there was a relationship between the entire Caucasian resistance struggle and the larger political scene in the East:

⁵⁷J.A. Longworth, *A Year Among the Circassians*, Henry Colburn, London, 1840, Vol. I, p. 129.

⁵⁸J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 450.

The present unequal contest [is] carried on against the pastoral tribes of the Caucasus not so much for the value of the territory as [for its significance as] a *pied a terre* to prepare for future conquests. Can we, therefore, wonder at the suppressed murmur of universal hatred which is heard throughout the East at the very name of Russia? Every advantage gained by the Circassians over their oppressors is hailed by the Oriental, whether Mahometan, Christian or Jew, with the most enthusiastic delight. Of the sacrifices and generosity of the Turks in behalf of the poor mountaineers, I could relate many instances, alike honourable to them as individuals and as a nation; but, in so doing, I should only expose these noble-minded men to the attacks of Russian malignity.⁵⁹

There was a considerable degree of oversimplification in this argumentation, but in retrospect it is clear that there was a core of validity to it that remains pertinent in the late 20th century. The Circassians themselves were not ignorant of the larger strategic context in which they were waging their struggle. Bell, for example, reported:

Old Ali Achmet, the prince of Sutscha...said England and the other powers of Europe had interfered on behalf of Greece, although that country had not fought for its liberty a quarter of the time that Circassia had.⁶⁰

But the Englishmen and Circassian leaders both sensed the thinness of the hopes on which the Circassians based their expectations for the future. Longworth recorded a Circassian dignitary's farewell to him:

So then you are leaving us, Bey, forever. You have been so long amongst us, that we had begun to consider you as one of ourselves; but, happily for you, you have a country to go to where you may live in peace and where there is yet no dread of the Moscovite. We, alas! have no other home to fly to; nor if we had, would we leave that of our forefathers; in which we were born, which Allah has given us, and for which it is our duty to die.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Spencer, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 161-2.

⁶⁰ J.S. Bell, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 54-55.

⁶¹ Longworth, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 336.

Longworth consoled himself with thoughts of the impermanence of tyranny as he departed:

Tyranny can never long prevail, or freedom be forever suppressed in the Caucasus; the tide of conquest may for a while submerge its valleys, but the time will come when, in spite of all the forts that Russia can erect there, it must recede even from them.⁶²

Soviet historians with their fondness for conspiracy theories of history have tried to paint the Circassians' resistance struggle as the creation of Urquhart and the Englishmen who followed him, backed by resentful Turkish pashas unwilling to acknowledge the historical inevitability of Russia's civilizing mission in the Caucasus. The fact that Circassian resolve did not decline after the last Englishman departed, but grew, is the best evidence we have of the wrongness of Soviet argumentation.

The German, Wagner, was not impressed by Russian performance, but was skeptical that the Mountaineers could long delay the Russian advance into Asia:

A mountain war against an inflexible, fanatical and freedom-loving people, is attended with difficulties which baffle the most learned combinations of European tacticians, and the Russians with all their immense hordes, their inexhaustible resources, their firmness and bravery, are not much nearer the subjugation of the Caucasus than the Tartars, the Turks and the Persians were before them. We do not imply by this that the [Chechens], by means of Shamyl or his successors, will be ever destined, or will ever be able to preserve Asia from a Russian invasion.⁶³

In spite of its small scope and unofficial nature, British and Turkish support for the Circassians in the 1830s was valuable to them. It helped them overcome their internal divisions and deterred weak men and exposed tribes who were inclined to compromise with the Russians.

⁶²Longworth, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 338-9.

⁶³Wagner, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 203-4.

Russian frustrations over their inability to subdue any of the Mountaineers led them to resort repeatedly to scorched-earth tactics-- which backfired.⁶⁴

Russian manpower was not inexhaustible, so Caucasian Christian auxiliaries were recruited and trained to fight against the Mountaineers. They seldom fought well and many deserted. Russia's Caucasian armies had large numbers of Poles who had been drafted to reduce the rebelliousness of their homeland. Large numbers of them cast their lot with the Mountaineers. Spencer reported that "hundreds of Poles" were fighting with the Circassians and had become so popular that many of their national songs had been translated into Circassian and were sung with enthusiasm.⁶⁵

The vigorous resistance which the Circassians demonstrated against the Russians enabled them to survive with no significant territorial losses into the 1840s. When Tsar Nicholas I appointed Prince Vorontsov Viceroy of the Caucasus in 1845, he hoped for a quick suppression of Caucasian resistance to Russian expansion. The wise and experienced Vorontsov knew that such hopes were unrealistic but he acceded to his sovereign's wishes and mounted a great offensive against Shamil. It was a disaster. Only at the expense of this heavy defeat was Vorontsov able to return to the Caucasian strategy which had the best chance of success: to ease the pressure against the Circassians while Russian forces proceeded systematically against Shamil in the east. Thus the Circassians were able to maintain a strong position into the 1850s when international circumstances suddenly combined to create what for a time appeared to be an unexpectedly positive situation both for them and for Shamil.

⁶⁴Bodenstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

⁶⁵Spencer, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 370. Bodenstedt met a Polish engineer officer at Ardler who had spent 12 years in Circassia, *op. cit.*, p. 195. We see here a remarkable parallel to the identification of Afghans and Poles in their resistance to Soviet domination in the 1980s. See also numerous references in Thadee Gasztowtt, *La Pologne et L'Islam, Notes Historiques*, Societe Francaise d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, Paris, 1907.

