

ERZURUM AS ONE OF THE OUTPOSTS OF THE EASTERN POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE (70S OF THE 19TH CENTURY)

ერზურუმი რუსეთის იმპერიის აღმოსავლური პოლიტიკის ერთ-
ერთი ფორპოსტი (XIX ს-ის 70-იანი წლები)

მარიამ გურეშიძე

ილიას უნივერსიტეტის გ. წერეთლის აღმოსავლეთმცოდნეობის

ინსტიტუტის ასისტენტ მკვლევარი,

საქართველო, თბილისი

ORCID ID :0000-0002-9825-0651

(+995) 551 127 855. mariagureshidze@gmail.com

აბსტრაქტი

XIX საუკუნეში რუსეთის იმპერია აქტიურად წარმართავდა კავკასიის დაპყრობას. ჩრდილო კავკასიელებმა დროში გაწელილ უთანასწორო ბრძოლაში, იმპერიას ღირსეული მეტოქეობა გაუწიეს. იმამ შამილის დატყვევებით (1859) ჩრდილო კავკასიაში მურიდიზმი და ჩეჩენთა კონსოლიდაცია დასრულდა. ჩრდილო კავკასიის სრულად დამორჩილებას, შემდგომში, ჩეჩნების ოსმალეთის იმპერიაში გადასახლება და მათი ერზურუმში, ერზინჯანში და დიარბაქირში ჩასახლება მოჰყვა (1864).

საქართველოს ეროვნულ არქივში დაცული დოკუმენტების შესწავლით, ჩვენთვის ცნობილი გახდა ჩეჩენთა გადასახლებას და განსაკუთრებით, ზემოთ აღნიშნულ ერზურუმის ლოკაციაზე მათ ჩასახლებას რუსეთის იმპერიის მხრიდან რა გათვლები ედო საფუძვლად და როგორ აისახა 1877-1878 წწ. რუსეთ-თურქეთის ომის დროს განვითარებულ პოლიტიკურ მოვლენებზე.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: რუსეთის იმპერია, ჩრდილო კავკასია, ჩეჩნები, ქურთები, ერზურუმი.

Mariam Gureshidze

Ilia State University Giorgi Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Study

Assistant Researcher

Tbilisi, Georgia

ORCID iD :0000-0002-9825-0651

(+995) 551 127 855. mariagureshidze@gmail.com

Abstract

In the 19th century, the Russian Empire actively conducted the conquest of the Caucasus. The North Caucasus people fighting in a long, unequal battle provided worthy competition to the Russian Empire. After the capture of Imam Shamil (1859) was completed, the consolidation of Chechens and the Muridism. The full conquest of the North Caucasus followed the migration of Chechens into the Ottoman Empire and their settlement in Erzurum, Erzincan, and Diyarbakir (1864).

Based on the documents found and treated in the National Archives of Georgia, it is presented why the mountaineers were settled in this particular location—Erzurum, how the determination of the Russian Empire reflected on the migration, and on the political events developed during the Russo-Turkish war in 1877-1878.

Keywords: Russian Empire, North Caucasus, Chechens, Kurds, Erzurum.

Introduction

Russia's strategic interests, which included the fortification and expansion of its southern borders as well as its control over areas that were advantageous from a strategic and economic point of view and gained new international importance, were a significant factor in the confrontation that developed between the Russian and Ottoman empires in the seventies of the 19th century. The main goal was to establish control over Kars and Erzurum, which were significant from an economic, military and strategic standpoint.

Proceeding from the topicality of the problem, I believe it is necessary to consider the intentions of the Russian and Ottoman empires for 1864. The attitudes and actions of these two subjects with regard to the Kurds residing on the territory of Erzurum and the Chechens who were migrated to this territory in 1864, as well as later during the war of 1877, are of particular importance. The study of this issue requires due attention based on the principle of historicism, which, in turn, as a result of a reassessment of the processes that unfolded during that period, brings to light even more details. The attitudes and actions of the Kurds and Chechens during the conflict between the two empires (1877) are revealed from the documents found and treated in the National Archives of Georgia and confirmed by specialist literature A. Menteshashvili, Sh. Megrelidze, S. Esadze, N. Halfin. In this study, I present the anatomy of this war in order to better comprehend and assess the objectives that the Russian and Ottoman Empires pursued both globally and with regard to the two primary participants in the conflict—the Kurds and the Chechens.

