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Claiming Kabarda: The Contest for Empire in North Caucasia from the Conversion of Korgoka Konchokin to the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja

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“Formerly a Kabardian chief and loyal subject of the most gracious [Russian] sovereign, I have now embraced the Russian faith and been baptized, according to my own wish and not under duress.” So Korgoka Konchokin recorded, in 1759, the fact of his conversion in a laconic letter to the commandant of Kizliar, the Russian government’s chief representative in Caucasia. In his letter, Konchokin did not explicitly state the circumstances surrounding his decision to join the ranks of Russia’s Christian subjects. He instead requested permission to be dispatched to the Russian Court, and to resettle, upon his return, in the meadowlands between Meken and Mozdok, two clearings located on the left bank of the Terek River. He also attested to the sincerity of his cousins’ desire to follow his example; together with those of their dependents “wishing to be baptized,” they would found a new settlement some 125 miles (as contemporaries reckoned) upriver from Kizliar, Russia’s southernmost fortress in Caucasia. The commandant had the letter translated from “Tatar” into Russian, appended to one of his reports, and sent via courier to the College of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg.¹ How would Russia’s ruling elites in the capital respond to these requests?

¹ Korgoka Konchokin to Kizliar Commandant Ivan L’vovich von Frauendorf, November 26, 1759, in *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia v XVI—XVIII vv: dokumenty i materialy* (hereafter *KRO*), 2 vols., eds. T. Kh. Kumykov et al., (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1957), 2: 201. This letter is the only published source of Caucasian provenance that we have for Konchokin’s conversion. Other relevant evidence is found in *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii* (hereafter *AVPRI*), f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5.

More than four months passed before news of Konchokin's conversion finally reached St. Petersburg, where members of the College of Foreign Affairs received it with a characteristic combination of cautious enthusiasm and incredulity. Two months later, the College acquiesced to Konchokin's request to visit the Russian Court, averring that his conversion constituted an unprecedented event in the history of the government's relations with the lords of Kabarda. But if the College found Konchokin's actions laudable, concerns about his motives lingered. The College therefore instructed the commandant of Kizliar to conduct a thorough investigation into the "special reasons" for Konchokin's conversion as well as his circumstances in Kabarda, more generally.² Upon his arrival in the Russian capital, this plucky Kabardian headman managed to dispel his hosts' doubts and convince them of the seriousness of his intentions. In subsequent reports to the Senate, the College recommended establishing a settlement at the edge of empire along the lines adumbrated in Konchokin's letter. The College was careful at the same time to emphasize that neither the construction of a fort nor the settling of new converts at Mozdok would violate the terms of any treaties with the Ottomans, Russia's chief rival in the region. Konchokin's proposal, as elaborated by the College, ultimately formed the cornerstone of the Senate report that urged Catherine II to approve plans for a new settlement on the Terek. In the fall of 1762, more than three years after Konchokin was christened Andrei Ivanov, the empress affixed the imperial "*Byt' po semu*" (so let it be enacted) to the Senate report that signaled a new stage in Russian empire-building in Caucasia. The following decade witnessed the first serious attempts by the Russian government to claim possession of Kabarda.³

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² For the initial reaction of the College of Foreign Affairs (hereafter CFA) to the story of Konchokin's conversion, discussed in greater detail below, see the CFA decree to Commandant Frauendorf, February 29, 1760, AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, ll. 22-25 ob.

³ The College's recommendations are summarized in the October 9, 1762 Senate report, *KRO*, 2: 218-20.

The most important event to occur in North Caucasia in the second half of the eighteenth century, the founding of Mozdok figures in most accounts of Russian expansion into North Caucasia as little more than a footnote, if it is mentioned at all. Two features of the historiography deserve comment in this regard. The first concerns the prevailing periodization of the Russian expansion into North Caucasia. Most students of the problem have chosen to focus on the Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century.⁴ As a rule, their work manifests a palpable narrative and analytic impatience with events of the preceding century. This has made it difficult for historians to move beyond the jingoistic pronouncements of imperial era and Soviet authors, who admittedly paid considerable attention to the period and questions explored in this essay.⁵

The second point concerns the assumptions and methods historians have traditionally brought to bear on the study of Russia's international relations. Like their colleagues in other nationally defined fields, historians of Russian foreign policy have tended to adopt a view from the center. They have assumed the conduct of foreign policy to be the true *métier de roi*.⁶ Their method has been to subject to detailed study the papers of Russia's sovereigns and their closest advisers. Not surprisingly, this approach has led some to view Russian expansion as a center-driven process, and to claim, for example, that "in 1762 Peter III inaugurated vigorous action in

⁴ The classic study is John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (1908; reprint, Richmond, Eng.: Curzon Press, 1999); the standard treatment is now Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994); M. M. Bliiev and V. V. Degoev, *Kavkazskaia voina* (Moscow: Roset, 1994); N. I. Pokrovskii, *Kavkazskie voiny i imamat Shamilia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000); Iakov Gordin, *Kavkaz: zemlia i krov': Rossiia v Kavkazskoi voine XIX veka* (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal "Zvezda," 2000). Exceptions to this rule are Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700—1860* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500—1800* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁵ For example, V. N. Kudashev, *Istoricheskie svedeniia o kabardinskom narode* (1913; reprint, Nal'chik: El'brus, 1991); N. A. Smirnov, *Kabardinskii vopros v russko-turetskikh otnosheniakh XVI—XVIII vv.* (Nal'chik: Kabardinskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1948); idem, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI-XIX vekakh* (Moscow: Izd-vo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1958); *Istoriia Kabardy s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, eds. N. A. Smirnov et al. (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1957); idem, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI-XIX vekakh* (Moscow: Izd-vo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1958.)

the Caucasus, pushing forward Cossack settlements and ordering the construction of new fortresses.”⁷ In such accounts, Russia foreign policy is often reduced to the personality of Russia’s rulers. One virtue of this approach is its ability to account for wild oscillations in foreign policy, which can be attributed to the peculiarities of particular reigns or attempts “by one personal or familial hierarchy group to replace another in positions of power and influence.”⁸

Others view “zig-zags” in policy orientation as aberrations, and assign little explanatory power to the clash of individual wills in the ordering of foreign affairs. One authority, for instance, describes policy fluctuations as an “optical illusion,” and understands Russian foreign policy as a “long-range process marked by consistency of methods and purpose,” having “little to do with personalities.”⁹ Like-minded historians emphasize overarching coherence and continuity in Russian foreign policy across several reigns and even centuries. In a recent study that pays considerable attention to Russia’s involvement in North Caucasia, Michael Khodarkovsky contends that “Russia’s expansion to the south and the east was anything but haphazard, spontaneous, and uncontrolled... Rather, it was a deliberate process with varying motives and policies, to be sure, but consistent in its objectives of expansion and colonization of the new regions and peoples.”¹⁰ By identifying persistent factors in Russian foreign policy, these works contribute considerably to our understanding of the impetus for and challenges to Russian imperial expansion over the long term.¹¹

⁶ David M. Griffiths, “The Rise and Fall of the Northern System: Court Politics and Foreign Policy in the First Half of Catherine II’s Reign,” *Canadian Slavic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Fall 1970), 547; Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 187.

⁷ Firuz Kazemzadeh, “Russian Penetration of the Caucasus,” in *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution*, ed. Taras Hunczak (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 246.

⁸ David Ransel, “Nikita Panin’s Imperial Council Project and the Struggle of Hierarchy Groups at the Court of Catherine II,” *Canadian Slavic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Fall 1970), 454.

⁹ John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xiv, xv.

¹⁰ Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier*, 2.

¹¹ For an inventory of these factors and a thorough overview of approaches to the study of imperial Russian foreign policy, see Alfred J. Rieber, “Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretative Essay” and “The

These approaches and sensibilities place substantial constraints, however, on the study of Russian empire-building in Caucasia. First, histories of the Caucasian wars in the nineteenth century pay too little attention to the formative period of Russian involvement there—the eighteenth century—when the government made the first significant attempts to extend its authority over the region. This body of work throws light on the patterns of highlander resistance to Russian encroachments, but the discussion of violent resistance should not be allowed to obscure other modes and manifestations of cross-cultural contact, such as cooperation.¹² Second, the notion that “the creation of foreign policy was the exclusive preserve of the autocrat” may hold true in a European context,¹³ but this fact cannot adequately explain the formulation of Russia’s Caucasian policies. Dynastic ties bound Russia’s rulers to their counterparts in Europe, and provided them with intimate knowledge of European politics. In contrast, Russia’s rulers were relatively ignorant of matters Caucasian. As a result they were forced to cede significant authority and grant special powers to imperial administrators stationed there. Located almost a world away, officials in St. Petersburg came to rely heavily on information supplied by subordinates in the field and by Caucasian populations themselves. What role did political entrepreneurs outside the metropolis play in shaping imperial policies toward the region? Finally, Russian foreign policy may, in retrospect, appear to be consistent and coherent, but it is worth remembering that contemporaries were forced to fashion them without the benefit of hindsight. What is needed is a history of foreign relations that moves the

Historiography of Imperial Russian Foreign Policy: A Critical Survey,” in *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. and trans. Hugh Ragsdale and asst. ed. Valerii Nikolaevich Ponomarev (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 315-359 and 360-443, respectively.

¹² Similar concerns have been voiced by Edward J. Lazzerini, “Local Administration and Resistance to Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century Crimea,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, eds. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 169-87, and Paul W. Werth, “From Resistance to Subversion: Imperial Power, Indigenous Opposition, and Their Entanglement,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 21-43.

¹³ Griffiths, “The Rise and Fall of the Northern System,” 569.

discussion beyond the person of the ruler, outside the metropolis, and onto ground where the contingencies of empire-building make the outcome of the project at every stage rife with uncertainty.

Until recently, nation and nation-state predominated in historical thinking about Russia.¹⁴ Transnational history seeks to relieve historical practice from what Gérard Noiriel calls “the tyranny of the national,” or as Praenjit Duara famously put it, to rescue history from the nation.¹⁵ Americanist historians have traced the term *transnational* back to Randolph Bourne’s 1916 essay, “Trans-National America,” in which he argued that the United States “is coming to be, not a nationality, but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors.” For scholars today, the term “connotes movement and connection through time and space.”¹⁶ That historians of Russia today share these concerns and sensibilities is clear from recent work by authors who do not assume the centrality of the nation-state, but demonstrate instead the multinational character of the Russian empire by studying its multiple “threads.”¹⁷ It is not at all clear, however, that nation and nation-state should be discarded as units of historical analysis for Europe in the age of nationalism.