THE CAUCASUS IN THE CRIMEAN WAR

From the late 1820s onward it became a basic tenet of policy among all the European powers that Russia must not be permitted to finish off the Ottoman Empire and annex its once-Byzantine heartlands, including Constantinople. The Russians had recognized this determination and acceded to it in the Treaty of Adrianople, but this treaty was in part negated by the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi in 1833--the outgrowth of Ottoman weakness and Russian assertiveness. The notion that it was Russia's manifest destiny to gain control of Constantinople remained an article of faith among a broad segment of Tsarist statesmen and military leaders. Wagner reported the enthusiasm which greeted the appointment of Vorontsov in the mid-1840s, where many Russians in Tbilisi felt that the Caucasus was too small a theater for his talents:

They were of the opinion that the proper post and suitable sphere for such a man would be that of governor-general of Turkey after the conquest of Constantinople. They affirmed that no person was so well adapted as Michael Worontsoff...to impose on the Orientals and to conciliate their affections, to reconcile the Turks to the Russian yoke, the contradictions between Christendom and Islam, and between the West and the East...⁶⁶

But Wagner was skeptical of Russian realization of her aims in the foreseeable future:

But it is not probable that the undertaking of governing Constantinople will fall to the lot of any Russian now living. Russia has still to digest the conquests of Catherine and, until Poland and the Caucasus are more effectively Russianized, a Russian Emperor will scarcely stretch forth his hand in earnest for a booty whose maintenance might easily cost him more blood than all the previous conquests of Russia put together.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Wagner, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 95-96.

⁶⁷Wagner, *loc. cit.* A century and a half later, at the end of the 1980s, as both Poland and the Caucasus confront Gorbachev with severe and seemingly intractable dilemmas, the same judgment might well be rendered on Russian prospects for expanding its influence southward into Iran and Turkey.

By the early 1850s the Russians, however, were no longer disinclined to remain cautious about advancing toward Constantinople. "We have on our hands a very sick man," Nicholas I said of Turkey. He aspired to work out a deal with Britain whereby in return for a free hand in Egypt, Russia would be given more freedom of movement in the Balkans and Asia Minor. Many other factors were involved in the mounting tensions which culminated in the Crimean War. These included complex church politics, Greek and Italian issues, trade, and various groups' claims and rights in Jerusalem--but the step which precipitated the Crimean war was Russian occupation of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1853.

The British and French fleets moved eastward. There was a flurry of European diplomatic activity culminating in a meeting between Nicholas I and Austrian Emperor Franz Josef at Olmutz at the end of September, but to no avail. On 8 October 1853 Turkey declared war as the British fleet was ordered to pass the Dardanelles. At the end of November 1853 Russian Admiral Nakhimov surprised the Turkish fleet in the harbor of Sinop and destroyed it. This action sent a shock wave through the British and French governments, and the attack was condemned as a massacre in the British press. All of Europe was preoccupied with these events. Rising tension was chronicled and commented upon at length in the *New York Tribune* by its "most trustworthy source in London," Karl Marx.⁶⁸ He was a consistent champion of strong action to put "Russia, true to the old Asiatic system of cheating and petty tricks,"⁶⁹ in her place:

The great end of Russia has been to crush the spirit of religious and political independence which has manifested itself of late among the Christian subjects of the Porte.⁷⁰

⁶⁸*New York Tribune*, 9 March 1854.

⁶⁹Karl Marx, *The Eastern Question, Letters Written 1853-1856 dealing with the Events of the Crimean War*, Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling (eds.), Augustus M. Kelley, New York, 1969 (reissue of 1897 London edition), p. 146.

⁷⁰*Idem*, p. 108.

Marx did not regard Russian advance into the Balkans as in the ultimate interest of the people who lived there, especially the non-Slavs. In early January 1854 the British and French fleets passed the Bosphorus and entered the Black Sea. At the end of February Britain and France gave the tsar an ultimatum: evacuate Moldavia and Wallachia within two months or face war. Russian actions made clear the demand was to be ignored. The two powers declared war on Russia at the end of March. Marx, critical of the long delay and suspicious of secret compromises, was relieved.

The causes of wars such as this are always difficult to sum up briefly--for there are many. It is difficult to disagree with the judgement of the late Hugh Seton-Watson when attempting to sort them all out:

It can be argued that the Western Powers entered the war to protect Napoleon's prestige, to protect Turkey, to fight tyranny, or to restore the balance of power. Of these four reasons, the last was the most important.⁷¹

The war was not called Crimean at the beginning, and the Crimea did not figure in early action, which was concentrated in the Balkans where the Russian army laid siege to the Turkish stronghold of Silistria, which the Turks defended with determination. The first hostile contact between Russia and the Western Powers came in the Baltic at the end of the spring of 1854. The British attacked the Kola Peninsula at the end of the summer, and, on the other side of the globe, an Anglo-French squadron unsuccessfully attacked Kamchatka in early September 1854. It looked like a worldwide conflict.

The Turks had concentrated sizable forces on their Caucasian frontier during the summer of 1853. The Russians had to keep their forces in the Caucasus thin in order to concentrate on the Danube. Prince Vorontsov had only two regular divisions supported by ten Cossack regiments and irregular formations of Georgian and even some local

⁷¹Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, p. 321.

Muslim militia to deploy in Circassia, Chechnia and Daghestan--about 23,000 men in all. Shamil moved quickly to take advantage of their weakness and mounted an attack into eastern Georgia in August 1853. It caused great alarm but was neutralized by a Russian counterattack. This raid encouraged the Turks--and many Europeans, including Marx--to develop high hopes of the Mountaineers' effectiveness. The Turkish commander at Batum attacked along the coast and captured the Russian post at Fort St. Nicholas. In subsequent fighting, the Russian garrison at Redutkale was withdrawn, and sea communications from the Crimea to Poti were broken. All of this happened during the weeks before the annihilation of the Turkish fleet at Sinop.

