

ISCKMC 2020**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****TEREK RIVERSIDES IN THE 16TH–17TH CENTURIES. THE
BEGINNING OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS**

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the socio-political situation in Chechnya in the 16th-18th centuries and the events contributing to the establishment of friendly relations on the banks of the Terek. They involve Chechens return to the plain, establishment of relations between the Caucasian peoples and Russia, attraction of representatives of neighboring peoples by the Chechens and their experience in the establishment of Russian–Chechen friendly relations in the Chechen riverside. The paper articulates that Chechens have always been the autochthons of the region. Driven into the mountains, mostly exterminated, the remnants of the people, having survived and multiplied, began to return to the plain after the collapse of the Golden Horde. As for the Terek riverside territories, where Chechens and Cossacks settled, archaeological data indicate that the ancestors of the Chechens lived here since ancient times. However, before the mass resettlement of Chechens along the Terek, prior to that form of government in this region, there was a long assertion of the Russian government in Chechnya and on the banks of the Terek. By the second half of the 18th century, having resettled the Cossacks, the Russian population in the Caucasus, onto the left bank of the Terek, having strengthened quantitatively and consolidated qualitatively the villages, from a military point of view, tsarism firmly established its power in the empty lands of the Terek territories.

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1. Introduction

The Chechens (Nokhchi) who during the period of the Tatar-Mongol invasion were forced to leave the fertile plain to the mountains did not abandon the thought of returning to their plain homeland. Like other peoples of the North Caucasus who had lost their political initiative and leading role in the plains, part of the Chechens, for some time, continued to live on the plains, others returned to their homes and set up links necessary for survival with the new inhabitants of the region. What happened to the Chechen population after the Tatar-Mongol invasion? Most of the people were exterminated because of fierce resistance. A small part having retreated to the mountainous part of Chechnya not only survived and multiplied, but preserved and developed the culture of the people, customs and traditions in the most difficult mountain conditions. For further development, the Chechens had to return to the plain, which during their absence had passed from hand to hand of various political forces. It was necessary to come to an agreement with them, and these were the foreign feudal lords, and then with the representatives of the Russian government that was gaining a foothold in the region. During the period from the 16th to 18th centuries, relations were built based on the friendship and good neighborliness. The topic of Russian-Chechen relations was of interest to many, both Caucasian scholars of the 19th–20th centuries and modern scientists. Among them are the following authors: Potto (1904), Akhmadov (2019), Gelaeva and Matagova (2019) and others.

2. Problem Statement

In order to comprehensively study Russian-Chechen relations, the following tasks were set: to address the density of population of the region in the Golden Horde period, a subsequent return of the Chechens to the plain and to Terek riverside territories, resettlement of the Cossacks to the banks of the Terek in the post-Mongol period, clarification of the nature of Russian-Chechen relations, and establishment of friendly relations.

3. Research Questions

Russian-Chechen relations on the example of Terek nearby territories.

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper aims to show the political balance of power in the Terek territories, return of the Chechens to the plain, resettlement of the Cossacks along the Terek, start of the formation of friendly relations.

5. Research Methods

The study considering a part of Chechnya, its near-river regions, settlement of a multi-ethnic population in this region and, as a consequence, formation of friendly relations between peoples was based on the following historical methods and principles: historical-comparative, historical-systemic,

historical periodization, all investigating a scientific problem in accordance with the principles of historicism and objectivity.

6. Findings

Being forced to leave the fertile plain to the mountains during the period of the Tatar-Mongol invasion, the Chechens (Nokhchi) did not abandon the thought of returning to their plain homeland. Like other peoples of the North Caucasus who had lost their political initiative and leading role in the plains, part of the Chechens, for some time, continued to live on the plains, others returned to their homes and set up links necessary for survival with the new inhabitants of the region. “On the right bank of the Sunzha, at its confluence with the Terek,” Oshaev wrote, during the 8th-14th centuries (and possibly in the 15th century AD) there was a very large settlement. The inhabitants of the settlement belonged to the ancestors of modern Chechens, which is irrefutably evidenced by the Gudermes ceramics, containing deeply local traditions of pottery, traced back in the monuments of the local population of the Bronze Age (as cited in AdmChR, 1995). It is difficult today to gauge the conditions on which the population lived during the Tatar-Mongol invasion, and then Timur times. Yet it is unambiguous that this settlement existed on the plain. It is likely that this population was the first to adopt Islam, and therefore it was left by the Tatar-Mongols as a co-religion population. There might be some other reasons and conditions.

It goes without saying that the near-river lands were populated by the autochthons of the region. Without going deep into a detailed consideration of the population of the Terek banks in an earlier period, we will cite only the scientists who specially dealt with the issue stating that the Terek River could not be a serious obstacle to the “expansion of the Nakhchoy”. As professor Ibrahimbeyli notes, the lands beyond the Terek had been used for centuries in the cattle breeding of the mountaineers (as cited in AdmChR, 1995).

