

ISCKMC 2022**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****KUNACHESTVO – THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF
FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN NORTH CAUCASUS AND RUSSIA**

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the institution of kunachestvo developed in the Caucasus as a historical experience of friendship between the peoples of the North Caucasus and the Russia population in the Caucasus – the Cossacks. The study reveals the features of the custom of kunachestvo, the positive aspects of this custom, which strengthened economic, commercial, cultural relations of the peoples of the North Caucasus. By a twist of historical fate the peoples who lived in the territory of the North Caucasus and were neighbors had to either fight until the strongest wins or live in peace and harmony. The custom of kunachestvo developed in the Caucasus contributed to the fact that the peoples of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Caucasus lived in peace and harmony. The one who had a friend-Kunak in a foreign land found not only food and shelter, but also the sincere participation of Kunak (the owner of the house in which the guest stayed) in all his affairs. It could be non-repayable financial aid, the search and punishment of offenders, the matchmaking of a bride to someone or his son, etc. The need for hospitality was dictated among the Kunaks by a special breath of life. In extraordinary conditions without food and shelter, without relatives or acquaintances, far from their native places, with the real prospect of being robbed, killed or captured and sold into slavery it was critical to have a friend like the Kunak.

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1. Introduction

Mountain-Cossack Kunak ties, a peculiar kind of Caucasian analogue of sworn brotherhood, began to form from the emergence of the Terek Cossacks. Tolstoy wrote in his diary: “In order to become a Kunak, i.e., a friend, according to tradition you had to exchange gifts and then take food in the house of a Kunak” (Gelaeva, 2015, p. 124). Over the centuries of neighborhood and various contacts the customs of the Cossacks and mountaineers became very close. The custom of hospitality was strictly observed in the Cossack environment. If a Muslim was visiting the Tereks, then in no case pork dishes were served.

As Professor Velikaya (1994) notes:

If a Kumyk, Chechen, Kabardian or another person of the Muslim faith visited the house of the Cossack, the holy images were covered with a sheet. No alcohol was served, and the guest was given the right to kill cattle or poultry. (p. 34)

People talked about the prototype of Tolstoy’s Eroshka – Epishka Sekhin: “It happened that he visited the auls of non-peaceful people, and everywhere he was welcomed as an honored guest. Everyone around loved him, and not only us, but also the Chechens and the Nogais...” (Gilyarovskiy, 1960, p. 205).

2. Problem Statement

The study considers the issues of kunachestvo, a custom so common for the North Caucasus. The peoples of the Caucasus freely traded with each other, developed good-neighborly and friendly relations between the peoples of the North Caucasus due to this custom.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the study includes the issues of mutual interaction in various areas of life, the culture of the Chechens, Cossacks and other peoples of the North Caucasus as a result of the established Kunak relations.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the friendship of the peoples of the North Caucasus and the Russian population in the Caucasus – the Cossacks as a consequence of the historically established custom of kunachestvo.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis included the principles of objectivity, scientificity and historicism implying the study of facts and phenomena in all their diversity, in the specific historical conditions of their emergence and development. The authors applied the methods of the source study analysis.

6. Findings

There are two forms of *kunachestvo*. The first, most common form is *kunachestvo*-friendship stemming from hospitality.

The second is *kunachestvo*-patronage between the owner and the person who needs protection and shelter.

If such a person found protection in the owner, then a special form of *kunachestvo* was established between them, close to artificial kinship.

The works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy and many other writers who knew well the life and customs of the Chechens and other peoples of the Caucasus reflect the examples of fidelity, peacefulness, friendship, ethics and *kunachestvo*.

Tolstoy, who lived in 1853–1854 in Starogladovskaya stanitsa and studied the life and morals of the Grebensky Cossacks and Chechens, wrote: “Grebensky Cossacks arranged their dwellings in Tatar (meant in Chechen) manner”.

Living among the Chechens the great Russian writer wrote: “The Cossacks became relatives with them and learned their customs, lifestyle, morals of the mountaineers”, or “Until now, Cossack clans are considered kinship with the Chechens...” (Tolstoy in the Caucasus in the notes of contemporaries, 1961).

Tolstoy was a frequent guest in Chechen villages, knew many Chechen families through which he recorded Chechen folklore.

Tolstoy considered Sado Miserbiev, Isaev, Shamurzaev and other mountaineers to be his *Kunaks*. Tolstoy wrote about his *Kunak* Sado Miserbiev: “Many times he proved his devotion to me, putting his life in danger because of me, but this does not mean anything to him, it is a custom and pleasure for him”. Sado Miserbiev gave Tolstoy a sword, and the Chechens give weapons only to friends. There is a picture of this sword in the Literary Museum named after Tolstoy in Starogladovskaya stanitsa. The sword itself is kept in Moscow in the writer’s museum.

In the summer of 1853 on the way from Vozdvizhenskaya village to the Grozny fortress Tolstoy and Sado Miserbiev fell into an ambush while disengaging from the main crew. The *Kunaks* raced forward, and when Tolstoy’s horse began to lag behind, Sado gave him his horse and convinced the mountaineers to stop the pursuit.