When Britain and France entered the war, the Russians evacuated the rest of their coastal forts in Circassia. Shamil envisioned a general offensive coordinated with the Circassians. But his emissary, Mohammed Emin, had difficulty persuading the Circassians to cooperate systematically. Sefir Bey took a mission from Constantinople to Sukhumi and then to Tuapse to try to mobilize Circassian efforts. The Shapsugs in the south were equivocal, though the northern tribes in the vicinity of Anapa were eager for action. The Abkhaz, who had both Christian and Russian princes, were divided, with the Christians favoring the Russians. As a price for cooperation the Abkhaz Muslim Prince Iskender asked assurance that he would be recognized as independent and allocated additional Georgian territory. This territory happened to belong to the Dadianis, a Georgian noble family that had kept its distance from the Russians. The Turks did not want to alienate them. While parleying proceeded, the Turks developed plans for a general Caucasian offensive which would include Allied landings on the coast and a three-pronged offensive from Batum, Ardahan, and Kars. They argued that the Muslim population along the entire coast and in western Georgia could be depended upon to rise. The ultimate objective would be occupation of Tbilisi. Their British and French allies were lukewarm to such thinking. They were more concerned about destroying Russian naval power in the Black Sea. Karl Marx had a more comprehensive view of the potentialities of the situation and favored Turkish plans. He wrote in November 1854:

The chances for the Turks are, indeed, far more encouraging in Asia than in Europe. In Asia they have but one important post to guard: Batum; and an advance, be it from Batum or from Erzurum, towards the Caucasus, opens to them, in case of success, a direct communication with their allies, the mountaineers, and may at once cut off the communication, at least by land, of the Russian army south of the Caucasus with Russia; a result which may lead to the entire destruction of that army.⁷²

There is no way of knowing whether the Turks' expectation that a general Allied offensive against the Caucasus backed by the substantial naval power the British and French had at their disposal would have generated full cooperation among the Circassians, Abkhazes, and Muslims in Georgia. Shamil's cooperation was assured. This was a period, however, when anti-Russian sentiment in Georgia as a whole had receded to insignificance, and Shamil's raid had aroused Georgian fears. Nevertheless, Russian border defenses were in poor condition. The old Turkish fortress at Akhaltsikhe and others in this region were as they had been in 1829. No improvements had been made to them. New fortifications in the Alexandropol (Gumru/Leninakan) region had been planned but not completed. During the winter of 1853-54 the Turks did not capitalize on their initial advances, though they had brought Akhaltsikhe under siege in mid-November.

Local victories and the destruction of the Turkish fleet at Sinop notwithstanding, Prince Vorontsov was depressed by the presence of the British and French fleets in the Black Sea. He feared a surge of activity among the Circassians as well as in Daghestan and even among the pacified Muslim population of Azerbaijan. Though the threat of Turkish invasion aroused both Georgians and Armenians to rally to support of Russia, Vorontsov felt the need for substantial troop reinforcements. Few could be sent. In March 1854, even before the British and French had formally entered the war, he asked for sick leave and left Tbilisi for Moscow, never to return.

⁷²Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

General Read,⁷³ who replaced him, made a highly pessimistic initial assessment of the situation and recommended to Nicholas I that all the eastern Muslim territories be evacuated and that Russia also reconcile herself, if further pressed by the Turks, to the sacrifice of all Georgian territories, withdrawing north of the main Caucasus chain. The Tsar, appalled, replaced Read by Prince Baryatinsky, who, five years later, was to accept the surrender of Shamil. Nicholas I's stubborn refusal to give ground in the Caucasus was in the end to prove correct, though he did not live long enough to have the satisfaction of realizing it.

The year 1854 turned out to be a bad one for the Turks. They were forced back to Batum. Turkish hopes for Allied landings on the Circassian coast were in vain. At the eastern end of the Turco-Russian frontier, Russian forces advancing from Erevan captured Bayazit at the end of July. In early August, General Bebutov defeated the main Turkish army at Kurudere, between Alexandropol and Kars. Turkish casualties and prisoners totalled 10,000 against losses of 3,000 on the Russian side. This Russian victory influenced Persia, which up until now had been on the alert for an opportunity to regain lost ground in the Caucasus, to remain neutral. It also confirmed a decision which had been made by the British and French governments at the end of June to make a direct attack on Russian territory in the Crimea and destroy the basis of Russian naval power in the Black Sea.

Thus the war became Crimean on 14 September 1854 when an Allied (British-French-Turkish) army began landing near Eupatoria. And with this landing the possibility that the North Caucasian freedom struggle might get substantial Allied help--turning Vorontsov's fears and General Read's defeatist vision into reality--became remote.

During the very time the decision to attack in the Crimea was being reached between London and Paris, Shamil sent a delegation to confer with British and French commanders at Varna. They were more interested in Circassia, where Shamil's influence was tenuous, than in the areas he

⁷³See footnote in Allen and Muratoff, *op. cit.*, p. 66, on his probable Scottish ancestry.

controlled in Daghestan and Chechnia. Discussions were inconclusive. Allied agents who visited Circassia did not share the optimism of some of their Turkish colleagues about the situation there. Allied officers attached to the Turkish armies on the Caucasian front were skeptical of both the Mountaineers' potential and, in the light of continuing setbacks, of Turkish offensive capabilities in the Caucasus.⁷⁴ Shamil decided to lie low and restrain his forces from major offensive action against Russian positions.