Methods

The methodological basis of this article allows us to study the issue in relation to other historical events. Working on archive documents, we use the methods of historical cognition and complex and comparative analysis, which allow us to draw a scientific-analytical conclusion about why Chechens in the 19th century migrated to the Ottoman Empire and settled in Erzurum.

Results

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Russian Empire's war of conquest in the Caucasus was largely based three main factors: 1. Interest in the Caucasus as a system of trade routes; 2. Market; 3. Political and strategic position (Fond1505:1). For Russia, the Caucasus was a strategic route to the East, a point of connection and contact with the Islamic civilization, as well as a natural protective barrier on the southern border of the state (Gureshidze, 2021:50).

I believe it is important to highlight the 1877–1878 events from the century-old conflict between the Ottoman and Russian empires, especially in light of the possibility that military actions may have begun as early as October 1876. The main strategic objectives of the Russian Empire included: a) the capture of Batumi; b) the defense of the Rioni region; c) the defense of Sukhumi in connection with the security of Abkhazia; and d) the defense of the remaining part of the Black Sea coast (Fond1087:1). According to the archival record, the Russian Empire's goal in the Caucasus was to seize the opponent's territory as quickly and peacefully as possible and establish itself as the Caucasus and Ottoman state. The most significant and practical area for the Russian Empire was Kars and Erzurum. According to the archival record, the main objective of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus was to conquer the opponent's territory as soon as possible and with as little force as possible and establish themselves in the Caucasus and Ottoman state. Kars and Erzurum represented the most important and useful territory for the Russian Empire (Fond1087:4).

Kars was important in the state and social life of medieval Armenia. The city was also a major center of crafts and trade, with international trade routes passing through it. An important military station, it is linked by rail and road with the principal Turkish cities (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey> 6.10.2024).

It should be noted that by 1877, the capture of the fortress of Kars by the Russians could have been the only logical outcome of the campaign; in this case, significant forces were released to be moved in the direction of Erzurum and Batumi. Russian commanders in chief properly assessed the strength of the fortification which had 300 cannons, half of which were contemporary weapons intended for positional battle (Allen, Muratoff, 1953: 201).

On July 8, 1877, the Russian ambassador to England, Count P. A. Shuvalov notified the British authorities that Russia was ready to conclude a peace truce on moderate terms if a peace proposal was made by the Ottomans before the Russian army crossed the Balkan ridge. At that time, Russia's demands were far more reasonable than at the Constantinople Conference in 1876. Russia initially demanded that Bulgaria be independent up to the southern borders of Adrianople and the Rhodope Mountains, but later agreed to restrict her demands to the liberation of the portion of Bulgaria located north of the Balkan Range, enlarging the borders of Montenegro and Serbia, and granting Bosnia and Herzegovina autonomy (Megrelidze, 1969:83). Additionally, the annexation of Kars, Batumi, Ardaghan, Bayazeti as well as payment of indemnity. A. I. Nelidov, the director of the diplomatic chancellery, drafted this peace negotiating project, which was approved by Tsar and then sent to Austria and Germany (Megrelidze, 1969:84).

When the Ottoman Empire faced the possibility of complete collapse in 1877, the disagreement over upcoming peace talks began between Russia and the Ottomans. The size of the Ottoman Empire's Asian portion, which Russia was to get as payment, was of great significance. Numerous initiatives were undertaken, different viewpoints were expressed, extensive correspondence took place, etc. It is noteworthy that Major-General Stabnitsky of the Russian General Staff wrote a

letter on January 10, 1878, expressing his concern that the Russian Empire would experience a heavy burden if its Transcaucasia possessions were simply expanded without guaranteeing future economic benefits. He put forward two proposals: annexing to Russia the Ottoman territory up to the Soghanlugh Ridge, from the Euphrates plain, including Bayazeti, Batumi and Artanuj, and adding the Erzurum plain with the city of Erzurum. These proposals later became known as the Caucasus I and II projects. According to the first project, Sanjak, Bayazeti, Kars, Childir and part of Lazistan, namely upper and lower Ajara, were to be transferred to Russia. In both cases, the Russian Black Sea coast would extend 60 kilometers in the direction of Trabzon. Most of the annexed territory was a fertile field. At the same time, Russia acquired Batumi and the transit route passing through Erzurum and Bayazeti (Megrelidze, 1969:85-86).