The Russians and the representatives of other peoples who sided with the Chechens fought in the troops of Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil together with the Chechens. “Peasant serfs and Cossacks ran to the Chechens during the Caucasian War. They always found shelter and hospitality among the Chechens” (Gritsenko, 1965, p. 55).

So, in 1840, at the height of the uprising in lowland Chechnya, the Cossack Zot Charin of the Chervlennaya village escaped into the mountains. It is telling that at the same time he stole a horse from the head of the village – the coronet Arnautov, and after some time non-peaceful, i.e. recognizing, like Charin, Shamil’s power, the Chechens stole this horse and returned it to the former owner (Stepanenko, 2016).

The fact of the horse returning to the enemy’s territory indicates a quite difficult and ambiguous relationship between the Cossacks and mountaineers divided by the front line. Zot Charin, like most

fugitive Cossacks, became an agent and an active accomplice in the Chechen raids on Cossack villages. He also participated in the punitive measures of Shamil against the rebellious mountain villages. For his devotion and courage in battles, Zot Charin received a silver order from Shamil. In 1842, he, along with three other fugitive Cossacks and four Chechens, raided Naurskaya village to hijack cattle, but was captured during the retreat. The captured defector was sentenced to death enforced on February 25, 1846. Three days later, another captured defector was shot – the Cossack Naum Vavilov from Chervlennaya village, also caught in the raid, but already near Amir-Aji-yurt (Stepanenko, 2016).

The defectors on both sides fought to the last ditch preferring death to captivity because they were well aware of their future: shooting or life imprisonment in Siberian hard labor in exile. Praising the fighting qualities of the Cossack defectors, the modern researcher Klychnikov (2016) writes: “Perfectly guided by how the cordon line is guarded, without causing suspicion among local residents, such renegades were the most dangerous opponents for the population of the border” (p. 70).

A native of Naurskaya village, Yakov Alpatov, was among such dangerous guides and leaders of the mountaineers and the brother-in-arms of the aforementioned Charin in raids. Since 1846, he regularly attacked the Cossack line. Usually the purpose of his raids was cattle raid. Alpatov resorted to murders extremely rarely, often releasing captured Cossacks. There are cases when he kidnapped beautiful girls for noble mountaineers. For example, this was the fate of the Pyatirublev sisters, but having married the mountaineers, they later voluntarily refused to return to their native farm occasionally visiting their parents who stayed there. His most famous achievement in raids was that in October 1851 he captured the state-owned post office with a huge amount of 37 thousand rubles for that time (Yarkho, 2003).

Unlike most fugitive Cossacks, Alpatov converted to Islam and was firm in the new faith. Having been captured by the Cossacks loyal to the king, he refused to return to Christianity before execution and was hanged in 1856 near Naurskaya village on a barrow later called Alpatov (Chernozubov, 1912). Another defector Ananiy (Andzor) Shushpanov also converted to Islam and after capture was exiled to Siberia. Another fugitive Korchagin, like Z. Charin, was led into the mountains by his thirst for revenge on his authorities (Tkachev, 1912).

The fugitives did not only include Old Believers, but also the descendants from mixed marriages between Cossacks and the representatives of North Caucasian nationalities.

In the pre-reform period, despite the hostilities, some of the Cossacks had Kunaks and relatives in the mountains, knew their language, customs. In the confrontation some of the Cossacks hesitated between the two cultures showing signs of marginal ethnic identity (Velikaya, 2001, p. 120).

For example, the son of a Cossack Frolov from Chervlennaya village and the Kabardian princess Taimazova Misost (same as Ivan) escaped to the Kuban and fought against the Russian army (Velikaya, 2001). This layer in the villages also demonstrated a “dual” identity and served as a certain transfer mechanism, a link connecting the North Caucasian peoples with the Cossacks. The most famous fugitive Cossack Terek with a similar “dual identity” was the bailiff of the Karachay people, a former horseman of the Imperial Guard of the Caucasian half-squadron, a native of Naurskaya village – Semyon Semenovich Atarshchikov. A man of amazing fate, he was the son of the Chechen Ismail (Semyon), who was given to

amanats and baptized in Astrakhan, and the baptized Nogai Antonina Urusova, and grew up in the Kumyk village of Karabudakhkent. He told the following about his childhood: “I was involuntarily related to the life, morals and customs of the mountaineers” (Kosven, 1961, p. 46).

Despite the patronage of General G.Kh. Zass and the brilliant prospects in his career in October 1841, he fled to the Abadzehs, converted to Islam and became one of the leaders of the raids on the Cossack villages – Hadzhret Magomet and received the status of the primary Uzden among the Adygs. Besides, he became famous for his proclamation to soldiers calling for a mass escape to the mountains. At the same time, he promised the fugitives his patronage threatening the offending defectors with severe fines. The fate of Semyon Atarshchikov was quite tragic. In August 1845, he was seriously wounded and handed over to the authorities by another fugitive Cossack Foma Golovkin, who was counting on an ample award. Atarshchikov died without recovering from his wound, Golovkin himself was denied the award on the grounds that he was already rewarded with a pardon for desertion and could not expect nothing more (Begeulov, 2015, p. 109).