Like Shamil, Karl Marx in London was depressed at the lack of audacity and strategic concept on the part of the Allies, lack of will to engage Russia decisively in the face of the "scornful boldness and self-reliance of the Czarian policy."⁷⁵ There were many reasons, including a heightened degree of public awareness and debate over tactics and strategy by journalists and politicians. A case has been made for characterizing many 19th century wars as "the first modern war." In respect to media attention and emotional public preoccupation stemming from it, a good claim can be made for the Crimean War:

War correspondents, observers and even wives, were able to wander freely around the battlefield and record the astonishing fact that when wars came men died, were killed, were wounded and suffered. These points were more easily seen than the gains of a campaign and therefore were faithfully and dramatically recorded. It would seem from [journalists'] accounts that the Crimean War was the most mismanaged, brutal and futile campaign that has ever been fought.⁷⁶

But as we have seen in recent decades, journalistic perceptions can skew and obscure reality. Public preoccupation with the melodrama of a conflict can produce pressures which divert statesmen from devising strategy and force military commanders to give priority to matters that distort the conduct of the war.

⁷⁴E.g., see Charles Duncan, *A Campaign with the Turks in Asia*, London, 1855, Vol. I, pp. 216-17.

⁷⁵Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

⁷⁶Philip Warner, *The Crimean War, a Reappraisal*, London, 1972, p. 3.

Seen from St. Petersburg and Moscow, the Allied invasion of the Crimea--Russian territory that had not been contested for the better part of a century--and the fact that Russian forces had difficulty defending themselves there, while they were already fighting hard in the Balkans and in the Caucasus, was a disaster and humiliation of major proportions. During the winter of 1854-55 the Russians reluctantly agreed to negotiations, and a conference in Vienna was agreed to. Meanwhile, Nicholas I died:

All that he had thought he had achieved in 30 years seemed on the point of collapse. It has been suggested that he committed suicide. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he had lost the will to live.⁷⁷

The Vienna conference dragged on for nearly three months. The Allies wanted Russian naval power in the Black Sea eliminated. As long as Sevastopol held out, this was a condition the Russians could not accept. There had been a bit of Caucasian action in the spring of 1855 when Allied naval forces had assisted a Circassian prince coming from Constantinople to capture Novorossisk and gain control of part of the Taman' Peninsula, but this venture was more part of the Crimean campaign than of the Caucasian. There was hard, bloody fighting in the Crimea all summer but no inclination on the part of the British and French to give serious consideration to offensive action against the Caucasus itself. Sevastopol finally fell on 10 September, with the final assault costing the Allies nearly 11,000 casualties against almost 13,000 on the Russian side.

Meanwhile, the Russians found themselves threatened with serious defeat in the Caucasus as well. Omer Pasha, who commanded the Turkish contingent in the Crimea, had revived the plan for offensive action in the western Caucasus. It envisaged an undertaking which would have confronted the Russians with

⁷⁷Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

...an advance on Kutaisi, and subsequently on Tiflis which might threaten a union with the Murids descending into Kakheti [eastern Georgia] and the isolation of all Russian forces on the Turkish frontier.⁷⁸

The British would at first hear nothing of this scheme, but the Turks were eager to seize the initiative in the east and found new troops to send to the Caucasian front. Omer Pasha was recalled to Constantinople in mid-July to begin implementing his plan. The British withdrew their objections to it in August 1855.

Muravyev, the Russian commander on the Caucasian front, had made good progress in the border region during the summer of 1855, had laid siege to Kars and threatened Erzurum, but hesitated to press his advantage out of fear of Turkish counterattack from the direction of Trabzon with Allied naval support behind it. In late September Muravyev learned that Omer Pasha had arrived not in Trabzon, but in Batum, with 8,000 reinforcements and had pushed on to Sukhumi and Redutkale where further landings were expected. The Turkish plan was now clear. News of the fall of Sevastopol arrived and heartened the defenders of Kars. Muravyev decided to storm Kars. The attack failed, with Russian losses of 8,000 against Turkish casualties of 1,500, but the Russians were still able to maintain the siege.

By the end of September the Turks had concentrated 35,000 troops on the Caucasian coast, but they were far from meeting the requirements for full execution of Omer Pasha's plan. The plan also depended heavily on help from the Abkhaz and Circassians of the coastal region. With the approach of winter, their leaders preferred to wait. So did Shamil, with whom coordination was poor. Nevertheless, when Omer Pasha received news of the repulse of the Russians at Kars in early October, he decided to begin the push inland along the valley of the Ingur. But like Vorontsov in Chechnia in 1845, he found himself entangled in forests with few roads and frequent stream crossings. He covered only 50 miles in 20 days even though there was little organized Russian resistance.

⁷⁸Allen & Muratoff, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

In fact, the Russians were poorly organized for defense, and the Turks won an easy victory at the first real engagement near Zugdidi. Omer Pasha was slow to follow up on this good fortune, and the region was soon deluged with heavy rains, as always happens at this time of the year along the Black Sea. Even with the Turks marooned in mud, the Russian commander, Prince Bagration, panicked, prepared further withdrawals, and burned large quantities of stores.