But what, if anything, can transnational history offer students of Russia and the stateless world of North Caucasia, where traditions of nation remained weak, or else were absent, well

¹⁴ Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung—Geschichte—Zerfall* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992), introduction.

¹⁵ Gérard Noiriel, *La tyrannie du national: Le droit d’asile en Europe (1793—1993)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991), quoted in Donna R. Gabaccia, “Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History,” in *Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 3, (Dec. 1999), 1115; Praenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Quoted in David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999), 968.

¹⁷ For a sense of the variety of work currently being done, see eds. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); eds. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel, *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998); and eds. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

into the twentieth century? Is it possible to write a truly transnational history of imperial Russia if the limits of state authority and the porosity of national borders were among its distinguishing features? In discussing the desirability of transnational history, Richard White calls for historians to be more attentive to spatial issues. Drawing on the work of the French geographer Henri Lefebvre, White argues for “a history that does not have to choose between the local, regional, national, and transnational but can establish shifting relationships between them.”¹⁸ If the efficacy of the nation as an adequate framework for analyzing Russo-Caucasian relations in the eighteenth century is highly questionable, it still makes sense to distinguish among the multiple scales—local, regional, imperial (or center-region), and international—on which cross-cultural encounters were played out.¹⁹

I propose in the following pages to examine Russo-Kabardian relations in the period from 1759 to 1774 by approaching the problem from these angles of vision. I am particularly concerned to disentangle the aggregate of phenomena that constitute what I call frontier diplomacy. Frontier diplomacy engaged diverse populations in the process of negotiating Russia’s advance into North Caucasia. Metropolitan ruling elites in St. Petersburg had obvious roles to play in the formulation and justification of governmental policies. But for a fuller picture of the processes of Russian expansion to emerge, it is necessary to de-center the discussion of foreign policy. If “border regions have their own social dynamics and historical development,”²⁰ close attention must also be paid to relations between Caucasian populations

¹⁸ Richard White, “The Nationalization of Nature,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 3 (Dec. 1999), 977, 981.

¹⁹ B. E. Noldé, *La formation de l’Empire russe: études, notes et documents*, 2 vols. (Paris: Institut d’études slaves, 1952-53), moved in this direction a half of century ago; Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich*, deserves credit for breathing fresh air into a truncated tradition; see also the suggestive work of Alfred J. Rieber, “Struggle over the Borderlands,” in *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 61-89, and his “Approaches to Empire,” forthcoming.

²⁰ Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” *Journal of World History*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1997), 212.

and Russian officials stationed in the region. Finally, Russia's diplomatic mission in Istanbul placed the Kabardian question in the broader context of international affairs. By taking a multi-lens perspective on three separate but related events—Konchokin's conversion, the founding of Mozdok, and Russia's attempt to annex Kabarda—I suggest how an array of political entrepreneurs were ultimately able to frustrate the Russian government's attempts to extend its authority over Kabarda in 1774.

The story of the events surrounding the founding of Mozdok opens a fascinating vista on the formulation of imperial policies toward North Caucasian populations. If the apocryphal "Testament" of Peter I has helped Russia's enemies (and generations of historians) make sense of its foreign policies, no single document or unifying vision guided the formulation of the government's Caucasian policies in the second half of the eighteenth century.²¹ On Catherine's accession, in 1762, the future course of Russian foreign policy was uncertain in the extreme. Initially, the empress and her closest advisers paid little attention to matters Caucasian; soon they would adopt a foreign policy orientation that looked northward, concentrating on European great power politics while largely neglecting the problem of securing Russia's vast, open southern frontier. As for Caucasia, the Russian government had no master plan for extending its domains beyond the Terek River, where Russian expansion had stalled in the 1730s. Rather, decisions taken by ruling elites in the metropolis were to a great degree informed by and refined in response to the actions of political entrepreneurs working at the edge of empire, as the account of Konchokin's conversion related above suggests. Neither the empress nor her advisers could predict or completely control the native and international responses to the decision to establish a

²¹ L. R. Lewitter, "The Apocryphal Testament of Peter the Great," *Polish Review*, vol. 63 (1966), 27-44; O. Subtelny, "Peter I's Testament: A Reassessment," *Slavic Review*, vol. 33 (1974), 663-78; Hugh Ragsdale, "Russian Projects of Conquest in the Eighteenth Century," in *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, 75-82. Evgenii Anisimov,

forward presence at Mozdok, nor did they anticipate that war with the Ottomans would break out in 1768. And it was in the context of this war that the Russia government began to think seriously about annexing Kabarda. At every stage, Kabardians and other Caucasians played varied and vital roles in shaping—by cooperating, contesting, and resisting—Russia’s policies toward the region, which emerged piecemeal.

* * *

The engine driving Russian expansion into Caucasia stalled long before Catherine II’s accession. By 1724, Peter I had laid claim to territories along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, including the Iranian provinces of Gilan, Mazanderan and Astarabad. But these territories soon proved too costly for Russia to maintain.²² As early as March 1726, Catherine I stated her government’s readiness to retrocede all three provinces to the shah. Two years later, Peter II’s Supreme Privy Council again instructed its representatives in the Persian marchlands to begin negotiations for Russia’s withdrawal from the region, on condition that “these provinces not fall into the hands of any other power.”²³ If the Russian government was looking for an exit strategy that would lead to an alliance with its Iranian counterpart, it was not prepared to purchase that alliance at the price of an Ottoman occupation of its erstwhile possessions. In the event, the Iranian juggernaut under Nadir Shah and the losses Russian troops had endured due to a deadly combination of near-constant warfare, oppressive climate and the spread of infectious diseases,

The Reforms of Peter the Great. Progress through Coercion, trans. J. Alexander (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 254, considers the “Testament” valid in spirit, if its attribution of authorship is not.

²² Consider the case of the 1000 Don Cossack families who arrived in 1724 to serve at Peter’s new fort, Sviatoi Krest. Their population was halved in subsequent years by a combination of forces, chief among which were an inhospitable climate that served as an incubator of infectious disease and the constant depredations of neighboring indigenous populations opposed to Russian encroachments. See P. G. Butkov, *Materialy dlia novoi istorii Kavkaza, s 1722 po 1803 god*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1869), 1: 78. On the commercial front, Peter’s Caspian adventure failed to pay dividends. Russia’s trans-Caucasian trade began to increase steadily only following the founding of Kizliar. See A. Iu. Iukht, *Torgovlia s vostochnymi stranami i vnutrennyi rynek Rossii (20—60-e gody XVIII veka)* (Moscow: Inst. Rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 1994), esp. 28-29, 83-84.

²³ Butkov, *Materialy*, 1: 85, 101.

forced the issue of Russia's retreat from the region.²⁴ By the treaties of Rasht (1732) and Ganja (1735), the Russian government returned all territories that its armed forces had conquered from Iran, including the strategically and commercially important towns of Baku and Derbent.²⁵ It also abandoned Russia's southernmost fort in the region, at Sviatoi Krest, and ordered the retreat of its garrison forces to the left bank of the Terek River, where construction of a new fort at Kizliar commenced in 1735.²⁶ There is no evidence that the governments of Empresses Anne and Elizabeth ever seriously considered regaining those territories by either diplomacy or war.

Russia's withdrawal from southeastern Caucasia had the effect of creating a political vacuum there. Into the void came forces that Russian commanders believed were loyal to the Ottoman sultan: Crimean cavalry and sundry North Caucasian tribesmen, in the first instance. The best route to Derbent and Baku from the Kuban passed through lands claimed by Kabardian powerbrokers, some of whom professed loyalty to the Russian sovereign, and in close proximity to which Russian troops were stationed. The Russian government viewed Crimean-led incursions into Kabarda as a violation of the Russian-Ottoman treaty of 1724. The fighting that

²⁴ Estimates of Russian losses over the course of Russia's twelve-year presence in "Persia" run from 45,000 to 200,000; for Butkov, there was "no doubt" that the latter figure most accurately reflected the real situation. Butkov attributed Russia's withdrawal to non-military factors—disease, most likely, malaria (in the sources, *morovaia iazva* and *morovoe povetrie*)—in the first instance. But it is important to keep in mind that Butkov, a military man who served in Caucasia toward the end of the eighteenth century, was wont to downplay the "military gifts and successes of Nadir" in explaining Russia's withdrawal from the region, in Butkov, *Materialy*, 1: 139-42.

²⁵ The treaties of Rasht and Ganja are in T. D. Iuzefovich, comp., *Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom, politicheskie i torgovye* (St. Petersburg: Tip. O. I. Baksta, 1869), 194-200 and 203-207, respectively.

²⁶ Ivan Popko, *Terskie kazaki s starodavnikh vremen*, vyp. 1, *Grebenskoe voisko* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Departamenta Udelov, 1880), xiii-xiv, estimated that as many as one in three settlers perished at Sviatoi Krest, while the Terek Cossack population there was reduced by as much as two-thirds. The turbulent history of Sviatoi Krest is summarized in N. P. Gritsenko, *Goroda Severo-vostochnogo Kavkaza i proizvoditel'nye sily kraia* (Rostov-on-Don: Izd-vo Rostovskogo universiteta, 1984), 75-83; Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700—1860* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 32-33.

soon broke out between Russian troops and forces loyal to the Ottoman sultan was one of the contributing factors leading up to the Russo-Ottoman War of 1735—1739.²⁷

The political status of lands lying south of the Kuban-Terek river valleys was addressed in the Treaty of Belgrade (1739). In its articles, the belligerents acknowledged that border disputes had long been a source of discord between them. Article 6 spoke of two Kabardas, “Greater and Little,” and stipulated that they serve as a “barrier” between the two empires. The “Kabardian people” (*Kabardinskii narod*) were to be considered “independent,” subjects of neither empire. Further, both the Ottoman and Russian courts pledged not to interfere in Kabardian affairs. Yet the article contained two clauses that greatly weakened the idea of Kabardian independence. One concerned the Russian practice of taking *amanats*, or diplomatic hostages, as a means of assuring tribal quiescence along Russia’s turbulent southern frontier. “Following the former custom,” the article reads, “every time that the Empire of the Russias should take hostages from the two Kabardas for the sole purpose of maintaining tranquility, the Ottoman Porte will be free to do the same for the same end.” Another crucial clause permitted both empires to undertake punitive campaigns against Kabardians should they give cause for complaint.²⁸ In the final analysis, the treaty did nothing to safeguard Kabardian political independence, nor was this its chief purpose. On the contrary, it envisioned and even sanctioned future imperial incursions into Kabarda, and the political ramifications of hostage-taking, a form of submission, must have been clear to both sides. It is also worth noting that although

²⁷ No modern study of the Caucasian origins of this war exists, but on Russian policy toward the Ottomans in this period, see A. Kochubinskii, *Graf Andrei Ivanovich Osterman i razdel Turtsii iz istorii vostochnago voprosa. Voina piati let (1735—1739)* (Odessa: Tip. Shtaba Odessk. voen. Okruga, 1899).