The Chechens developed unwritten ethical standards of *kunachestvo* and sworn brotherhood. In 1882, Leontovich (1882) wrote that *kunachestvo* is worshiped among the Chechens along with kinship.

In 1834 Kogan Blaramberg (1992), an officer of the Separate Caucasian Corps of the General Staff of the Russian Empire, wrote that:

The laws of *kunachestvo* of this people (meaning the Chechens) are more strictly observed than those of other mountaineers. The *Kunak* will not let offending his friend throughout the time that he lives with him, moreover, he will protect him from the threat even at the expense of his own life... (p. 97)

Sworn brotherhood was spread among the Chechens for several reasons: friends who wanted to become even closer and fellow villagers who wanted to conclude a friendly alliance – “*dommazlar, 6ouuar*” (friendship, brotherhood – Chech.) fraternized. Brotherhood took place by the oath in the presence of friends and elders, by “blood mixing”, when sworn brothers made cuts on their hands and mixed blood drops; by drinking milk from one bowl with a golden ring inside.

After the symbolic action, the sworn brothers exchanged swords, *bashlyks*, cloaks and other things, which were also the symbols of sworn brotherhood. Sworn brotherhood was reported to families and close relatives on both sides. One of the sworn brothers gave lunch inviting friends and relatives of sworn brothers. Since that both sides assumed the traditional responsibilities of true relatives.

Assessing the quality in the Caucasus Zisserman (1879) wrote:

Brotherhood is when two people who rendered a mutual service or are closely acquainted and want to become closer friends perform the rite of brotherhood ... They swear to be brothers and not to regret their blood. Sanctified by time, this custom, like all other customs, is observed so strictly that one after another people were made blood avengers or completely died, and this was not unusual... (p. 214)

According to the Caucasian tradition, the owner of the *Kunak* and his clan guarded the peace of a guest and defended his honor.

The Chechens, like other peoples of the Caucasus, had a special room for a guest. In mountainous areas it was a room on the second floor, and in lowlands, where the houses were one-story, a “guest room” (*хъеуа ыла*) was built in the courtyard, or one of the rooms (*хъеуийн чоб*) was given to guests. These rooms differed from others in the best decoration. According to the description of Dubrovin (1871),

The owner, in most cases, warns the guest and goes out to meet him, greets, shakes hands, takes the horse ... Inviting the guest to the Kunak room, according to the tradition the owner takes the weapons handed over to him by the guest at the doorway. After that, the mountain etiquette obliges the owner to provide the most exquisite hospitality. Despite the miserable housing, poverty and poorness, the Chechens are characterized by the warmest hospitality... (p. 169).

The custom of hospitality had no place for estates relations, although the rich (*лакхара нах*) usually stayed with wealthy people.

This did not mean that any Chechen from a poor family could not invite any noble visitor to him and provide him with everything necessary. This corresponded to communal traditions (Khasbulatova & Akhmadova, 2011).

Thus, hospitality and *kunachestvo* served to establish and develop peaceful, good-neighbourly and kinship relations between different people (both between close neighbors and between residents of different villages, countries and peoples) regardless of their race, language and religion.

Hence the rule: “Guests of ancestors are higher, more honorable (than ordinary guests)”. A person in need of patronage and protection will not enter the first Kunak house on his way. He will stay in the Kunak of a strong and influential person, who is able to protect his life and honor from enemies.

A person that got into trouble immediately shares his problems with the owner and that he is counting on the patronage and protection of the owner of the house (Kunak). In this case, hospitality is used to protect against the enemy. The guest becomes a member of his family, community, and therefore counts on such protection. *Kunachestvo* close to friendship and artificial kinship, but with an emphasis of patronage was established between the guest and his patron. The inequality of relations was in the guest-requester and the owner-patron. In Russian ethnography such a form of *kunachestvo* was called the patron *kunachestvo*.

7. Conclusion

Kunachestvo-friendship is a classical form of *kunachestvo*, close in content to artificial kinship (sworn brotherhood). People having a fellow feeling for each other meet here based on the equality of rights. Each side at any time can count on everything that the Kunak owner is able to do for it. *Kunachestvo*-friendship implies the change of roles, when each of the parties can be either in a relatively strong position of the owner or in a weak position as the guest. The Kunaks congratulated each other on the joyful events in their lives, provided help and support in a difficult situation. It was mandatory for the Kunaks to visit each other for wedding, funeral, some other joyful or sad events on both sides.

Many Kunaks in various regions of the Caucasus pushed the boundaries of human ability. *Kunachestvo*-friendship is still a prestigious form of ties, one of the forms of popular diplomacy and

social partnership. The more Kunaks the mountaineers in various parts of the Caucasus had, the greater respect and honor he enjoyed in his small homeland.

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