The final part of Stabnitsky's report states: "It is impossible not to consider that by annexing the Asian part of the Ottoman Empire to Transcaucasia, it becomes possible for the country to get significant economic benefits." The report draws attention to the population of the part that was annexed, which was made up 90/10 of Kurds (Megrelidze, 1969: 85-86). To reach a truce, Turkey had to agree to a number of additional conditions in Asia Minor, including: immediately clearing Erzurum of its own troops and withdrawing them from the Beiburt-Mamakhatun line; clearing the positions of Tsikhisdziri and Batumi; withdrawing their troops from Kobuleti, Shavsheti, Lazistan and liberate Bayazeti and Vani sanjaks from their own troops (Megrelidze, 1969: 91). The Treaty of Adrianople required the Turks to promptly liberate the fortifications on the Danube, Silistria and Rushtuk, as well as Erzurum in Asia Minor. Immediately after the signing of the Armistice of Adrianople, Austria-Hungary insisted that the terms of the upcoming Russia-Turkey Armistice be presented for discussion at an international conference. England also joined this demand of Austria-Hungary. The ruling circles of England and Austria openly threatened Russia to break off diplomatic relations if the Russians entered Constantinople. In December 1877, the British military attaché Colonel Wellesley stated that, his government would side with Turkey if the Russians did not cease hostilities by January 14, 1878. At a meeting of the British Council of Ministers, it was decided to announce to the Russian authorities that England would not recognize the peace negotiations that took place between Russia and Porte, because no European countries had taken part in them (Megrelidze, 1969:99).

Finally, the Russians compelled the Ottomans to concede the areas mentioned in the first Caucasian project: Batumi, Ardahan, Kars, Bayazeti, and the entire region, including the Soghanlugh Ridge (Megrelidze, 1969:101). The San Stefano Treaty was signed in 1878.

Based on the aforementioned, the battle for Erzurum also had strategic significance because it allowed Russia to expand its frontiers to the south, penetrate international commerce routes, and increase the protection of the empire and Kars from the south. I'll discuss Erzurum, its importance to the Russian Empire, the precise tactics it used to exercise influence there, and the outcomes.

Over time, various nations attempted to establish control over Erzurum:

Rome and Sasanian Iran in the first half of the 3rd-4th centuries, Arabs in the 40s of the 7th century, the Kingdom of Georgia at the end of the 13th century, the Ottoman Empire in the mid-16th century considered it as a base for military operations in the South Caucasus, and in the beginning of the 19th century Russia captured Erzurum twice as a result of victory in the war with the Ottomans, and this interest did not slow down even at the beginning of the 20th century (in 1916, it was once again conquered by the Russian Empire as a result of the defeat of the Ottomans) (Chochiev, V. 1979. Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia). The caravan route from Iran to Anatolia passed through Erzurum. It has served as a significant commercial and military hub since antiquity, and it continues to serve these purposes today as the primary rail hub connecting Ankara with Iran (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey/The-central-massif> 9.10.2024). As was mentioned above, Russia could not have imagined increasing its territory in 1876 without Erzurum. The interest of the Russian Empire in Erzurum was so strong that, along with other measures, a change in the demographic background was considered as a result of artificial intervention in favor of the Russian side. This is evidenced by archival documents; according to archival document, in 1877 the Russians intended to resettle the Cossacks in Erzurum. It is said in the document that “Brave people, Kurds and Lazes live in the regions of Erzurum and Kars. The Turks did not completely subjugate these tribes. No doubt they will disregard us too. Therefore, our government will be forced to strengthen military control over the territory we have under our control. By resettling the Cossacks, we will save money on maintenance of the troops, and at the same time we will turn the country into Russian. There are quite a lot of Armenians who live in these locations, particularly in the province of Erzurum, and they are of the same faith as us even if they do not support us in the ongoing conflict or, to put it another way, care very little about our victories. To be honest, they are not and never will be our enemies. Due to their pragmatic nature, Armenians are unconcerned by either of these wars or any other conflicts. Practical reasons prevent us from executing them, therefore we will leave them in their current settlements, where there will be enough room for the Cossacks even without their lands. We will not condemn them because of their practicality; instead, we’ll let them stay in their current villages, where there will be enough room for the Cossacks” (Fond1438, King, 2008: 40)