Muravyev, whose perseverance had led to the capitulation of Kars on 6 November 1855, dismissed Bagration. Though their offensive had been remarkably successful up to this point, the Turks were unnerved by the fact that the Mountaineers had not exerted themselves. Omer Pasha established his headquarters in Zugdidi, but returned to Constantinople during the course of the winter. His troops remained until spring and were then evacuated to Batum.⁷⁹

Theoretically the Caucasian offensive could have been resumed. And the Turks could have gone on the offensive against Muravyev's forces who were planning a march on Erzurum. It might even have been possible in the summer of 1856 to forge effective links with the Mountaineers, certainly in Circassia and probably with Shamil, whose forces retained some offensive capability which might well have been augmented. The Turks had transferred 30,000 men from the Crimea after Sevastopol, but a British expeditionary force would also have been desirable. With the British public regarding the war won with the fall of Sevastopol, this would have been an extremely controversial action, probably insupportable politically. The issue never had to be faced, for peace negotiations intervened. The new Tsar, Alexander II, saw this as the best course after attempting to deal separately with the Austrians over arrangements in the Balkans. Muravyev's victory at Kars, where 24,000 prisoners had been taken, including British officers, saved Russian pride, but it also had a more practical effect. It commanded respect from the Western Allies who had no particular interest in advancing Turkey's frontiers in the Caucasus. Thus Russia's bargaining position was improved.

⁷⁹Allen & Muratoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-102.

The Treaty of Paris was worked out in a conference in that city which extended from late February until mid-April 1856. Russia accepted terms which severely curtailed the ambitions with which she had moved into the Romanian principalities in 1853 and gone on the offensive against Turkey in the Caucasus, but otherwise she did not pay a heavy price for defeat. The Crimea, scene of so much dramatic fighting on both sides, was returned intact. The Black Sea was demilitarized, thus excluding Russia from a military presence in the Mediterranean. This was an important gain for Turkey, especially since in the Caucasus the frontier was reconfirmed where it had been since the Treaty of Adrianople. Russian and Turkish gains and losses in nearly three years of fighting there had simply balanced each other out.

The Crimean War, in the course of being fought, became a limited war. In the heady period when Britain and France first joined in Turkey's war against Russia, they had attacked in the Baltic, in the Arctic, and in distant Kamchatka. It was a general war. None of this early initiative had anything to do with the Russo-Turkish rivalry which had originally set the war going. The first phase of the conflict did not last long. By the time the offensive against the Crimea had been decided upon, the war had been transformed from a worldwide conflict to one which was narrower than the basic Russo-Turkish war itself. The primary British-French objective became simply the elimination of Russian naval power in the Black Sea.

The fact that in the treaty which concluded the war the situation on the Caucasian front was returned to the *status quo ante bellum* underscores the absence of agreed objectives in the Caucasus throughout the conflict. From the viewpoint of grand strategy, actions in the Caucasus were undertaken to affect the course of the war elsewhere-- at least as far as Britain and France were concerned. They opposed Omer Pasha's offensive along the Caucasian coast in 1855. Turkish attitudes were different, but never coherently formulated and not pressed consistently upon Turkey's European allies. In the end the defeat of Russian naval power seemed as important to the Turks as any other objective.

It can be argued that the Caucasian peoples had as much entitlement as those of the Balkans to having the European Powers ensure arrangements whereby they could achieve their national aspirations. But in European eyes the Caucasus was part of the Middle East, utterly foreign, less civilized, exotic, and exciting but with little direct relationship to the affairs of Europe. Many Europeans may have had the same feelings about the Balkans, but this region was too close to home to be ignored. Too many European powers had a direct interest in it. Russia could not be allowed a free hand in the Balkans. Austria would not tolerate it. There was no counterbalancing power in the Caucasus comparable to Austria.

Had the Ottoman Empire possessed more internal dynamism and more far-sighted leadership, it could perhaps have prevailed upon the British to support a Caucasian strategy either for direct reassertion of territorial claims or for some degree of recognition of the local peoples' status. Such ambitions were articulated in Turkey, but public opinion did not impact on foreign policy the way it did in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. There were other intrinsic problems too.

The Georgians were the keystone of the Russian position in the Caucasus. If they had been determinedly anti-Russian, Vorontsov's and Read's pessimism would have been proved justified, for they were probably also the largest numerically of the Caucasian peoples. Armenian attitudes toward the Russians were similar to those of the Georgians (in spite of rivalry between the two peoples), but the Armenians were in a much weaker position and, therefore, more dependent on Russia, even though there were still more Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire than in the Russian Empire. Even among Ottoman Armenians, however, there was a growing tendency toward orientation toward Russia. Had the North Caucasian Mountaineers possessed a direct territorial link with Turkey, their fate could have been very different. Had Persia been more assertive, the political calculus in the Caucasus might also have been altered. But Persia was weak though it still had substantial residual influence in Azerbaijan and the Russians were apprehensive of it.

With his characteristic strategic long view Sir Henry Rawlinson had written in 1849 of the significance of the Caucasian independence struggle for containing Russia and preserving the balance of power in Europe:

...moderate support of Shamil might still, perhaps, save the Danubian principalities, and as long as his banner floats from the summits of the Caucasus, so long is Persia safe from the hostile invasion of a Russian army.⁸⁰

Looking back in 1873 on what he had written a quarter century earlier, Rawlinson concluded that the failure of the British to take advantage of the opportunity the Crimean War offered to check and/or reverse Russia's absorption of the Caucasus had even more far-reaching consequences than he had anticipated. The first impact was not on Persia, as he expected, but on Central Asia:

...it was not until after the submission of Shamil in 1859 and the consequent pacification of Circassia, that Russia began to push her way up the Jaxartes [Syr-Darya]. [My] forecast only failed in anticipating that the first development of the power of Russia, when freed from the Caucasian entanglement, would take place in the direction of Persia; whereas in reality...the Persian question is deferred to a later period.⁸¹

DEFEAT

The recurrent Russian and, until recently at least, even more frequent Soviet allegation that the freedom struggle of the Caucasian Mountaineers owed its intensity to propaganda, arms shipments, and money supplied by Turkish and British agents is negated by the events that followed the Treaty of Paris.⁸² Neither Shamil's Murids nor the Circassians and Abkhazes put down their arms. Shamil and the

⁸⁰Maj. Gen. Sir Henry Rawlinson, *England the Russia in the East*, John Murray, London, 1875, pp. 68-69.