²⁸ The treaty is in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii: Sobranie pervoe* (hereafter *PSZ*), 45 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830), vol. 10, p. 910, doc. 7900; an English translation is in J. C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics. A Documentary Record*. Volume 1. *European Expansion, 1535—1914* (2nd ed., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), doc. 24.

Kabardians fought on both sides during the war, none had any say in the treaty negotiations concerning the political fate of Kabarda.

The Treaty of Belgrade framed diplomatic relations between the Russian and Ottoman empires for more than a third of a century, and constrained relations between the Russian government and Kabardian headmen as well. It was largely observed, however, in the breach. Nevertheless, the treaty is significant as the first international instrument to raise the question of Kabardian political sovereignty. By its terms, Russia became, for the first time, one of the guarantors of Kabardian independence, and it implicitly obliged the Ottoman sultan and Crimean khan, also for the first time, to renounce all former claims of suzerainty over Kabarda. Paradoxically, although the treaty attempted to solve the Kabardian question, its language validated practices that led to further armed clashes on the frontier, and protracted diplomatic wrangling in Istanbul. Sometimes rival groups within Kabarda attempted to ally themselves with regional players outside Kabarda, including armed men loyal to metropolitan ruling elites of rival empires. This state of affairs obtained until a plucky Kabardian chieftain, known to Russian authorities as Korgoka Konchokin, set out to secure refuge in Russia. The events surrounding the story of his conversion and resettlement had profound consequences for the political history of North Caucasia, and left an imprint on Russian diplomatic history as well.

All politics is local: the conversion of Korgoka Konchokin

In the summer of 1759, Korgoka Konchokin appeared before a Cossack village located on the Terek River. He was carrying a letter stating his desire to enter into “negotiations concerning an important matter” with the commandant of Kizliar, Brigadier Ivan L’vovich von Frauendorf.²⁹

²⁹ Frauendorf to Astrakhan Governor Zhilin, September 16, 1759, AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, l. 7. The College of Foreign Affairs finally received a copy of this report via Astrakhan on December 30, 1759; see *ibid.*, ll. 10-13.

Frauendorf had been serving at Kizliar since the early 1750s, and it is through his correspondence with the governor of Astrakhan and the College of Foreign Affairs that we get our fullest picture of the events immediately surrounding Konchokin's conversion. Kizliar was Russia's first line of defense against incursions from the south. The Russian administration there had a distinct military cast, and came under the jurisdiction of the governor of Astrakhan and the College of War in St. Petersburg. Kabardians, Tatars, Georgians, Armenians and other Caucasians served as unit commanders among the Cossacks, forming the hard core of Russia's fighting forces in the region. They also played vitally important roles as go-betweens; without them communication between Russia's frontier administrators and the local population would have been impossible. These Cossacks were settled in the vicinity of Kizliar, in villages scattered along the Terek River. Although the College of War probably understood Kizliar and the Cossack villages in exclusively military terms—as Russia's first line of defense in Caucasia—it was inevitable that these communities would be drawn into a variety of encounters with their neighbors across the border. So the commandant of Kizliar was also responsible for providing the College of Foreign Affairs with firsthand accounts of developments in the region.

This was not the first time Konchokin had come to the attention of Russian authorities. Almost a decade earlier, he had traveled from Little Kabarda to Kizliar in order to register a complaint against neighboring Kumyks and Kabardians from Greater Kabarda, who, he claimed, were taking his dependents captive and rustling his livestock. At the time he had asked to be allowed to resettle, together with his *uzdens* and dependents, near the warm springs on the right bank of the Terek, across from Chervlennaia *stanitsa*, the Cossack village furthest upriver from Kizliar.³⁰ Contemporary sources are silent on whether the Russian government ever responded to Konchokin's request, but it is likely that Russian officials refused giving satisfaction in such

cases so as to avoid the appearance of violating the terms of Belgrade. These officials did what they could to limit unauthorized movement along its poorly defined Caucasian borders.

Caucasian men of influence, for their part, well knew where to turn to obtain such authorization.

That Konchokin hailed from a family of Kabardian chiefs known to Russian authorities as (sometimes) friendly clients did nothing to free him from the mandatory six-week quarantine imposed on highlanders wishing to enter Russia. While he waited out his quarantine, Konchokin was visited by a number of Kabardians in Russian service. These go-betweens—several Cossack officers and Konchokin's own sister—assumed responsibility for elucidating, conveying, and translating Konchokin's intentions (he did not speak Russian) for the benefit imperial authorities across the border.

Prince Shelokh Kasimov was the first to report back to Frauendorf. Kasimov was a nephew of the commander of the Terek Host, Prince El'Murza Bekovich Cherkaskii, who in turn was the brother of Prince Alexander Cherkasskii, the trusted comrade of Peter I who died during the Khiva expedition of 1717. Kasimov had been an *amanat* at Sviatoi Krest in 1731, but was then relocated to Kizliar. Released to Kabarda in 1751, he soon asked to be taken into Russian suzerainty. In 1753 he was promoted to captain of the Kizliar Host. Besides the wages he drew for his military service, St. Petersburg granted him a "special salary," which consisted of 300 rubles per year, 200 logs, as much lumber as needed for the construction of a mansion at Kizliar, and privileged access to the region's forests, fisheries, and fertile agricultural lands. This was typical of the kinds of resources Russian authorities were prepared to dedicate to the maintenance of Kabardian lords in Russian service. It was hoped that Russian largesse would guarantee a chief's loyalty and allegiance, provide incentive to serve zealously, and "entice other Kabardian lords to enter Her Imperial Majesty's eternal suzerainty and service" (*dlia*

³⁰ Astrakhan Governor I. O. Brylkin to the College of Affairs, February 28, 1750, in *KRO*, 2: 167.

priokhochivaniia protchikh kabardinskikh vladeltsov k vyezdu v vechnoe e. i. v. poddanstvo i sluzhbu).³¹ The precise value of the salaries and specific privileges granted varied from one

individual to the next. But Kasimov's case was not uncommon. It highlighted for ambitious or desperate outsiders the tangible benefits of Russian patronage. Was Konchokin hoping to negotiate a similar package for himself and his followers?

According to Prince Kasimov, Konchokin had arrived at the border in order to declare his "sincere intention" of embracing the Russian faith. In his report to the College of Foreign Affairs, Frauendorf registered his skepticism about Konchokin's stated reasons for converting. The general was cold to the idea of interfering in Kabarda's tribal rivalries, and he was concerned that conversion might be a merely pretext for traveling to St. Petersburg to lodge complaints against rivals in Greater Kabarda. Such behavior was not unprecedented. A group of chiefs from Little Kabarda, led by Batoka Tausultanov, had traveled to St. Petersburg the previous year to complain about depredations suffered at the hands of their enemies in Greater Kabarda. In his petition to the Russian empress, Tausultanov had requested protection from his Kabardian rivals and permission to resettle his people on the left bank of the Terek. In principle, the College of Foreign Affairs was not opposed to the idea of resettling Kabardians on lands it considered to be within imperial domains. In December 1758, the College noted that, according to the Treaty of Belgrade, "the Kabardian people were free" (*svobodnyi*). Should any Kabardian "cross over to the Turkish side, it would not be possible for [the Russian government] to openly hinder this [movement]; likewise, the Turkish Court would have no just grounds for claims

³¹ "Extract, what ranks and salaries were previously given to Kabardian and Kumyk lords," January 1762, AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, ll. 70-76ob, here, ll. 74-75.

[against Russia], should any Kabardian wish to live on our side [of the borders].”³² But the College was prepared to agree to such requests only on condition that the settlers first convert to Christianity, since it was concerned with increasing the number of loyal subjects in its borderlands, not with ameliorating intertribal relations in Kabarda. The College reminded Frauendorf that the Treaty of Belgrade prohibited both the Ottoman and Russian governments from interfering in Kabardian internal affairs. Thus, officials in St. Petersburg communicated the government’s policies through representatives like Frauendorf, who made it clear to Kabardians that conversion to Christianity was the necessary precondition for receiving permission to settle in lands claimed by Russia. Batoka Tausultanov had signaled to Frauendorf his readiness to convert as early as 1757, but on his arrival in St. Petersburg, he decided against taking that step. At the time the Russian government was focused on affairs in Europe, especially its role in the Seven Years War, so the College decided to put off consideration of the matter until “a more convenient time.”³³ Frauendorf’s skepticism, then, harmonized with and was informed by the College’s decrees on the question of resettling Kabardians within Russia.

Frauendorf had no intention of hosting Konchokin at Kizliar until he could be relatively certain such a move would result in the latter’s conversion. So Konchokin was subjected to another round of interrogations at the Shchedrin outpost, where he was being held in quarantine. Kabardian go-betweens in Russian service attested again to the veracity of the story told to Kasimov. Following a medical examination and fumigation (*okurka*) of his person, Konchokin was permitted to travel to Kizliar, where he reiterated several times his readiness to convert. On August 22, 1759, under the supervision of Commandant Frauendorf and the clerical

³² Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Dagestana (hereafter cited as TsGARD), f. Kizliarskii komendant, op. 1, 1762, d. 500, l. 34, quoted in I. I. Iakubova, *Severnyi Kavkaz v russko-turetskikh otnosheniakh v 40—70-e gody XVIII veka* (Nal’chik: El’brus, 1993), 67.

establishment at Kizliar, Konchokin was christened Andrei. (The inspiration for his surname, Ivanov, apparently had come from Frauendorf himself, whose Christian name was Ivan.) Having converted, Konchokin requested permission to return to his lands in Kabarda in order to determine whether his wife, children and cousins would be willing to convert. Should his wife refuse, he confided to Frauendorf, she would be sent back to her relatives. Although the commandant initially advised him against making the trip, which he considered “inappropriate” and “due to the volatility (*legkomyslie*) of [the Kabardian] people, dangerous,” he ultimately yielded on the question. But he insisted that while in Kabarda Konchokin receive religious instruction from the head of the Ossetian Commission, the Georgian cleric Pakhomii. In concluding his report, Frauendorf asked the College whether Konchokin should be sent on to St. Petersburg, and requested a decree that would address how best to entice and reward his relatives, should they follow Konchokin’s example.³⁴

Communications between the Terek and the Russian capital had not improved significantly since the seventeenth century, when important or sensitive information might reach its target within six weeks. But it was not uncommon for instructions from the center and reports from the periphery to spend three months en route.³⁵ Frauendorf’s first report to the College concerning Konchokin’s conversion, dated September 16, 1759, was received in St. Petersburg on December 30, 1759. In the interim, Konchokin had returned to Kizliar from Kabarda, and was now asking to be resettled on lands lying between Meken and Mozdok, where he intended to establish a community of new converts consisting of his kinsmen and their dependents. Konchokin, Frauendorf, and Astrakhan Governor Zhilin all anxiously awaited further

³³ TsGARD, f. Kizliarskii komendant, op. 1, 1762, d. 500, ll. 37, 38, 39, cited and discussed in Iakubova, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 68.