Kabardian burial monuments on the territory of Chechnya indicate that Kabardian princes, who became vassals of the Golden Horde, actively occupied not only the interfluvium of the Terek and Sunzha Rivers, but also other plain lands of Chechnya (Bagaev, 1968).

Following the collapse of the Golden Horde, Kabardian princes retained their positions in the Terek and Sunzha basins. Moreover, with the weakening of the Mongols, the Kabardians “occupied the entire space between Malka, Terek and Sunzha. At this time of their power, they had a strong influence on the Chechens, who had barely begun to leave the Ichkerin mountains, made tributaries of the Karabulaks, Ingush, a significant part of the Ossetians, Karachays and Abaza. The Russian government found them in this position when we began to draw closer to the Caucasus” (ASRI, 1883). These are the natural consequences of the historical fate of peoples who fought with nomads to complete self-destruction. The remnants of the Chechen people, who miraculously survived in the highlands, multiplying in numbers began to move to the desired homeland – the plain. The exhausted Nakh people and, on the contrary, the Kabardian owners who had entrenched themselves on the Chechen plain, and the influx of Russian immigrants who rushed for various reasons to the Caucasus – this was a political alignment in the 16th century in the plain Chechnya. However, it would be wrong to believe that the entire political and economic initiative was in the hands of Kabardian owners alone. The second half of the 16th century, the time when leaders or biacci began to look into the political situation. As far back as

the second half of the 16th century, the documents evidence the established, if not vassal-subject, then at least friendly allied relations.

The fact that Russians appeared in the Caucasus, in particular along the Terek, had its own reasons. According to the documents, in the 16th century under Tsar Ivan the Terrible, Cossacks and archers began to settle down on the Terek, “partly on the Malka and the lower Sunzha, in 1567 resulting in the formation of Terek province (RSMHA). According to the Caucasian expert Debu (1829), during this period, some of the Cossacks “fearing punishment for the robberies inflicted on the Volga, and serving to destroy the trade with Persia, restored during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, left headed by Ermak to Siberia. Others, with their chieftain, withdrew across the Caspian Sea to the Caucasus Mountains: there, having received forgiveness for their crime from the sovereign, they were transferred to the Terek and were nicknamed the Greben Cossacks (Debu, 1829).

According to another author, at the end of the 14th century, the territory of modern Chechnya was invaded by Timur” (Timur Leng; 1370–1405). Endless wars and invasions resulted in a significant part of local sedentary population to be exterminated or pushed into inaccessible mountain gorges across the Greater Caucasus. Since the end of the 15th century, fugitive Russian peasants and Cossack guards from the Grand Duchy of Ryazan began to settle down on the empty lands in the upper reaches of the Terek River and at the confluence of the Argun and Sunzha – on the ridge of the Caucasus Mountains. The same author asserts that in the 15th century, Chechens and Ingush began to migrate to the north, to the flat lands in the valleys of the Argun, Sunzha and Terek rivers (Gankovsky, 1995). Assumably, Chechens and Cossacks first settled in the same already existing Chechen villages along the banks of the Terek. After all, it is no coincidence that Cossacks, until the Russian regime came, had got well with the Chechens, known the Chechen language, and almost completely adopted their clothes, way of life, and customs. Besides, as the pre-revolutionary historian Potto (1904) assumes, the Cossacks have invariably preserved the old Russian faith, Russian speech and Russian view of the sovereign’s business.

During this period of troubled times, Chechens began to invite respected, honorary people from among neighboring peoples to rule villages, and, to a greater extent, to establish friendly relations with the growing Russian state.

Generally, relations between the Caucasian peoples were always based on friendly mutual influence. Alims, the elders, respected by one Caucasian people, were known among other Caucasian peoples as well. That was primarily attributed to the community of historical destinies, religion, and geographical location.

Akhmadov (1996), who was concerned with the topic of Russian-Chechen relations in the 17th century, defines the formalization of legal relations between the Russian and mountain peoples of the North Caucasus in a chronological framework of the second half of the 16th century until the middle of the 19th century. He divides the target period into three stages. The first stage – the second half of the 16th – late 17th century – is characterized by the establishment of vassal-allied relations between the Moscow tsars and the mountain princes. The second stage – early 18th century – the first quarter of the 19th century – is characterized by the growth of purely colonial methods, open military expansion of Russia in the North Caucasus. The third stage – the 30–50s of the 19th century – is represented by the war

between the mountain peoples, the peoples of the North-East Caucasus (Imamat Shamil) and the Russian Empire.

In his work, Laudaev (1872) wrote: “The Kabardians appropriated the land on the left bank of the Sunzha River and a part of Malaya Chechnya” (p. 24). However, in the 17th century, the Chechen ethnos, apparently, brought about by anti-feudal uprisings, disengaged from the power of alien feudal lords.

A contemporary ethnographer, Chesnov (1995), confirms that the Chechen society in the 16th century was not socially homogeneous. He writes that “in world history the Chechens have a special place, because as far back as late Middle Ages, in the 16th–17th centuries, they broke the back of the feudal aristocracy” (Chesnov, 1995, p. 62).