⁸¹Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 69FN.

⁸²See, e.g., Hadji Murat Ibragimbeyli, *Kavkaz v Krymskoi Voine 1853-1856 gg. i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, Nauka, Moscow, 1971.

Circassians had never achieved effective coordination of their operations, though they had almost never operated at cross purposes. Failures and frustrations caused strain on both sides. Shamil had lost popularity among some of the peoples of Chechnia and Daghestan because of the severity of his religious prescriptions. After 25 years of unbroken warfare, there had been heavy loss of manpower. Total population had doubtlessly declined in some regions. Agriculture, trade, and handicrafts had been disrupted. But Shamil could not have continued to fight on by himself. The forces which the Russians had to bring to bear to defeat him are the best measure of the extent and intensity of the support which he still enjoyed. And the fact that it required another five years after Shamil's surrender for the Circassians to be subdued demonstrates how deep-rooted was their antipathy to Russian domination.

Had he lived (he died in 1856), Prince Vorontsov would in all likelihood have endorsed the plan Prince Baryatinsky developed to subdue Shamil. Only half the Russian military forces in the Caucasus could be committed to the struggle against the Mountaineers during the Crimean War. With the war over, all available soldiery could be brought against the Mountaineers, and reinforcements could be brought in from other parts of the country. Three armies were assigned to the task. They moved systematically to surround Murid strongholds. General Evdokimov, for example, spent two years bringing Chechnia to heel. During the winter of 1858-59 he advanced through the thickly forested region of Ichkeria to the borders of Daghestan. Shamil took refuge in the *aul* of Gunib, deep in the heart of Daghestan, above the gorge of the Kara-koysu. It was a formidable position and brings to mind Magdala, where the Emperor Theodore made his final stand against the British incursion into Ethiopia a decade later. To cut Gunib off from the rest of the Caucasus, Baryatinsky deployed 40,000 men and 48 guns around it. He moved forward slowly and deliberately, in keeping with the classic Russian military tradition. On Tsar Alexander II's birthday, 25 August 1859, he stormed Gunib. Shamil surrendered personally to Baryatinsky at four o'clock in the afternoon.⁸³

⁸³Gunib and all the other sites in Daghestan associated with Shamil were protected by the Mountaineers and have remained shrines to his

Though word of it must have spread rapidly, Shamil's surrender had only limited effect on the will to resist of the majority of the Circassians. Several thousand northern Circassians, it is true, assembled their families and movable possessions and sailed for Turkey in 1860. But the largest Circassian tribes--the Abadzekhs, Ubykhs, and Shapsugs--formed an alliance and convened a national assembly at Sochi. They appealed to Turkey and Britain for support. None came, not even promises. Tsar Alexander II came to Ekaterinodar (now Krasnodar) in 1861 and met Circassian leaders as part of an effort to work out a truce. The Abadzekhs agreed to evacuation to a territory offered to them north of the Kuban. Their descendants continue to live there today in the Adygei Autonomous Region of the RSFSR.⁸⁴ The other Circassians, by far the majority, saw no basis for compromise.

So the fighting continued, but Circassian resources were limited. Russian military operations in Circassia were resumed in earnest in 1862. Baryatinsky's tactics were the same as those applied against Shamil. It took two years to complete formal "pacification." A Russian column finally forced its way through to Tuapse in early 1864. In the following months, the great majority of Circassians submitted to, or fell under, Russian control, but many did not surrender officially and some groups in inaccessible areas continued resistance until the end of the decade. Passive resistance never ceased.

memory through the vicissitudes of the Soviet era. On the site of Shamil's actual surrender a gazebo has been erected with a plaque with the inscription: "On this stone General Field Marshall Prince Baryatinsky sat when receiving the captive Shamil on 25 August 1859," but the local people call the gazebo "Shamil's summer house." An old man who guided a sympathetic Russian writer around Gunib in the 1950s said he believed that Gunib had fallen to tsarist troops only because of treachery and insisted that the monument had been erected in honor of Shamil, not Baryatinsky. "Then why did the Mountaineers tear it down during an uprising at the end of the last century?" the Russian writer asked. "I don't know," the old man answered. Dmitri I. Trunov, *V Gorakh Dagestana*, Molodaya Gvardia, Moscow, 1958, p. 126.

⁸⁴Compared to most other Muslim groups in the Soviet Union in the latter half of the 20th century, they have had a rather low rate of increase. The population of the Adyge Autonomous Region totalled 404,000 in the 1979 census of which less than 25% was Adyge. See Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, Hurst, London, 1985, pp. 190-191.

AFTERMATH

The contrast between the respect shown Shamil by the Tsarist regime during the final 11-1/2 years of his life and the treatment of those who were captured or surrendered after armed--or unarmed--opposition to the Soviet reincarnation of the Russian Empire is a striking measure of the degree of retrogression in observance of humanitarian principles that occurred under 20th century "scientific socialism." Shamil was subjected to no physical discomfort, treated honorably, taken to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and received by many prominent figures. He was a prominent guest at the wedding of the tsar's son in 1866. He was never permitted to return to the Caucasus, but spent a decade in Kaluga enjoying the comforts of a Russian country gentleman. He was given permission to go to Mecca in 1870, embarking at the old Circassian fortress of Anapa and stopping in Constantinople to be received by Sultan Abdulaziz en route. He died in Medina in February 1871.

