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Reluctant Abolitionists: Slavery, Dependency, and Abolition
in the Caucasus (1801-1914)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Sergey Salushchev

Committee in charge:

Professor Adrienne Edgar, Chair

Professor Erika Rappaport

Professor Sherene Seikaly

Professor Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky

Professor Bruce Grant

December 2022

The dissertation of Sergey Salushchev is approved.

Professor Adrienne Edgar, Committee Chair

Professor Erika Rappaport

Professor Sherene Seikaly

Professor Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky

Professor Bruce Grant

December 2022

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by

Sergey Salushchev

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In the heydays of my graduate education, Paul Werth, a well-known historian of Russian imperial history, opened a well-crafted barrage of critical but fair commentary on my draft of an article on the history of Christian Orthodox missions in the Caucasus with a mollifying preface. He wrote: “The Caucasus is a fundamentally difficult region.” The gravity of his words has not been lost on me since.

The research and writing of this dissertation sent me on a remarkable journey, which brought me back to the Caucasus – a region where I grew up and called home for nearly fifteen years of my life. I must admit that when I left the Caucasus in 2005, I did not look back. The region left me with a trail of painful memories of which the two brutal wars in the Chechen republic (1994-1996 and 1999-2009) left an indelible mark. So, when I began my graduate program in the Department of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), I could hardly conceive of traveling back to the Caucasus voluntarily. Yet, this is exactly what happened in 2017 when my plane landed in Yerevan, Armenia. I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity because it allowed me to experience the Caucasus from a more intellectually mature vantage point and see beauty and kindness where I once saw violence and rage. I have climbed the foothills of the Mount Kazbegi, spent three unnerving hours of interrogation by a Russian Federal Security Officer on the Georgian-Russian border, and carefully leafed through centuries-old documents that taught me so much about the history of the Caucasus and its people.

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I am of course very thankful to my parents. If you were to ask my parents about the topic of this dissertation, they would struggle to give an answer. However, they always supported and encouraged my decision to pursue a PhD in History. I am forever grateful for their unconditional love and unwavering support.

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ABSTRACT

Reluctant Abolitionists: Slavery, Dependency, and Abolition
in the Caucasus (1801-1914)

by

Sergey Salushchev

For centuries the institutions of slavery and social dependency constituted an integral element of the strikingly diverse social landscape of the Caucasus region. Known as kul in Dagestan, kusag in Ossetia, or akhashala in Abkhazia, enslaved people could be found in virtually all regions of the Caucasus mountains. Personal status of the enslaved people was determined by eclectic oral traditions of indigenous customary law, which generally recognized them as chattel. The prevalence of slavery in the region, in turn, encouraged a flourishing transnational slave trade whose extensive networks straddled much of Eurasia. The status of the Caucasus as the single most important supplier of enslaved people in the Black Sea basin was solidified in 1783 when Russian Empire abrogated the Crimean Khanate and formally annexed the Crimean Peninsula.

Russia's annexation of the Georgian kingdom Kartli-Kakheti in 1801 marked a pivotal milestone in the gradual expansion of Russian imperial interest into the Caucasus, which portended great changes in the lives of the indigenous communities living in the region.

However, rather than upending the social conventions and political institutions of the native population, the tsarist government, spurred by the tenuous nature of its rule in the region, practiced the politics of imperial co-optation. Thus, the imperial authorities often recognized the right of the indigenous ruling elites to continue managing the internal affairs within their traditional territorial domains and promised to protect the political status quo in return for loyalty to the Russian Tsar. The vacillating pendulum of hegemonic pretensions of the imperial state and the broad autonomy of its vassals translated into a policy of tacit toleration of the indigenous institutions of slavery and social dependency in the Caucasus.

After decades of ambivalent policies and reluctant efforts to contain slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus, in the 1860s the government undertook what was arguably the most transformative series of reforms aimed at delivering a decisive answer to the *kholopskiĭ vopros* (the slave question). However, abolition in the Caucasus arrived on the heels of the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto, which abolished the institution of serfdom in the heartland of the empire and, in turn, gave the government the green light to contemplate the legislative contours of emancipation in the Caucasus Viceroyalty. Although the abolition marked a major rupture in the history of the Caucasus, where slavery and the slave trade have had verifiable existence since the emergence of the first written records, freeing of the enslaved people in the region was eclipsed by the emancipation of Russian serfs and consequently received scant attention in the historiography of imperial Russia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East.