³⁴ AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, ll. 7-9ob.

instructions.³⁶ Without a resolution from the College, neither Russian official was prepared to take further action. In Russia's frontier diplomacy with the lords of Kabarda, this was uncharted territory.

In St. Petersburg, reaction to news of Konchokin's conversion was generally positive. According to the head of the College of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Vorontsov, "since this Korgoka Konchokin was the first Kabardian chief to be baptized, he is therefore deserving of charity." What Vorontsov meant, in fact, was that Konchokin was the first Kabardian chief willing to leave Kabarda, resettle under Russian protection, acknowledge Russian suzerainty, and most important, convert to Orthodox Christianity. Still, Vorontsov and his colleagues reasoned that Konchokin could not have decided to convert on the basis of religious conviction, as he was "ignorant of [the tenets of] Christianity." So they instructed Frauendorf to investigate the "special reasons" that had caused Konchokin to take such drastic steps. Vorontsov also requested a full accounting of Konchokin's circumstances in Kabarda: "how many dependents does he have, and do his cousins wield power among the Kabardian people, and what are their fathers' names."³⁷ In other words, the College was particularly interested in assessing the relative power of Konchokin and his kinsmen—judged in terms of the number of dependents possessed, their standing among the Kabardian people, and their lineage. From the point of view of St. Petersburg, these factors constituted the political life of Kabarda. The Russian government was eager to cultivate clients in the strategically located lands of Kabarda. But it first wanted to be certain that in doing so it could claim strict adherence to the terms of its treaties with the

³⁵ M. A. Polievktov, *Ekonomicheskie i politicheskie razvedki moskovskogo gosudarstva XVII v. na Kavkaze* (Tiflis: Nauchno-issled. institut kavkazovedeniia Akademii nauk SSSR, 1932), 9, 10.

³⁶ The Tatar original of Konchokin's letter, to which both his names—Korgoka Konchokin and Andrei Ivanov—were affixed in Arabic script, is in AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, l. 15, and the translation is in l. 16. Both versions were attached to Frauendorf's November 27, 1759 report to the College of Foreign Affairs, *ibid.*, l. 14-14ob; Governor Zhylin's November 8 and December 10 reports to the College are in *ibid.*, ll. 2-2ob, 18.

Ottoman government. Konchokin's conversion had made this possible. But the details of any patron-client relationship with Kabardian chiefs would have to be worked out in St. Petersburg, where the government was now prepared to receive Konchokin and his suite.

Why forces had moved Konchokin to seek Russian patronage and protection? Thanks to the investigation ordered by the College and Konchokin's own testimony, it is clear that intertribal rivalry was a contributing factor, and that his conversion was not the result of any religious epiphany. Only one voice suggested that religious considerations might explain Konchokin's actions. According to Archimandrite Pakhomii's testimony, "Prince Andrei and other Kabardians had, over the course of eight years, often discussed the Russian faith (*grekorossiiskii zakon*) with me." During these discussions, the cleric alleged, Konchokin had expressed his desire to convert. Pakhomii further testified that he knew of no other reasons for Konchokin's conversion. But Pakhomii's interpretation of the events surrounding the conversion was discounted in St. Petersburg, where his proselytizing efforts among Highlanders were viewed as a failure.³⁸ More compelling was the testimony of Terek Cossack Boris Artem'ev, who had accompanied Konchokin to Kabarda following the latter's conversion. While in Kabarda, Artem'ev learned from "many esteemed *uzdens*" that men of power from Greater Kabarda often conducted raids into Little Kabarda, where they plundered villages, took captives, and rustled livestock. According to Artem'ev, Konchokin's supporters believed they could avoid such depredations in the future by moving closer to Russian positions on the Terek. Konchokin's cousins had agreed to the conversion with this in mind.³⁹

³⁷ CFA decree to Frauendorf, February 29, 1760, AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/, 1759-1763, d. 5, ll. 22-25ob.

³⁸ Pakhomii to Frauendorf, June 3, 1760, AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, l. 32ob.

³⁹ Artem'ev to Frauendorf, May 27, 1760, *ibid.*, ll. 31ob-32.

Konchokin himself admitted, first to Frauendorf and later to members of the College, that some of his dependents had fled his lands and taken refuge in Kizliar, Greater Kabarda and among Kumyks. He hoped that by converting and becoming a Russian subject, Russian authorities would take measures to ensure the return of his dependents. He believed his adherence to Christianity and acceptance of Russian suzerainty (*poddanstvo*) entitled him to imperial favor (*milost'*), which he equated with protection of his particular interests against those of his rivals in the region. These reports informed the College's subsequent recommendations, which now contained fresh arguments and compelling justification for claiming new lands in northern Caucasia.⁴⁰ The debate over Russia's policies toward Kabarda was quickly taking on international dimensions.

Multiple perspectives on the founding of Mozdok

These events throw considerable light on the Russian government's decision to establish a new settlement at Mozdok. The College outlined its thinking on this matter to the Senate, which then summarized it in a report confirmed by Catherine II on October 9, 1762.⁴¹ The story of Konchokin's conversion formed the heart of the report. That the subject was raised at the highest level of government suggests its importance to Russia's policymakers. The discussion in St. Petersburg at once highlighted the special challenges facing the Russian administration in the region pointed the way to resolving them.

According to the College, the most important challenge facing the government in North Caucasia was the reinforcement of the Kizliar region. Russia's borders there needed to be protected against "local barbaric peoples." The Russian government in St. Petersburg had

⁴⁰ Andrei Ivanov (Konchokin) to Frauendorf, July 25, 1760, *ibid.*, l. 33-33ob; Tatar original on l. 37-37ob; for the events surrounding Konchokin's embassy to St. Petersburg, see *ibid.*, ll. 41-98ob.

initially hoped the Ossetian Commission would be able to contribute to the security of Russia's exposed Caucasian borderlands by converting highland populations to Orthodox Christianity, the assumption being that co-religionists would be more likely to act in ways favorable to Russia than people of other confessions would be. This was less a mission to civilize Highlanders than it was a means of cultivating pliable and reliable clients. By 1762, however, the Commission's proselytizing efforts had "still not borne any fruit." The official Russian presence in the vicinity of Kizliar was relatively small and spread thin across the lower course of the Terek. These villages at best constituted a porous border. The challenge facing the Russian administration in the region, then, was to settle loyal populations in the gaps in the defensive line that was taking shape along the Terek.

The College viewed Konchokin's request to resettle his people between Meken and Mozdok as a "convenient means" of meeting this challenge. It was confident that Konchokin's example would serve to attract other Highlanders who, like him, hoped to escape the oppression of local rivals and enjoy greater security under Russian protection. The new settlement at Mozdok would welcome "people of every nation, that is, Chechens, Kumyks and other Highlanders and Nogai wishing to convert," all of whom would be placed in Konchokin's charge. According to reconnaissance carried out by order of the College, Konchokin and his cousins would bring as many as 800 people to Mozdok; the Ossetian population numbered at least three thousand; the Kists, who lived near the Ossetians, Kabardians and Chechens, could be expected to provide as many as 1000 armed men on horseback. The Russian government viewed these communities as reservoirs of potential converts and subjects. It was also hoped that "other Christian nations—Georgians, Armenians and others located beyond Russia's borders," would likewise wish to resettle on lands between Mozdok and Chervlensk. Each "nation" (*natsiia*)

⁴¹ The following discussion is based on the Senate report in *KRO*, 2: 218-20.

would constitute separate “settlements” (*sloboda*) and be permitted to build churches and worship according to its own faith and rites. Muslims, however, would not be allowed to reside at Mozdok. But on the question of Muslim settlement there, the report seemed to contradict itself insofar as it provided salaries for Konchokin’s *uzdens* who did not wish to convert. In all likelihood, St. Petersburg intended to leave its administrators some latitude in negotiating this question. In any event, enforcement of this restriction would have to be left to their discretion.⁴²

What had Konchokin gained by negotiating with the Russian government? First, he learned, if he was not already aware, that cooperation with the Russian government could pay considerable dividends. He was given rank and title, which helped define his place within Russia’s ruling class. As a lieutenant colonel in the Russian army, “Prince Cherkaskii-Konchokin” became a member of the Russian ruling class. He and members of his suite received monetary rewards, which naturally enhanced the prince’s prestige in the eyes of his subordinates. The Russian government also pledged to cover the cost of building his lodgings at Mozdok, and would extend to Konchokin other privileges befitting his new station. These were the tangible rewards that constituted Russian imperial favor (*milost’*); alone they were probably enough to explain why some Highlanders actively sought Russian patronage. But Konchokin would also now be able to share in the empire’s glory, a concept no Russian prince took lightly. In earlier negotiations with the Russian command in Caucasia, Konchokin had asked to be rewarded in a way that would adequately reflect Russian imperial glory, so that “non-baptized Tatars would not be able to laugh at me.”⁴³ The College registered Konchokin’s concern in its first response to the news of his conversion.⁴⁴ In the course of negotiations with him, the

⁴² *Uzdens* who converted to Christianity would receive 40 rubles, while those who refused to do so would receive 30 rubles. See *KRO*, 2: 218-220.

⁴³ *KRO*, 2: 201.

⁴⁴ AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1759-1763, d. 5, ll. 23 ob.

College had made every effort to research the facts of previous Kabardian embassies to St. Petersburg in an attempt to avoid giving offense to Konchokin by its offers of compensation. There is every reason to believe that Konchokin was satisfied with the results of the negotiations.