Under these conditions, the rulers of Caucasian peoples, in endeavors to benefit from established relations with such a powerful neighbor as Russia, tried, with the help of Russia, to assume administrative functions to control the local peoples (Chechens) who by that time had freed from the power of feudal lords. Thus, in a letter to the Russian sovereign in August 1722, a Kumyk feudal lord Saltan Mamutov asked that his son Makhmen, kept as an amanat in Russia, could “have rule over the okochany” (REFPA) (i.e. over the Chechens). The decree in response to the Don and Terek Cossacks said that Saltan Mamutov would receive a salary from Astrakhan and, at the request of Saltan Mamutov, the tsar “for his service and loyalty, has commanded you Don and Terek Cossacks, when his enemies attack him, to give him a helping hand” (REFPA).

Likewise, Kabardian princes, Kumyk feudal lords, and Avar nutsal later received lands along the Terek. The lands located at a distance from the mountains and closer to the Caucasian military line, which guaranteed security in managing the formed villages, were fertile and yielded a rich harvest.

The tsarist authorities saw a certain benefit in the resettlement of the Chechens, assuming that the Chechens who settled along the Terek would be easier to control. A Kizlyar commandant V. Obolensky expressed quite definitely on this occasion that if the Chechens “are taken out of the forest and strongholds and settled in lands awaiting settlement, and, pursuant to their custom, they will be sworn in by a written oath, then they will not cause any theft and other disobedience” (REFPA). Thus, the resettlement of the Chechens to the flat lands was seen as a benefit for both sides.

Since early 18th century, the banks of the Terek were a zone of Russian influence and were part of the Russian system of government. Therefore, a decision whether the Chechens should be settled here was directly driven by Russia’s policy for the development and conquest of the territory of Chechnya. Identical processes for the resettlement of Caucasian peoples within the Caucasus and beyond took place in other regions of the Caucasus. The methods, means, goals of the policy of tsarist Russia in the national outskirts, including in all regions of the Caucasus, were of a colonial nature. However, along with general problems and reasons, there were also some peculiar features in the resettlement of the Chechens along the Terek, due to some specific mentality of the Chechen people, their history, geographical location, etc.

In the 18th century, a Caucasian military line was built in the North Caucasus along the rivers from the Caspian to the Azov and Black seas. The Caucasian military line was a network of fortresses, towns and Cossack villages. On the territory of Chechnya, the Caucasian military line passed along the Terek River in the 18th century, while in early 19th century it was moved from Terek to Sunzha.

In 1735, the Kizlyar fortress, founded on the Terek River, served as the first link in the Caucasian military line. The Cossacks settled here, under the name of the Kizlyar army, as well as those located in the villages along the Terek, were the basis for the Kizlyar Cossack regiment, which received this name in 1833. Different authors cover this process of resettlement of the Cossacks to the banks of the Terek in different ways. Thus, one of the authors of the middle 19th century writes: "... but even prior to the formation of the Kizlyar army in the southwestern limits of the Kumyk land, fugitive Cossacks from the Volga and from the Tersky town settled in the vicinity of the village of Andreevaya (where the fortress Vnezapnaya is nowadays). They formed the Greben Cossack army, probably getting this name from the ridges (rus: гребень [greben'] – ridge) of the mountains that they inhabited. The Greben Cossacks were the closest neighbors of the Chechens." The version that the Greben Cossacks got this name from the ridges of the mountains that they inhabited is not considered proven. Further, the author claims that "the Cossacks moved to the right bank of the Terek and stayed there until the early 18th century. Then after the events described above, Peter the Great, having learned that they serve as a den for fugitives and robbers, ordered them to resettle to the left bank of the Terek" (Zhanov, 1859, p. 62).

An unknown author of a paper published in a military collection argued, and one cannot but agree with this, that the Russian government is more firmly established on planes and plains, which do not represent favorable conditions for defense and prolonged stubborn resistance. That is why the Chechen population, who lived on the right bank of the Terek and in the valley of the river Sunzha, under the name of the Nadterechny and Sunzha Chechens, recognized the power of Russia, paid taxes and performed the duties imposed (Zhanov, 1859).

However, before the mass resettlement of Chechens along the Terek and prior to such form of government in this region, there was a long assertion of the Russian government in Chechnya and on the banks of the Terek. By the second half of the 18th century, having resettled the Cossacks, the Russian population in the Caucasus, onto the left bank of the Terek, having strengthened quantitatively and consolidated qualitatively the villages, from a military point of view, tsarism firmly established its power in the empty lands of the Terek territories.

7. Conclusion

Thus, in the post-Mongol period, actually, from late 14th to early 15th centuries the Chechens began to return to the flat lands, which they were forced to leave in the past centuries more than once. The process of settling Chechens on the plain continued intensively in the 16th–18th centuries. In the 18th century, the ethnic boundaries of the Chechens extended to the banks of the Terek. They moved from the mountains, founding more and more new settlements that exist here to this day. The neighborhood of the highlanders with the Cossack population and the Terek cordon line during this period fostered the establishment of friendly relations with the Russian population in the Caucasus and with the Russian state at large.

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