The Mountaineers Shamil had had to abandon were less fortunate except for the few who became open collaborators of the Russians. Local situations varied, but for the most part the populations of the central and eastern Caucasus were simply left to fend for themselves as best they could. They were not subjected to calculated scorched-earth treatment designed to force them to emigrate. Russian settlers did not rush in to claim their lands. By continuing resistance, the Circassians brought Russian wrath upon themselves. But there was more to it than vengeance. The fertile Black Sea valleys were more attractive than the high mountains of Daghestan. The Russians were eager to repopulate them with settlers they considered reliable. They did nothing to discourage the mass emigration of Circassians to the Ottoman Empire. There is a good deal of evidence, in fact, that Russian military forces who occupied the Circassian lands pursued a policy calculated to force as many of the Circassians as possible to emigrate. The reports of British diplomats during this period provide a good deal of evidence of Russian vindictiveness and even atrocities. A few examples:

The Russians in order to compel the natives of Netauchee and Shapsik to abandon the country and emigrate to Turkey have lately destroyed the whole of that part of Circassia, burning down the houses and crops of the people and thus obliging them to fly.⁸⁵

A Russian detachment having captured the village of Toobah on the Soobashi river inhabited by about a hundred Abadzekh.... After they had surrendered...they were all massacred by the Russian troops. Among the victims were two women in an advanced state of pregnancy and five children. The detachment in question belongs to Count Evdokimoff's army and is said to have advanced from the Pshish valley. As the Russian[s] gain ground on the coast, the natives are not allowed to remain there on any terms, but are compelled either to transfer themselves to the plains of the Kouban or emigrate to Turkey.⁸⁶

The Ubikh and Fighett tribes are...fast embarking for Trebizond. In fact, after their land had been laid waste by fire and sword, emigration to Turkey is the only alternative allowed to these mountaineers who refuse to transfer themselves to the Kouban steppes and contribute periodically to the militia.⁸⁷

Most of [the Abkhaz] have been plundered of everything by the Russians before embarking and have barely been allowed to bring with them the strict necessities of life for a short period. In many villages, and especially in the district of Zibeldah, their houses have been wantonly burnt by the Cossack soldiery and their cattle and other property forcibly taken away or sold under compulsion to Russian traders at a nominal price.⁸⁸

The Russian government has now acquired the territory of that brave and devoted race who have only prized one thing more than country--liberty, or at least the life that is free from the domination of a foreign foe. They are flying the shores immortalized by their defense and seeking an asylum in a

⁸⁵F.O. 97-424, #29, Stevens to Russell, Trebizond, 10 October 1863, as cited in Justin McCarthy, *The Fate of the Muslims*, forthcoming. Citations which follow are from the text and footnotes of the author's typescript, Chapter 2, "Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus."

⁸⁶F.O. 97-424, #2, Dickson to Russell, Soukoum-Kale, 17 March 1864, *idem.*

⁸⁷F.O. 881-1259, Dickson to Russell, Soukoum-Kale, 13 April 1864, *idem.*

⁸⁸F.O. 97-424, #13, Palgrave to Stanley, Trebizond, 16 May 1867, *idem.*

neighboring empire. In short, Circassia is gone; what yet remains is to save the Circassians. The Ottoman Government is willing to afford the refuge they desire. But its means for doing this are...scanty; what it has already done--and this, comparatively speaking, is little--has been at a cost of 200,000 pounds.⁸⁹

How many people left? The subject has only recently attracted the consistent attention of historians who have begun combing through Turkish archives, British Foreign Office files, contemporary reports of eye-witnesses and, to the extent they are available, Russian materials on the great exodus. The Ottoman government set up a migration commission as early as 1860, but it was prepared to deal only with the 40-50,000 refugees expected at that time.⁹⁰ It was eventually practically overwhelmed by the influx. During the winter and spring of 1864 alone, 257,068 individuals were listed as departing for Turkey from seven Black Sea ports under Russian control. Many also reached Turkey over land. Some sources estimate that Circassian migration had already reached a million by the end of 1866. Emigration, which included other Caucasians in smaller numbers, continued on a large scale to the end of the decade of the 1860s and did not cease during the following decade. There was, in fact, an upsurge during and after the Russo-Turkish War of 1876-78.⁹¹

⁸⁹F.O. 881-1259, Bulwer to Russell, Constantinople, 3 May 1864, *idem*.

⁹⁰An as yet unpublished Istanbul University doctoral dissertation based on extensive exploitation of Turkish archival sources provides the most comprehensive available survey of the Ottoman experience in receiving and resettling Caucasian refugees: Bedri Habicoglu, *Kafkasya'dan Osmanli Imparatorlugu'na Gocler ve Iskanlari*, History Department, Faculty of Literature, University of Istanbul, 1983. A Turkish work which has recently appeared and which I have not yet had time to examine has been published to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the expulsion of the Circassians: I. Aydemir, *Kuzey Kafkasyalilarin Goc Tarihi, Muhaceretin 125. Yili Anisina*, Ankara, 1988.

⁹¹As cited in Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914, Demographic and Social Characteristics*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1985, pp. 65-70.