It is interesting to note the message sent by the Consul of France in Tbilisi to the plenipotentiary and extraordinary ambassador of France in Constantinople (September 22, 1840): “The Russian Empire’s war is along the whole Caucasus region, where even recently defeated tribes were rebelling, while it was concerned about upholding peace in Georgia. There is a high chance of an insurrection starting because there have been reports regarding Ibrahim Pasha’s invasion of Erzurum for a number of months. Both Asian Christians and Muslims looked up to Ibrahim Pasha as a liberator and eagerly anticipated any chance to collaborate with him” (Mamoulia, 2022:38-39).

I think it’s important to point out that the Russian Empire had two potential indirect allies against the Ottomans in 1877. For instance, it is noteworthy to re-

flect about the aftermath the forced relocation of the Chechens (1864-65) and the outcome of the choice to place them in the Ottoman Empire, namely in Erzurum, Erzincan, and Diyarbakir (Fond 545:28). Since the Kurds frequently opposed the Ottoman Empire and settled in fertile land, it is likely that 1) the settlement of Chechens would be a significant challenge and source of discomfort for the Kurds in Erzurum, whereas the newly resettled Chechens initially had a positive attitude towards the Ottoman Empire, which was evident in their choice (Fond 545:5-7, 35, 37) but they settled on an extremely infertile area (it was not difficult for the interested forces to incite hostility). At this time, the Kurds will once again be given the opportunity to search for an ally in the Russian Empire, which was the sworn adversary of the Chechens. And the relationship that developed between the Kurds and the Russian Empire would help the Russian Empire gain influence in the region in the first place. 2. The Russian Empire would have the ability to manipulate the newly resettled Chechens knowing how much the Chechens loved their ancestral homeland and how eager they were to return. The fact that Chechens who voluntarily immigrated to Turkey found themselves in a grave situation led them to request to be resettled in Siberia, and they were ready to convert to Christianity in exchange for this. Otherwise, they preferred to die at the border rather than return to the Ottoman Empire. Chechens were returned by the Russian authorities from the border with the help of the Ottomans (Fond 545:13). The outcome of this manipulation was consistently employed by the Russian Empire against the Ottoman Empire during regional power struggles. 3. The interests of the Ottoman Empire coincided with those of other international actors, in particular one of the common goals was to stop the expansion of the Russian Empire toward its southern borders towards Constantinople and in the west towards the Balkans. There was also an interest in preventing the attempt of the Cossacks to settle in the territory of the Ottoman Empire (Erzurum), which was intended by the Russian Empire to strengthen the aforementioned expansion, as well as to protect new spheres of influence.

The Kurds' steadfast opposition to the Ottoman Empire was the reason the Russians made this choice. According to A. Menteshashvili, the Russian government's main concern during the wars with Iran and Turkey was the neutrality of Kurdish tribes. Imperial Russia made a guarantee to the Kurdish chiefs that in exchange for their voluntary relocation, they would maintain control over their subjects while under Russian rule and also provide pasture for their livestock. General Paskevich, who was in charge of the Russian forces in the Caucasus at the time, was one of the first who realized the importance of establishing friendly ties with the Kurdish tribes. He worked tirelessly to use the Kurdish tribes as a counterweight to the Turks. He got in touch with Pasha Bailul of Bayazeti for this reason. In turn, Bailul offered his loyalty and service to the Russians. At the end of the summer of 1828, when General Al. Chavchavadze approached Bayazeti with the Yerevan detachment, its governor Bailul surrendered the city without a fight. As a result of this military triumph, Alashkert and Bayazeti sanjaks came under total Russian military control (Menteshashvili, 1978:63-64). S. Esadze notes that during the