This dissertation examines the history of abolition in the Caucasus region under Russian imperial rule from 1801 to 1914. Two main arguments undergird the research and writing of this dissertation. First, using primary sources collected in the archives of Armenia, Georgia, and the Russian Federation, this project demonstrates that aside from rhetorical condemnation

of slavery, abolitionism has never become a guiding principle or clearly articulated policy that accompanied Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus. On the contrary, until the late 1860s, the imperial administration was reluctant to emancipate the enslaved people and largely turned a blind eye to the practices of slave labor in the region. Second, contrary to intuitive expectations, Russian blueprints for abolition of slavery in the Caucasus did not entail a unilateral, unconditional, and immediate emancipation. Fearful of losing the support of the slaveholding class, the imperial government invited the slaveholders to play an active role in drafting the abolitionist legislation that established the rules for emancipation in each region of the Caucasus mountains. The terms of abolition required the enslaved people to pay a redemption sum to obtain freedom. Until a redemption sum was paid in full, the formerly enslaved people entered what the imperial government termed as the temporary-obligated relations (*vremenko-obiazannye otnosheniia*) with their former owners and continued performing the same labor duties for a period that could last up to seven years. Various forms of anachronistic social dependency and custom-based labor obligations continued to survive in different parts of the region until the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. In short, at every stage of the emancipation reforms in the Caucasus, the Russian imperial government prioritized the financial wellbeing of the landed nobility and slaveholders at the expense of the freedom and life chances of the enslaved and socially dependent people.

Furthermore, Russian abolitionist reforms meant much more than simple liberation of the enslaved communities. The imperial government aimed to usher in the advent of modernity in the region. The chief hallmarks of this modernization effort included the introduction of rudimentary forms of capitalist production, commercial proprietorship, and promotion of a cash economy. Abolition was accompanied by a comprehensive land reform, which

prioritized private landownership for the select social elites and installed communal land-tenure regime over agricultural land in the indigenous peasant communes. The reforms upended the traditional economies of subsistence, encouraged production of surplus value, and gradually linked local economies to the forces of supply and demand in the markets of the Russian Empire and the Middle East.

Finally, abolition of slavery in the Caucasus also served as an important but frequently overlooked catalyst for the *Muhajir* (emigrant) movement, which witnessed a mass transimperial migration of Chechen, Dagestani, Ossetian, Circassian, Abkhaz, and other indigenous groups from the Caucasus into the Ottoman domains. Among the *muhajirs* were hundreds of slaveowners who decided to leave their native homeland because of the refusal to lose their enslaved and enserfed people. As a consequence, thousands of the enslaved and enserfed families and individuals were forced to follow their masters on a difficult journey to the foreign lands of the Ottoman Empire. These enslaved communities played an integral role in the founding of new villages and cities in Anatolia and the Levant.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND CALENDAR

In this dissertation, I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration from Russian with one single exception. For words of Armenian, Georgian, Chechen, Ingush, Dagestani, Ossetian, Adyghe, and Abkhaz origin, I adopted the Russian transcriptions of the words as they originally appeared in Russian imperial primary sources and then used the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian to render them in the English transcription. Finally, for words of Arabic and Farsi origin, I used transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES).

When citing Russian imperial sources, I used the dates precisely as they appeared in the original documents in the Julian calendar.

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INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. Map of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus in 1801, including the annexed Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 14.