Mortality among Caucasians en route was high, and large numbers died of illness after reaching Ottoman territory. Excerpts from another British diplomatic dispatch provides some impression of the appalling results of this vast mass movement of defeated people to new homes:

According to the report of the [Ottoman Governmental] Commission, the number of Circassian emigrants which sailed from Samsoun [in one particular group] was 2718. Died between Samsoun and Constantinople...202. Transshipped at Constantinople...528. Died between Constantinople and Cyprus...637. Landed at Cyprus...1351. The suffering and mortality of the Circassian emigrants continue unabated. A report received by the Board of Health from the quarantine physicians of the Dardanelles...announces the arrival of the tug *Maria Despina* in tow of two other vessels laden with 1130 Circassians from Samsoun. The original number shipped was 1800 and during the voyage, which lasted 35 days, 670 died from disease, exhaustion, hunger and, above all, from horrible crowding.⁹²

The most comprehensive study of the Caucasian exodus to be done to date sums up a review of a wide range of data on numbers emigrating with the following observations:

There is much debate over the numbers of Circassians and others evicted from their lands in the Caucasus. No accurate counts were made...so one cannot say how many set out. Upon analysis of various estimates, it seems reasonable to state that approximately 1.2 million Caucasians emigrated from Russian-conquered territories. 800,000 of them lived to settle in the Ottoman dominions.

The Russian[s]...saw to it that the conquered Muslim lands were settled with what they considered to be more reliable populations. Just as Russians and Ukrainians had become the main population of the Crimea, Russians and Cossacks took most of the old Circassian lands. Armenians, Georgians and Russians were settled in the coastal lands of the Abkhaz. The first...reliable Russian census, taken in 1897, recorded the transformation of the Muslim lands of the Caucasus. The lands of the Circassians and the Abkhaz, once overwhelmingly Muslim, had become overwhelmingly Christian.⁹³

⁹²F.O. 97-424, Dickson to Stuart, Pera, 5 December 1864, as cited in McCarthy, *op. cit.*

⁹³McCarthy, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2, p. 41. McCarthy's careful

Circassians who came to the Ottoman Empire did not forget their homeland or lose their resentment of the manner in which they had been expelled from it by the Russians. Some among them were always ready to attempt to return. In early 1877 war broke out again between the Ottoman and Russian empires and, though the attention of Europe was focussed on the fighting in the Balkans, the Caucasian front was equally important to the Turks. They found thousands of Circassians, Abkhaz and other Caucasians ready to take up arms. Muslim Georgians, known as Ajars, inhabiting the coastal region north of Batumi (which up until this time had remained in Turkish possession), revolted and joined the Turks in April 1877. It took major Russian exertions to gain control of the area. The Turks launched an amphibious operation farther north. The force included perhaps 3,000 Circassians and Abkhaz. They carried 30,000 rifles to arm compatriots still living in the Caucasus. When the Turkish fleet bombarded Suhumi, the Russian commander withdrew his forces, and the Turks occupied the town and surrounding region. The Russians' situation continued to deteriorate through June as the Turks landed more Caucasian exiles farther north along the coast.

Fear of risings in the eastern Caucasus made Russian commanders reluctant to move immediately against the Turkish/Caucasian exile incursions. Revolt did break out in both Chechnia and Daghestan, where it was not suppressed under October 1877. There was a great deal of indecisive fighting in Abkhazia during the summer, and more Turkish landings were made, but by August Russian counterattacks forced Turkish withdrawal from Suhumi. The Russians, meanwhile, mounted massive flanking operations against the Turks, crossing the border, capturing

scholarly work fills a serious gap in modern historiography which has not only largely ignored the Circassian freedom struggle, but has given even less attention to the mass migration which came in the wake of Russian occupation of Circassian lands. This great exodus was the first of the violent mass transfers of population which this part of the world has suffered in modern times. Two generations later, tragedy began to overwhelm the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia. Millions of Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Kurds, and Nestorians were uprooted and, at a minimum, hundreds of thousands perished, during the commotion of World War I and its aftermath. None of these ethnic disasters is without some relationship to the others.

Ardahan, and laying siege to Kars. Kars fell in November and the Turks pulled their forces back to Erzurum, but the Russians, in spite of repeated attempts, had been unable to capture Batumi. Once again the Caucasian situation was adversely affected by developments in Europe, where Turkish forces suffered serious defeats. Eager to limit Russian gains in the Balkans, the European Powers pressed the Turks to cede Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi in the Treaty of Berlin signed in the summer of 1878.⁹⁴

So, like Omer Pasha's invasion of the Circassian coast during the final year of the Crimean War, Turkish operations in the eastern Black Sea in 1877 had little bearing on the course of the war and, in spite of the hopes of all involved in them, did not advance the interests of the Muslims of the Caucasus. Nevertheless, traditions of resistance and revolt against the Russian Colossus remained a live memory among the North Caucasians. During the decades which followed each of three succeeding generations took advantage of Russian defeats to attempt to regain freedom. The ferment generated by the Japanese defeat of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century led to the 1905 Revolution with widespread reverberations in the Caucasus. The upheaval of the 1917 Revolution and Civil War brought new upsurges of resistance which extended into the period of collectivization and the Great Purges. Many North Caucasians attempted to free themselves of the Soviet Russian yoke again during the German invasion of 1941-43. Stalin's subsequent deportation of a several of these peoples *en masse* in 1944 was the most brutal action the Russians had taken against Caucasians in more than a century and a half of effort to subdue them.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Allen & Muratoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-131.

⁹⁵The most authoritative account of this experience is a book which, originally circulated in the Soviet Union as *samizdat*, was smuggled abroad and published in English translation: Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples*, Norton, New York, 1978.

THE NORTH CAUCASUS: RUSSIA'S LONG STRUGGLE TO SUBDUCE THE CIRCASSIANS