Eastern War in 1853-1856, Hussein-Bek's son Ali-Bek resisted the Turkish troops during their campaign towards the Caucasus front (Esadze, 1937:20). An archived document about Russia's war preparations against the Ottomans in 1876 states that the Russians considered attacking the Kurds and Bashi-Bazouks on the border, even though it also adds that their forces were in a peaceful state and there was no need for mobilization (Fond1087: 2-3).

The experience of the ongoing war of 1877-1878 once again proved that due to the strong pressure of the Sultanate government, the besieged and active efforts of the local feudal elite associated with the Ottoman administration, the entire Kurdistan could not be mounted against the Russian army. The vast majority of the Kurdish population refused to participate in the war under the slogan of Jihad. Additionally, the Kurds who participated in the military activities lacked a fighting spirit and attitude in the conflicts, and they quit the Ottoman army at the first chance (Halfin, 1963:106).

Conclusion

it can be said that with the victory achieved by the Russian Empire in 1878, namely the Treaty of San Stefano, the Ottomans were forced to immediately clear the Danube fortifications, Silistria and Rushtuk as well as Erzurum in Asia Minor. Finally, the Russians compelled the Ottomans to give up the areas mentioned in the first Caucasian project: Batumi, Ardahan, Kars, Bayazeti, and the entire region, including the Soganlugi ridge. As can be seen from the aforementioned facts, the Kurds and Chechens who emigrated from the North Caucasus did not fight on the side of the Ottomans against the Russian Empire because the Kurds and Chechens were a potent military force that had to be taken seriously. Thus, it would be extremely challenging for Russia to seize control of those lands indicated in the first Caucasian project described above if they were fighting on the side of the Ottomans.

Bibliography

Allen, D. and Muratoff, P. 1953. Caucasian Battle fields. A History of the wars on the Turo-Caucassian Border 1828-1921. CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

Danilevsky, N. 1991. Russia and Europe. Historical and literary archive. Moscow "Book". (In Russian)

Esadze, S. 1937. Kurdish question during the imperialist war 1914-1917 years on the Caucasian war front. (In Georgian)

Chochiev, V. 1979. Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia. N-4

Gureshidze, M. 2021. The foreign policy implemented by the King Heraclius II. Proceedings of Georgian National Academy of Sciences Series of History, Archeology, Ethnology and Art History. Tbilisi. N2 (In Georgian)

Halfin, N. 1963. The Struggle for Kurdistan. USSR Academy of Sciences, Institute of the Peoples of Asia. The Kurdish Question in International Relations of the 19th Century). Publishing House of Eastern Literature. Moscow. (In Russian)

King, Ch. 2008. *The Ghost of Freedom. A History of the Caucasus*. Oxford University Press.

Mamoulia, G. 2022. *Imam Shamil and the National Liberation Struggle of the Highlanders in the North-Eastern Caucasus in the Reports of French Consuls from Tiflis*. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies. (In Russian)

Megrelidze, Sh. 1969. *Issues of Transcaucasia in the history of the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878*. "Metsniereba". (In Russian)

Menteshashvili, A. 1978. *Issues of Kurdish History of the Middle East (X-XX ss)*. University Publish House. Tbilisi. (In Georgian)

Fond 545. National Archives of Georgia. Fond-545, desc-1, doc-90 (In Russian)

Fond 545. National Archives of Georgia. Fond-545, desc-1, doc-97 (In Russian)

Fond 1438. National Archives of Georgia. Fond-1438, desc-1, doc-237(In Russian)

Fond 1505. National Archives of Georgia. Fond-1505, desc-1, doc-15 (In Russian)

Fond 1087. National Archives of Georgia. Fond-1087, desc-1, doc-479 (In Russian)

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey>

<https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/14966>

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095352461>.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/adrianople>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey/The-central-massif>