*Conditio sine qua non*¹

On 8 August 1805, a severe summer storm descended on the Black Sea. Caught in the middle of the calamity was a Turkish slaver ship en route to the markets of the Ottoman

¹ When translated from Latin, the phrase *conditio sine qua non* means: “an indispensable and essential action, condition.” The Latin transcription of the phrase appears in cursive penmanship on the pages of the government’s report authored in 1910 by then the Caucasus Viceroy, Count Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov. The Viceroy used this Latin phrase to explain the imperial government’s strategy to incorporate Dagestan (and other regions of the Caucasus mountains) into its sphere of political influence by entering into legally binding agreements with local ruling elites. Such agreements, or oaths of loyalty, guaranteed indigenous ruling

Empire's chief port and capital—Istanbul. The roaring gusts of wind, choppy waters, and rain had damaged the vessel. As the ship began to take in water and sink, the captain of the vessel was forced to escape the dangers of the open sea and seek shelter on the shores of the Crimean Peninsula. Eventually, the ship crashed onto shore near the port city of Sevastopol',² and its landfall did not escape the attention of the Russian navy: a group of officers and sailors quickly came to the assistance of the distressed crew. The elation that initially accompanied the ship's survival quickly gave way to shock as Sevastopol's Quarantine Inspector examined the ship's hull. Standing in front of the inspector were dozens of shivering bodies: adults, and children. The inspector counted a total of seventy people of Georgian and Abaza ethnicity: "forty women, twenty men, and ten children."³ Evidently, these people were destined to be sold on Istanbul's slave markets, and the Russians were bewildered by the grim discovery of the ship's human cargo. Before the Quarantine Inspector could solicit instructions from his superiors on how to proceed with the enslaved people, another Turkish ship appeared on the horizon and approached the shore. The enslaved people were promptly transferred onto the ship with no objections from the Russian authorities. After reportedly taking in a shipment of salt in the port city of Kozlov, it continued its journey toward Istanbul. There, the seventy Georgian and Abaza captives joined thousands of household servants, field workers, concubines, and soldiers from the Caucasus region who had been captured and sold on the slave markets of the Ottoman Empire and Iran over many centuries. The chance encounter of the Russian

class its customary rights and privileges, including the right to own and trade non-Christian slaves. See *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv* (hence forward RGIA), f. 1276, op. 19, d. 500, l. 15.

² RGIA, f. 1285, op. 3, d. 97, l. 53.

³ Ibid.

authorities with the Turkish slavers is hardly surprising. The incident corroborates the well-established presence of large-scale slave trade that linked the Caucasus region with slave markets in the Middle East and Central Asia. What *is* unsettling, however, is the passivity of the Russian authorities, who did nothing to rescue the enslaved people. Such resignation stands in sharp contrast with the noble image of zealous abolitionists that, until recently, was considered conventional wisdom among historians of Russian imperial escapades in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The narrative of Russian abolitionism had initially been constructed in conjunction with the abolitionist undertakings of other European powers. According to this narrative, the long nineteenth century heralded the era of a global abolitionist movement.⁴ The genesis of this movement emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century through the popular political activism of abolitionist organizations like the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the Great Britain, the Société des Amis des Noirs in France, and later, the emergence of the Sociedad Abolicionista Española in Spain. Inevitably, the momentum behind antislavery movements was slow in the making and was met with fierce resistance. Nevertheless, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the combined efforts of governments and antislavery organizations succeeded in disrupting transnational slave-trading networks by firmly affixing an aura of moral abhorrence to the institution of slavery. Within little more than a century, slavery and the slave trade in its various forms were suppressed or abolished with various degrees of finality in Eurasia, Africa, North America,

⁴ For a global perspective on the abolitionist politics of the nineteenth century see *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, eds., William Mulligan and Maurice Bric (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

and South America. Today, decades of painstaking research and scholarly writing have engendered a rich historiography of this global abolitionist movement. The lion's share of this scholarship is focused on the study of slavery and the slave trade in the Transatlantic and, more recently, the Middle East.⁵ Notably, Russian contributions to the antislavery cause have been written out of the global abolitionist history.⁶ This is perplexing given the fact that in the nineteenth century, the Russian imperial government became a signatory to several landmark international anti-slavery agreements and spearheaded two abolitionist campaigns of its own in the Caucasus and the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand and the Emirate of Bukhara in Central Asia.