There remained the question of whether the Crimean khan or Ottoman sultan would contest Russian building activities at Mozdok. The Senate report quoted above anticipated this question by making specific reference to the “peace treaty concluded between the All-Russian Empire and the Ottoman Porte in 1739.” The report faithfully summarized the contents of Article 6 of the Treaty of Belgrade, which stipulated that both Kabarda and the Kabardian people were considered to be “free;” that Kabarda was to serve as a “barrier” between the two empires; and that neither empire would be permitted to meddle in Kabarda’s internal affairs. As for the lands between Mozdok and Meken, the report contended that these lands “incontestably belong to [Russia’s] borders and are therefore appropriate for settlement” by Russia’s subjects. The Ottomans would have no grounds for protesting the resettlement of a Kabardian chief who had converted to Christianity, since Article 8 of the Treaty of Belgrade provided for just such an event. Here the College had taken some liberty with the original article, which stipulated:

If, after the conclusion and ratification of the present treaty of peace, subjects of either [signatory] Power should commit crimes or acts of insubordination or treason and flee to [the territory] of the other Empire, they shall in no way be received or protected but—excepting only those who may have become Christians in the Empire of the Russias and those who may have become Muslims in the Ottoman Empire—shall at once be returned or at least expelled from the lands where they may happen to be, so that such infamous men may produce neither coolness nor dispute between the two Empires.⁴⁵

To be sure, Konchokin’s conversion had taken place within Russian domains; not even the Crimean khan contested the legitimacy of the Russian presence at Kizliar. But Russia’s borders in North Caucasia were more imagined than real, as they had yet to be defined by treaty or other agreement with indigenous populations or outside powers. The more important question was

whether Article 8 could be interpreted to speak specifically to independent Kabardians. Since Kabardians were considered “free” by the terms of Article 6, did this mean they were free to choose to enter the service of either empire? Or did Russia’s protection of Konchokin, given his stated problems with other Kabardians, constitute a violation of this article? It was not immediately clear whether the Crimean khan or the Ottoman government would care to debate these matters. But the Russian government was now prepared for such an eventuality.

The Russian ambassador in Istanbul, Aleksei Obreskov, first learned of Konchokin’s story in a 1763 rescript signed by Prince Aleksandr Golitsyn, Vice-Chancellor of the College of Foreign Affairs. But events had earlier forced Obreskov to take an interest in Kabardian affairs. He informed the College, in 1761, that the Porte had instructed the Crimean khan to abide by the terms of all treaties with Russia, stay out of Kabardian affairs, and send word to Constantinople should any Kabardian seek to engage the khan as an intermediary or ally in local fighting.⁴⁶ Russia was aware of the khan’s efforts to compel Kabardian chieftains to acknowledge Ottoman and his own overlordship.⁴⁷ Freed from the stress and strains of war, and busy reassessing its foreign policies, the Russian government in 1763 was now prepared to pay more attention to the “Kabardian question.”

In his instructions to Obreskov, Golitsyn made frequent reference to the Treaty of Belgrade, insisting that Russia intended to live by its terms. At the same time it was clear that Catherine’s government intended to interpret its articles to Russia’s maximum benefit. First he gave a brief account of recent events in North Caucasia. He explained that Little Kabardian

⁴⁵ J. C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East*, 1:73.

⁴⁶ AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, 1761 g., d. 2, l. 1; published in *KRO*, 2: doc. 154.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the 30 May 1760 *zapis*’ from the Greben Cossack starshina A. Mokeev to Commandant Frauendorf in AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, 1760 g., d. 2, ll. 32-33. Mokeev’s had sent his Cossacks into Big Kabarda to reconnoiter conditions there under the pretext of buying a filly from Kabardian chieftain Kasai Atazhukin. Interestingly, some sixty years prior to this the head of the Chancellery of Foreign Affairs, Fedor

chiefs had frequently approached Russian border guards in search of protection from their rivals in Greater Kabarda. He then related the story of Batoka Tausultanov before moving on to outline the deal struck with Konchokin. Golitsyn insisted Russia had never “openly” entered into Kabardian affairs, but admitted Russian officials had occasionally offered “advice” to Kabardian supplicants. The College was of the opinion that Russian acquiescence to Kabardian requests for resettlement within Russian domains would constitute a “violation of the current treaty with the Ottoman Porte.” Konchokin was a special case, however. He had been allowed to come to St. Petersburg and resettle at Mozdok because he was the first Kabardian to convert to Christianity “of his own will” (*samoproizvol’no*). It was this event that led the College to turn for guidance to Article 8 of the treaty, which stipulated that neither empire harbor or protect criminals seeking asylum in the other’s domains.⁴⁸ In most cases, the signatories reserved the right to demand extradition of asylum-seekers. This did not apply, however, to those individuals “who may have become Christians in the Empire of the Russias and those who may have become Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.”⁴⁹ Konchokin fell into this category, and here Russia saw benefit in resettling converted Kabardians in consideration of the “security of those borders adjacent to Persia and the Kuban region.”⁵⁰ Implicit in this statement was an acknowledgement that Ottoman interests and its sphere of influence lay south of the Kuban River, while Iran’s lay south of the Terek River. Golitsyn’s mental map of imperial spheres of influence in Caucasia had been taken for granted by Russia foreign policymakers since the 1730s.

The government in St. Petersburg assigned strategic importance to Mozdok as an observation post facing the Ottomans, just as Kizliar guarded the approach from the Iranian

Golovin, advised Israel Ori to travel into Persian domains “under the guise of purchasing horses” in order to “assess conditions [there] without being suspected,” in Bournoutian, *Armenians and Russia*, doc. 49.

⁴⁸ AVPRI, f. Snosheniia Rossii s Turtsiei, op. 89/8, 1763, d. 333, ll. 65-66ob.

⁴⁹ Hurewitz, *The Middle East*, doc. 24.

marchlands. Surrounded as it was by “many barbaric but brave nations,” Kizliar required more people fit for military service, “especially Christians.” The measures taken (mostly by Georgian proselytizers) to convert Ossetians, Golitsyn lamented, had thus far been in vain; the Highlanders who had already converted were, in fact, continuing to live “as pagans” (*v bezverii*). By settling Christian Kabardians at Mozdok, Russia hoped to provide both incentive and example to other Highlanders. These newcomers would “not only come irrevocably under our suzerainty, but equally into the Christian fold” (*a cherez to ne tolko priamo v nashem poddanstve bezvozvratno ostavatsia, no ravnomerno i v khristianskom zakone*).⁵¹ It was with this in mind that Prince Andrei Cherkaskii-Konchokin had been allowed to settle on the Terek approximately 65 miles upriver from the nearest Cossack outpost at Chervlensk.

Golitsyn then laid out the argument for including Mozdok within Russian imperial domains. According to Golitsyn, the river Kurpa marked the furthest extent of Kabarda’s borders, while the lands immediately adjacent to the river were uninhabited pasturelands. Beyond these pastures lay other arable lands (*ugod’ia*) belonging to the “ancient indigenous Chechen people” (*ugod’ia drevniago zdesniago poddannago chechenskago naroda*), whom he considered subjects of Russia, “which in itself is sufficient to prove that the entire course of the Terek River below the Kurpa and the lands occupying the space on both sides of this river belong to our domains.” Kabardians were valuable as allies because they were adamant about preserving their freedom in the face of attempts by the Crimean khan to subjugate them. They themselves had subjugated many neighboring peoples; it was hoped Kabardian clients could be used to enforce order on a perilous frontier. But he warned Obreskov that they were also “enterprising” (*predpriimchivy*), and could at times be “implacable” (*tverdyy*) and “stubborn”

⁵⁰ AVPRI, f. Snosheniia Rossii s Turtsiei, op. 89/8, 1763, d. 333, ll. 66ob-67.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l. 67ob.

(*upriamy*) allies. The College felt certain some would turn to the khan for aid, should they perceive their interests threatened by Russian policies.

Golitsyn's rescript was designed to serve as the foundation for Obreskov's rebuttal should the khan raise the issue of Kabardian sovereignty before the Porte.⁵² But it was not clear to the College how the Porte would react to the khan's remonstrations. So Golitsyn instructed Obreskov to ascertain the extent of Ottoman interest in the Kabardians and Russian operations in Mozdok, and to provide the College with his opinion of how best to proceed in these matters. In the interim, should the Porte call Obreskov to account for Russia's actions in North Caucasia, he was to respond by highlighting the khan's attempts to subjugate all Kabarda and to use its population in the struggle against his Tatar rivals. Russia had remained silent on these issues out of respect and consideration for its "eternal friend," the Ottoman sultan.⁵³ Obreskov's aim was to persuade his Ottoman interlocutors that Russia had no intention of building a town at Mozdok, but only a modest "outpost" (*forpost*) that would be supplied with no more than a "small team" sufficient to guard against enemy attack. Golitsyn made it clear to Obreskov that Russia expected to gain much advantage over the Ottomans from the settlement at Mozdok, but explained that the government was delaying plans to build a proper fortress there until a more propitious time.⁵⁴

The following year found Obreskov exercised by precisely these issues. In June 1764 memorandum presented to the Porte, he responded to concerns voiced by the Crimean khan and offered a forceful, if somewhat disingenuous, defense of Russia's activities in Caucasia.

⁵² Ibid., ll. 68-69.

⁵³ In a November 12, 1763 rescript, Golitsyn reiterated the Russian position that the Crimean khan should not be allowed to cross the Don or Kuban' rivers in order to enter the places that served as a barrier between the two empires, i.e., the Kabardas. He was explicit about wanting to keep the khan out of the Caucasus mountains, to which end he was asking the Russian consul in Crimea, Nikiforov, to dissuade the khan from such action, while Obreskov was to make the best possible case before the Porte. Ibid., ll. 87-89ob.

⁵⁴ Ibid., ll. 69-70.

According to the khan's protest, the Russian government was: keeping an army officer and Cossacks in Kabarda in violation of the Belgrade peace; building a fortress on the Terek River; subjugating the inhabitants of Little Kabarda; had sent clerics to settle on the hills near Kuchuk Elbruz under the guise of hermits, when in fact their true mission was to win converts in Greater Kabarda; making travel to Daghestan nearly impossible by using force to free Georgians held captive by merchants passing through the region; and, finally, was supplying several border fortresses with troops, munitions and provisions. These were serious allegations. The Ottoman government responded by demanding that Russia abandon its forts in the region and respect the terms of its treaties with the Porte. Explicitly or implicitly, each point claimed that Russian forces in the region were acting in violation of Article 6 of the Treaty of Belgrade. To avoid hostilities with the Ottomans, the Russian government would have to mount a robust defense of its activities in the region. This task fell to Obreskov.⁵⁵

The Russian ambassador attempted to address these concerns in January 1764, but the Porte insisted on receiving a direct response from the Russian Court. With this in hand, Obreskov provided a point-by-point rebuttal of the khan's complaints. First, Russia did not violate the terms of the treaty by sending Cossacks from Astrakhan and Kizliar into Kabarda to take diplomatic hostages and to retrieve stolen property, but was exercising its right, as stipulated in the treaty, to continue to practice this "ancient tradition." As for Russian forces in Kabarda, "can so few individuals cause harm to an entire nation," Obreskov asked rhetorically. The khan was using the "*amanat* question" as a means of winning allies in Greater Kabarda. That some Kabardians were opposed to the practice of taking hostages was irrelevant, since the treaty

⁵⁵ Obreskov's *zapiska* was presented to the Porte on 29 June 1764 and was originally composed in Italian, one of the languages of diplomacy in Constantinople. From this a Russian translation was made and sent to the Russian capital. AVPRI, f. Snosheniia Rossii s Turtsiei, op. 89/8, 1764, d. 355, ll. 73-90 (Russian translations), and ll. 94-97 (Italian variant).

legally sanctioned the practice. The Russia government was now insisting both sides scrupulously observe its terms.⁵⁶

Yes, Russia was erecting outposts along the course of the Terek. Here Obreskov offered a *tour d'horizon* of North Caucasian political geography. On the drawing attached to his memorandum, he plotted entire nations like so many flags on a map.⁵⁷ **[Insert drawing]** He defined Kabardian territory as the space located between lands inhabited by subjects of the Russian and Ottoman empires. In other words, Kabardian territory began in the west where Beslenei (whom the Russian government considered Ottoman subjects) lands ended, and stretched eastward along the left bank of the Kurpa River. The eastern extent of Kabarda's frontier closed where it encountered Russian subjects: "Kumyks, Chechens, Cossacks and others." Russia was not building fortresses (Obreskov contested the khan's "distorted descriptions" of these edifices, insisting they were small outposts and not fortresses) anywhere near the confluence of the Terek and Kurpa rivers, but far downstream, near Cossack settlements. Russian outposts in the region were absolutely necessary given the turbulent nature of the region, where Tatar nomads and Highlanders, who "all without exception have bestial customs," were notorious for kidnapping Russian subjects, raiding Russian settlements, and robbing caravans passing through the region. The outposts served the essential function of protecting the lives and livelihoods of Russia's subjects. Mozdok was being constructed with these concerns in mind.⁵⁸

As for Kabardians who had become Russian subjects, Obreskov averred, the treaty clearly recognized the right of individuals to convert and settle in either empire—Christians in Russian lands, Muslims in Ottoman lands. Obreskov contrasted the case of Korgoka

⁵⁶ Ibid., ll. 74-76ob.

⁵⁷ For the Russian version on the map, see *ibid.*, ll. 90ob-91, and ll. 92 ob-93 for a Russian-Italian variant.

Konchokin's voluntary conversion and resettlement to the Crimean khan's efforts to compel a Kabardian chief, Hadji Temriuk, to settle on the khan's lands. Russia had always been careful, according to Obreskov, to turn away Little Kabardians seeking protection from their rivals in Greater Kabarda, and had never interfered in Kabarda's internal affairs. Of course this was pure fiction: even Obreskov had acknowledged in the memorandum that Russian-sponsored clerics had occasionally traveled through Kabardian lands and into "independent Ossetia" in order to minister to Christians there. These activities were required by the faith; very few of these individuals actually lived in the region year-round, and their small dwellings posed no threat to Kabarda, he claimed.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the embassy of Cherkasskii-Konchokin had arrived back at Kizliar by April 1763. Construction near Mozdok commenced soon thereafter. Within a few months, Lt. Colonel Petr Gaka, the Russian official who had secretly been commissioned to oversee building operations at Mozdok, was informing St. Petersburg that some Kabardian chiefs appeared to be uniting against the idea of resettling Kabardians there.⁶⁰ When efforts to negotiate the termination of building operations at Mozdok failed, the chiefs threatened violence. While Russian officials in the region were busy mapping the lower course of the Terek and measuring distances between Kizliar and Little Kabarda,⁶¹ the chiefs of Greater Kabarda were preparing to dispatch an embassy to St. Petersburg to make their concerns known to the Russian Court.

⁵⁸ Ibid., ll. 78-84ob.

⁵⁹ Ibid., ll. 84ob-85ob.

⁶⁰ AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1763, d. 8, l. 1.

⁶¹ The College of Foreign Affairs had instructed Russian officials in the region to compose a map of settlements on the Terek. According to their findings, 92 *versts* (or approximately 60 miles) separated Kizliar from the westernmost Cossack settlements at Chervlensk; from there it was another 98 *versts* (or 65 miles) to Mozdok, which was 22 *versts* (some 15 miles) from where the Kurpa River flowed into the Terek, and where "Kabardian settlements begin." In other words, according to Russian officials, Kizliar was located some 211 *versts* (140 miles) from Little Kabarda. See the "Note on the locations of places between Kizliar and Mozdok...", in AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/1, 1764, d. 3.

The government in St. Petersburg continued to receive diplomatic protests from Crimea and the Porte, as if to prepare the ground for another Kabardian embassy. In 1764 Kaitoka Kaisinov arrived in the capital to protest the founding of Mozdok and other Russian policies. But Mozdok was the source of their greatest perturbation. The “request” (*proshenie*) Kaisinov delivered to the College of Foreign Affairs contained the outlines of a mental map of Kabardian domains that was at odds with the official Russian version:

The border of our land stretches along the steppe up to the Kuma River, and from the Kuma River [continues] up to the former settlement at Madzharba, where our sheep, herds of horses and other animals graze. On the mountain side [of the Terek], the Terek River flows up to a clearing called Meken, where up till now we grazed our herds, and where we cut the forest as our home building needs demanded. But now they have again begun to build a fortress on the Terek, and when the building of the fortress is completed and becomes established, the consequences for us will be oppression and losses in many things.⁶²

These protests could potentially complicate relations with the Porte. The College was eager to avoid such an outcome, so it instructed one its clerks to approach an *uzden* in Kaisinov’s suite in an attempt to have this testimony retracted. Apparently, the ruse worked. The College was able to procure a written statement that suggested Kaisinov and his backers had no legitimate claim to Mozdok since their herds rarely came within a distance of 20 miles from there, and then only sporadically. But the government was concerned that Russia’s involvement in and around Mozdok might be causing a growing number of formerly quiescent Kabardian powerbrokers to turn to Crimea and the Porte for protection. Although the College considered moving the new settlement closer to long-established Cossack villages such as Chervlensk, it recommended that this be done only in “extraordinary circumstances.” Ultimately, the College urged the Senate to reject the Kabardians’ “capricious demands,” especially with regard to Mozdok.⁶³

⁶² The request is in AVPRI, f. Kabardinskie dela, op. 115/2, 1762-1777, d. 7, ll. 81-85 ob; the quote is on l. 81 ob.

⁶³ College of Foreign Affairs report confirmed by Catherine II, November 9, 1764, RGADA, f. Kavkazskie dela, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 7-22; Nolde, *La formation*, 2: 344.

Russia's repeated efforts throughout the 1760s to purchase the goodwill of the lords of Greater Kabarda came to nothing. The "Kabardian question" remained hotly contested in this period—in Istanbul, St. Petersburg and across North Caucasia. The threat of a significant attack on communities between Mozdok and Kizliar by Kabardians and their allies continued to grow. When fighting broke out between Russian and Ottoman forces in 1768, the Russian position in northern Caucasia was even more tenuous than it had been prior to 1763.

Claiming Kabarda in the context of the the Russian-Ottoman War of 1768-74

Catherine's government first announced its intention of annexing Kabarda in the course of the Russian-Ottoman War of 1768-74. Traditionally, historians have traced the origins of Kabarda's annexation to Article 21 of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja, which marked the conclusion of the war. A consensus has formed around the classic study of the treaty, E. I. Druzhinina's *Kiuchuk-kainardzhiiskii mir*, which understands the article as providing for Russia's annexation of Kabarda in 1774.⁶⁴ Even when historians have chosen not to cite Druzhinina and have attempted independent readings of (usually translations of) the treaty, their conclusions have invariably fallen into line with hers. The "Druzhinina Consensus," then, looms large over narratives of Russian imperial expansion and the maps that accompany them. A critical examination of this consensus is long overdue.

⁶⁴ The tendency of some Soviet historians to date Russia's annexation of Kabarda to the sixteenth century is a question I cannot hope to address here. For a review of some of the relevant literature, see M. M. Bliiev, "K voprosu o vremeni prisoedineniia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza k Rossii," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 7 (1970): 45-47. Knowledge of the sources for Russo-Kabardian relations in the 16th and 17th centuries, not to mention the Treaty of Belgrade (1739), which stipulated Kabarda's political independence from both Istanbul and St. Petersburg, makes it difficult to take seriously the literature Bliiev reviews. Bliiev returned to the problem of annexation in his "O nekotorykh problemakh prisoedineniia narodov Kavkaza k Rossii," *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 6 (1991): 67-84.

Much has been written about Catherine's first war with the Ottomans and the treaty that signaled its conclusion.⁶⁵ The treaty registered a major shift in the balance of power between the Russian and Ottoman empires with serious, long-term repercussions for European power politics, more generally. Most scholars would agree with M. S. Anderson's assessment of the instrument as "one of the most famous and important treaties in the history of European diplomacy."⁶⁶ Western and Russian historians alike locate in the treaty's articles the origins of the 19th-century "eastern question," arguably "the most lasting and intractable of all sources of rivalry between the powers of Europe."⁶⁷ Several authors have even drawn attention to the vague wording of the articles concerning Ottoman Christians (articles 7, 14, 16, 17, 23 and 25), and Russia's alleged right to make representations on their behalf before the Porte.⁶⁸ Indeed, most discussion of the treaty has focused on precisely these articles, that is, on the origins of the "eastern question" as

⁶⁵ Questions of campaign strategy and military tactics are not my primary concern here. For a review of the relevant literature, however, and an original interpretation of the Ottoman experience of the war, see Viginia H. Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700-1783* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1995), chapter three, "The Russo-Turkish War, 1768 to 1774: On the Battlefield." For the Russian side, see the classic study by Iurii R. Klokman, *Fel'dmarshal Rumiantsev v period russko-turetskoi voiny, 1768—1774* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1951); and John R. Broadus, "Soviet Historians and the Eastern Question of the Eighteenth Century," *East European Quarterly*, vol.15 (1981): 357-75.

⁶⁶ M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774—1923. A Study in International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 1, remains the best diplomatic study of the "eastern question," the origins of which he traces to the treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja. Roderic H. Davison, "'Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility': The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered," in *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774—1923: The Impact of the West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 30, views the treaty as "a major step, possibly the greatest single step prior to 1955, by Russia into the Near East." Viewed from another perspective still, the treaty, according to Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: 2000 Years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 279, marked "a turning point in the relations between Europe and the Middle East."

⁶⁷ M. S. Anderson, *The Great Powers and the Near East 1774—1923* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 1; A. N. Sakharov et al., eds., *Istoriia vneshnei politiki Rossii. XVIII vek* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1998), 124, 280 n. 45.

⁶⁸ Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947; reprinted 1959), 1:526; Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Balkans* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 35; M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, p. xi; Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801—1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 46; Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya, XVIII. Yüzyıl sonundan Kurtuluş Savaşına kadar Türk-Rus ilişkileri (1798—1919)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1970), 28-30; and, John LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 106. For a revisionist assessment of this debate, see Davison, "'Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility,'" in his *Essays*, 29-50.

played out in Europe. As a result, the articles dealing with matters Caucasian have been all but ignored.⁶⁹

One would have expected historians of Russia to redress this oversight. Lamentably, this has not happened. Recent interpretative accounts that treat Russia explicitly as an empire often fail to mention the treaty at all,⁷⁰ while surveys that do have tended to ignore its “Caucasian” articles.⁷¹ Most surprisingly, Article 21 is a non-issue in recent studies of Russia’s southern frontier in which Kabardians figure prominently,⁷² as if the article had failed to address the vital question of Kabardian political sovereignty; as if Russian administrators subsequently made no attempt to enforce the government’s interpretation of the treaty among Kabardians; and as if Kabardians themselves had nothing to say on the matter. Scholars of Catherinian Russia, however, do not have the luxury of ignoring this important and complex document. According to one prominent scholar of Russia in the age of Catherine the Great, the cession of Kabarda “was confirmed in the treaty of Karazubazar ... [and] subsequently reluctantly accepted by the

⁶⁹ Exceptionally for this literature, M. S. Anderson, “European Diplomatic Relations, 1763—1790,” in *New Cambridge Modern History*, 14 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1965) 8: 264, addresses Article 21, contending that it “gave Russia the Kabardas.”

⁷⁰ D. C. B. Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552—1917* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkereich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich: Beck, 1992), offer no discussion of the treaty, though Kappeler notes in passing that the Kabardians and Ossetians “were formally placed under Russian suzerainty” sometime in the 1770-80s. In Kappeler, *Russland*, 151.

⁷¹ For example, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 6th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). The major exception is, of course, the excellent discussion in Boris Nolde, *La formation de l’Empire russe*, 2 vols. (Paris: Institut d’études slaves, 1952-53), 2: 92-107, and on Kabarda specifically, 2: 345-46. Interestingly, Nolde, *La formation*, 2:345, probably following P. G Butkov, *Materialy dlia novoi istorii Kavkaza*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1869), 1:335-36, concluded that Article 21 stipulated the “total annexation of Kabarda by Russia.”

⁷² Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), makes no mention of the treaty. Promoted as the “first comprehensive study of Russia’s southern and southeastern frontier,” Michael Khodarkovsky’s, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500—1800* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), which although it has much to say about Kabardians, is silent on Article 21. For Khodarkovsky, the treaty is important insofar as it compelled the Ottoman government to address Russia’s rulers as emperors, and for the one provision “which eventually led to recognizing Russia’s right to be a protector of Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman empire,” 51 and 263n38, respectively. As for the matter of the Ottoman Orthodox, it is not clear from the text which “provision” the author has in mind (though it is probably Article 7), or by whom and when Russia was recognized as their “protector.”

Porte in Article 21” of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja.⁷³ (As I will demonstrate below, the Porte rejected such readings of the treaty.) Paradoxically, Montefiore’s recent biography of Prince Grigorii Potemkin offers no serious discussion of the very treaty that was, as the author himself writes, “to make Potemkin’s achievements possible.”⁷⁴ So when historians of Russia have engaged Article 21, it has been to note in passing those territories annexed by Russia, including “the Great and Little Kabarda, that is, a part of the Kuban and Terek districts.”⁷⁵ In other words, they have lined up behind the Druzhinina consensus.⁷⁶

The classic and indispensable study of the treaty is Druzhinina’s *Kiuchuk-kainardzhiiskii mir*. This work briefly addresses international politics on the eve of the war, and then turns to a richly documented consideration of the Russian experience of wartime diplomacy. Foreign affairs and diplomacy are Druzhinina’s proper subjects, though she also has something to say about the military side of (and especially commander-in-chief Rumiantsev’s role in) the conflict. For the light it throws on the Russian side of the negotiations leading up to Kuchuk Kainardja, Druzhinina’s account remains unsurpassed.⁷⁷ Her discussion of the treaty is thorough, and she devotes appropriate space to the Caucasian aspects of the Ottoman-Russian rivalry. So it is quite natural that generations of historians have relied and continue to rely on her investigation in their own studies of Russia.

⁷³ Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 369, understands that “the problem of assimilating the Kabardas remained unsolved in the eighteenth century.”

⁷⁴ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Prince of Princes: the Life of Potemkin* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 131.

⁷⁵ Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1953), 1:525-26. Explicitly aware of the treaty’s complexity, John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105, writes: “Kabarda was incorporated into the Russian Empire, subject to the consent of the Crimean khan and the ‘elders of the Tatar nation’.” More recently, Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: a History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 231, though paradoxically now less concerned with the problem of empire than with the problem of Russia and the Russians, opines: “In the Caucasus Kabarda became part of the Russian Empire.”

⁷⁶ This consensus has found its way onto maps that accompany accounts of Russian imperial expansion during the reign of Catherine II. See the maps attached to this paper on the pages following Appendix 1.

⁷⁷ For the Ottoman experience of war, see Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman*, chapter 3.

Druzhinina's discussion of Article 21 is complex. First, she provides the context in which the "Kabardian question" emerged in the course of the Russian government's discussion of its war aims. Sticking close to her sources, she then follows the debate between the Russian and Ottoman negotiators as it unfolded during a series of protracted peace talks. Thanks to Druzhinina, we know that the belligerents had reached agreement on Kabarda by 27 December 1772:

Both Kabardas, that is, Greater and Little, on account of [their] proximity to the Tatars, have great ties to the khans of Crimea; thus, their belonging to the Russian Imperial Court must be left to the will of the Crimean Khan, his Council and the elders of the Tatar nation.⁷⁸

"Behind this formulation," Druzhinina writes, "was concealed the [Russian government's] earlier decision concerning the return of Kabarda to Russia."⁷⁹ In a footnote, Druzhinina qualifies her explanation of the article's wording by directing the reader to an earlier section of the book. And therein lies the complexity of her argument, which has to do with a kind of historian's sleight of hand.

In order to understand Article 21, Druzhinina's footnote seems to suggest, it is necessary to revisit the government's efforts to conclude a treaty with various Tatar elites following the Russian army's occupation of Crimea in 1771. After several months of seemingly dead-end negotiations, Russian persistence finally bore fruit. Signed on 1 November 1772, the Karasu Bazaar agreement proclaimed "an alliance, friendship and trust between Russia and the Crimean Khanate." Article 3 of the agreement reads:

All Tatar and Circassian (*cherkasskie*) nations, Tamantsy and Nekrasovtsy, who, prior to the present war, were under the authority of the Crimean Khan, shall remain under the

⁷⁸ This article, whose "vague wording" Druzhinina acknowledges, was signed at the 17th conference of the Bucarest Congress and underwent no further revisions. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-kainardzhiiskii mir*, 232. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Russian are the author's.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 286.

authority of the Crimean Khan as before; Greater and Little Kabarda, however, are under the suzerainty (*sostoiat v poddanstve*) of the Russian Empire.⁸⁰

But the treaty's key provision was its second, which announced Crimea's independence from either empire. The Karasu Bazaar agreement, therefore, is an important corollary to Druzhinina's discussion of Article 21 of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja; by referencing it, however subtly, Druzhinina tacitly acknowledges the failure of Article 21, taken on its own, to settle definitively the Kabardian question. Those scholars who have followed Druzhinina's reading of this article in their discussion of Russian expansion into Caucasia, and of Russia's annexation of Kabarda, more specifically, have apparently missed this point. In the end, Druzhinina concludes that the article "transferred Greater and Little Kabarda to Russia" and constituted the legal foundation of "Russia's historic rights to Kabarda."⁸¹ Accompanying her narrative is a map that reflects her interpretation of these issues, which has not, to my knowledge, previously been challenged.

There is hardly any evidence that Catherine's government had considered annexing Kabarda prior to the war. The Ottoman declaration of war, however, had the effect of nullifying its previous treaties with Russia, including the Treaty of Belgrade. It was only in the context of

⁸⁰ *PSZ*, vol. 19, no. 13943, 710. It is interesting to note that the agreement was published not under the date of its original signing, but under 29 January 1775, when it was ratified by Catherine in St. Petersburg. It is not clear to me whether the original document has survived.

⁸¹ Druzhinina writes: "The confirmation of Russia's historical rights to Kabarda was an indirect acknowledgement of her [Russia's] possession of Ossetia, which was subject to Kabarda," in *Kiuchuk-kainardzhiiskii mir*, 286. The problem of Ossetia's political status lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

Russian scholars writing prior to 1917 had anticipated Druzhinina's interpretation. Like Druzhinina, these scholars tended to quote verbatim the article's text and, by way of explanation, to refer to the 1772 Karasu Bazaar agreement, which stipulated in clear language Russia's authority over the Kabardas. See, for example, Butkov, *Materialy dlia novoi istorii Kavkaza*, 1:335-36. Almost without exception, subsequent Russian-language fell into line with Druzhinina's. For the Soviet period, see N. A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI—XIX vv.* (Moscow: Izd-vo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1958), 105; idem et al, eds., *Istoriia Kabardy s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1957), 62; N. S. Kiniapina, M. M. Bliev, and V. V. Degoev, *Kavkaz i Sredniaia Aziia vo vneshnei politike Rossii: Vtoraia polovina XVIII—80-e gody XIX v.* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1984), 32; and more recently, A. P. Bazhova, "Voina 1768—1774 godov. Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir," in A. N. Sakharov et al., eds, *Istoriia vneshnei politiki Rossii. XVIII vek. (Ot Severnoi voiny do voyn Rossii protiv Napoleona)* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1998), 124. Almost an exception is I. I. Iakubova, *Severnyi Kavkaz v russko-turetskikh otnosheniakh v 40—70-e gody XVIII veka* (Nal'chik: El'brus, 1993), whose research raises a number of interesting questions about the article that makes

formulating war aims and cogitating over the possible terms of the future peace that the Russian government revisited the Kabardian question. Some two years into the war, Catherine explicated the Russian claim to Kabarda in letters to her Prussian and Austrian counterparts.⁸² In 1739 Russia had agreed to leave it as a barrier between the two empires only in order to expedite peace negotiations, when in fact, Catherine claimed, Kabarda had belonged to Russia “from the earliest of times.” In support of this contention she cited as evidence her royal title, which included a reference to Kabardian princes. Russia was now demanding the return of Greater and Little Kabarda to their ancient master. Or was she? With the decision to invade and occupy Crimea, Russia was committing itself to a bold plan: preparing the ground for the formal recognition of Crimean independence from the Ottomans. In later airings of Russia’s war aims to Europe’s powers, Catherine persisted in demanding the annexation of Kabarda to Russia. Only now the demand was less categorical: just as it had in 1739, the Russian government was now prepared to leave Kabarda as a barrier between the empires in order to facilitate agreement with the Porte on other questions.⁸³ Which other questions did Catherine have in mind, and just where did Kabarda really fit in the hierarchy of Russia’s foreign policy priorities?

Answers to these questions can be found in the instructions drawn up in St. Petersburg for the Russian government’s chief negotiator, Count Aleksei Orlov.⁸⁴ Orlov was to begin negotiations with the idea of *uti possidetis*, that is, Russia would insist on keeping all wartime conquests. This was a purely formal move, however; to judge by Orlov’s instructions, the

it difficult to accept the standard view, but whose conclusions, in the final analysis, hardly differ from those of Druzhinina.

⁸² Catherine II to Frederick II, 9 December 1770, in *SIRIO*, 20:284-288; attached to the letter was a “Conciliatory Plan” stating Russia’s war aims, but which was not published together with the letter; it is in Johann Eustach Görtz, *Mémoires et actes authentiques relatifs aux négociations qui ont précédées le partage de la Pologne* (Paris : [s.n.], 1810), 112-12; cf. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-kainardzhiiskii mir*, 126-27.

⁸³ Exposé confidentiel des intentions de l’Impératrice de Toutes les Russies sur sa pacification avec les Turcs, communiqué au Pr. Lobkowitz, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de Leurs Majestés impériales et royales, 16 May 1771, in *SIRIO*, 97:286-302.

Russian government was prepared to make concessions. These concessions would allow Russia to appear willing to compromise and to focus on winning what it considered to be “more important and advantageous” gains. Orlov was instructed to proceed according to the following rule: he was to present the least important demands first. Independence for Crimea and certain Tatars was the *conditio sine qua non* of any peace, so Orlov was instructed to raise this issue only after several others had been aired. Kabarda was placed at the top the negotiating agenda, which is to say that the Russian government considered it the least important of its demands. The instructions were quite explicit on this matter: should the Ottoman negotiators prove intransigent on Crimea, Orlov was permitted to yield on the Kabardian question. “If other more significant demands, especially in regard to the freedom (*vol’nosti*) and independence of the Tatar nation, can be exchanged for and satisfied by compromising on the matter of Kabarda, then in that case we permit to allow [its status] to be defined as [constituting] a barrier between both empires, according to the terms of the treaty of 1739.”⁸⁵ These instructions defined the Russian approach to negotiations and clearly revealed the depth of Russian ambivalence vis-à-vis Kabarda.

The question of Tatar independence brought the first round of peace talks to an impasse. By the end of the second round of talks, the belligerents had agreed to the article on Kabarda as it would appear in the final version of the treaty signed at Kuchuk Kainardja. During the talks, Russia’s chief negotiator, Aleksei Obreskov, presented to his Ottoman counterpart a draft provision on Kabarda: “Both Kabardas, Greater and Little, should be recognized as completely belonging to the All-Russian Empire, since they had belonged to [Russia] from the earliest of

⁸⁴ Catherine’s rescript to Count A. G. Orlov, 22 March 1771, *SIRIO*, 97:246-56.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

times until the recent Belgrade Treaty.”⁸⁶ This official Russian version of Kabardian political history drew protests from the Ottomans. After some wrangling, the issue was left unresolved in order to move on to more important matters, first among which, at least from the point of view of the Russian government, was the Tatar question.⁸⁷

News of the terms of the Karasu agreement reached Obreskov on 21 November 1772. It is worth recalling that this agreement had proclaimed both the political independence of the Crimean khanate and the political dependence of Kabarda on Russia. Not surprisingly, the 8th conference of the Bucharest talks, where Obreskov had publicized the agreement, was “far more heated than the previous ones had been.”⁸⁸ There are three things to keep in mind when considering the Russo-Tatar deal struck at Karasu Bazaar. First, on learning of the agreement, the Ottoman negotiator immediately refused to recognize it as legitimate or binding in any way. Second, the Crimean political scene at the time was highly fluid, even anarchic. (No fewer than five khans ruled in Crimea in the period from 1768 to 1771.) Having occupied Crimea in 1771, Russia then attempted to capitalize on Crimean disunity by devoting considerable energy and resources to cultivating clients among well-placed Tatars in Crimea and among certain Nogai tribes. In the end, an agreement was reached despite objections from some quarters of a deeply divided ruling house and the principled opposition of the *ulema*, or religious authorities. Finally, the Ottoman government responded to the Russian invasion by sending its own Giray clients into Kuban, where they found like-minded Circassian and other Highlanders. Working from a base in Kuban, Devlet Giray was ultimately able to reinstate himself as Crimean Khan. Not only did he reject the 1772 agreement, he boldly claimed the Kabardians as his own subjects. On what authority, one may wonder? He cited Article 21 of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, a

⁸⁶ Quoted in Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-kainardzhiiskii mir*, 197-98.

⁸⁷ *SIRIO*, 97: 249.

move Druzhinina styled “hypocritical.”⁸⁹ These considerations force us to agree, I think, with Druzhinina on at least one point—Russian diplomats had overestimated the significance of the Russo-Tatar treaty for Russo-Ottoman relations. In fact, we can go one step further: they had also overestimated its significance for Russo-Crimean relations, for the very khan who had signed the agreement in 1772 had the Russian resident in Crimea arrested the following year.⁹⁰

How did Kabardians respond to Russian efforts to enforce its interpretation of the treaties of Karasu Bazaar and Kuchuk Kainardja? Russo-Kabardian relations had deteriorated dangerously as a consequence of the founding of Mozdok. During the course of the war, Russian forces clashed repeatedly with forces led by Kabardians. After the war, the commander of Russian troops in the region was instructed to provide the Kabardians with Russian and Turkish versions of the relevant articles of the agreements reached at Karasu Bazaar and Kuchuk Kainardja. Why did the government in St. Petersburg feel it was necessary to send copies of both articles? The answer to this question is to be found on the margins of a December 1774 report sent by the governor of Astrakhan to the College of Foreign Affairs. Governor Krechetnikov had opined that since the 1774 treaty had placed Kabarda under Russian suzerainty, the Ossetians, as dependents of Kabardian lords, were now to be considered Russian subjects. According to the members of the College, however, “in the treaty [of Kuchuk Kainardja] there is no precise resolution concernign Kabardians.” Rather, the College built the Russian claim to Kabarda on the Karasu agreement.⁹¹ But Kabardians continued to resist Russian encroachments. A full-scale war of resistance broke out toward the end of the 1770s, at which point Russia was still very far from having annexed Kabarda.

⁸⁸ Obreskov is quoted in Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-kainarzdhiiskii mir*, 206.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁹⁰ Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of Crimea, 1772—1783* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 55

Kabarda constituted an important dimension of the Ottoman-Russian rivalry that so greatly impacted the history of western Eurasia in the 18th century. That Russia's ruling elites did not consider Kabarda a high priority in the context of Catherine's first Ottoman war does not mean that historians should ignore Russo-Kabardian relations. On the contrary, it is precisely an appreciation of Russian (and Ottoman) ambivalence toward Kabarda that allows us to begin to unlock the mystery of Article 21. The article's ambiguous wording is a fair reflection of the ambivalence the belligerents felt about their North Caucasian commitments. We must not, however, mistake ambivalence for indifference, for the College of Foreign Affairs went to great measures to cultivate clients among an array of Kabardian princes, whom it view as the most powerful political entrepreneurs in all North Caucasia, and therefore as potentially valuable allies in the region. It is not an exaggeration to say that Russia's policies in North Caucasia were built on the hopes of securing Kabardian allegiance, a project the Russian government devoted considerable resources to since the second half of the eighteenth century.

In the final analysis, treaties are great abstractions when viewed from distant frontiers, so ambiguity and ambivalence are also salient features of frontier diplomacy. By reducing the problem of the annexation of Kabarda to the terms stated in bilateral treaties between rival empires, Druzhinina and her followers have implied that the incorporation of vast lands and diverse peoples should be understood as an *act*, rather than as a *process*—even when the annexing power (i.e., Russia) was profoundly ambivalent about its new acquisition (i.e., Kabarda); even when the center lacked the will, if it may have had the means, to establish effective imperial control in the newly annexed lands; and, most important, even when far-off powers attempted to decide the fate of Kabarda without the participation of Kabardians

⁹¹ AVPRI, f. Osetinskie dela, op. 128/2, 1775, d. 1, l. 205, quoted in Iakubova, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 146.

themselves. If Kabardians were not party to the peace negotiations, they nevertheless deserve to be brought back in to the story of Russian expansion into Caucasia, in which they played important and varied roles. It is time to rethink the ways we employ treaties in our narratives of Russian imperial expansion if we hope to arrive at a deeper understanding of the processes of annexation and incorporation. To paraphrase the head of Russia's College of Foreign Affairs at the time, such matters cannot be entirely be settled by the mere stroke of a pen.⁹²

In the period from 1759 to 1774, Russia's policies toward Kabarda and Kabardians evolved in reaction to unanticipated developments in North Caucasia. Without the story of Konchokin's conversion, it becomes almost impossible to imagine the founding of Mozdok occurring as it did, when it did. The settlement at Mozdok signaled a new stage in Russian empire building in the region, so the story of Konchokin's conversion throws considerable light on the story of Russian imperial expansion. But Mozdok also became the focal point of Kabardian resistance to Russian expansion, causing some Kabardian men of power to seek the patronage and protection of Russia's Crimean and Ottoman rivals. Shifts in the Eurasian balance of power also informed the thinking of Russia's policy makers, and nothing in this period left a stronger impression on their minds than the string of Ottoman defeats suffered in the course of the war of 1768-74. In these years, Russian war aims emerged in a piecemeal fashion, and eventually came to include the annexation of Kabarda to the Russian Empire. The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja did not "legally confirm Russia's historic rights to Kabarda," as Russian statesmen and myriad scholars would claim thereafter, but rather left the matter to be decided by the Crimean Khan and his advisers at some unspecified time in the future. Even if it had, the

⁹² "This matter, of course, is not the sort that can be entirely settled by the mere stroke of a pen." Count Panin to Field Marshal Rumiantsev, November 1774, in *SIRIO*, 135: 278. Panin was specifically referring to Article 3 of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardja, which addressed the question of Tatar political independence.

messy business of pressing Russian claims before Kabardian populations—an aspect usually ignored by historians commenting on the treaty—lay in the future.