⁵ Of particular importance is the scholarship on the history of slavery and abolition in the Ottoman Empire. The seminal works on these include such works as Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800-1909* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1996). Ceyda Karamürsel, "Transplanted Slavery, Contested Freedom and Vernacularization of Rights in the Reform Era Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 3 (2017): 690-714; idem., "'In the Age of Freedom, in the Name of Justice': Slaves, Slaveholders, and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic, 1857-1933," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 2015). Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Eve M. Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). Ehud R. Toledano, "Shemsigül: A Circassian Slave in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cairo," in Edmund Burke, III (ed.), *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 59-74. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (University of Washington Press, 1998), Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). Will Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶ The exception to this otherwise unassailable rule is Megan Dean Farah's article "Autocratic Abolitionists: Tsarist Russian Anti-Slavery Campaigns," in *A Global History of Anti-slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, eds., William Mulligan and Maurice Bric (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 97-117 and Liubov' Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan's *The Tsar's Abolitionists: The Slave Trade in the Caucasus and Its Suppression* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

Indeed, the Russian Empire ostensibly demonstrated a firm commitment to stopping the transnational slave trade by signing a series of international treaties in the nineteenth century. Tsar Alexander I joined seven European nations in declaring Russia's opposition to the slave trade at the Congress of Vienna on 8 February 1815⁷, condemning the slave trade as "repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality."⁸ This declaration served as a legal foundation for future antislavery treaties. In 1841, Russia was among five European powers to sign and ratify the Treaty for the Suppression of the African Slave Trade, which established the British, French, Prussian, Austrian, and Russian commitment to eradicating the international slave trade. More concretely, it permitted the signatories to stop and search any merchant ship belonging to a fellow signatory that was suspected of engaging in the slave trade in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.⁹ Fifty years later, Russia also joined the Brussels Conference Act of 1890, which sought to put a permanent end to African slavery.

On the international level, the narrative of Russian abolitionism was also reinforced through the press. Many foreign correspondents lauded Russian efforts to abolish serfdom and suppress the slave trade along the empire's colonial peripheries. Reporting on Russian endeavors to end the slave trade in the Black Sea basin in 1853, the British newspaper *The*

⁷ Mark Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and Its Legacy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 144-146. Jenny Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32. Stefan Krause, *Die Ächtung des Sklavenhandels auf dem Wiener Kongress: Ein Sieg der Humanität oder der Machtpolitik?* (Norderstedt, 2009), 9-13.

⁸ T.C. Hansard, *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time: Forming a Continuation of the Work Entitled 'The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803,'* vol. 32. (London: T.C. Hansard, 1813), 200-201.

⁹ Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law*, 127.

Leeds Times as well as other British publications reprinted an article that praised the anti-slavery work of the Russian Consul in the Ottoman port of Trabzon, where the “Circassian and Georgian slaves [were] frequently landed.”¹⁰ According to the newspaper, the Russians succeeded in expelling the Governor of Trabzon, Sarim Pasha, from his post for “turning a deaf ear” to Russian protestations against “allowing the slave dealers to depart with their cargo...”¹¹ In 1855, Reuben W. Weaver, an editor of the pro-abolitionist newspaper *The Star of the North* headquartered in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, critiqued the lack of progress to abolish slavery in the United States and noted that, “One of the last edicts of the Czar Nicholas did more for the cause of human freedom than all the morbid sentimentality of such mock philanthropy as generates negro novels like Uncle Tom’s Cabin...”¹² Weaver credited the “exigencies” of the Crimean War (1853-1856) for prompting the Russian imperial government to pursue the cause of freedom. Drawing parallels between the “bold movement” in Russia and the abolitionist stalemate in the United States, Weaver posited a foreshadowing question: “And who shall say that we may not in a like seeming mysterious manner once work out the strange problem of American slavery?”¹³ Further, in 1858, *The Belmont Chronicle*, an American newspaper published in St. Clairsville, Ohio, commented on the looming abolition of serfdom in Russia by proclaiming that, “Russia has advanced more in the last fifty years than any other European country, has advanced more than the world will credit, and bids fair,

¹⁰ “Turkey,” *The Leeds Times* (Leeds, UK), May 21, 1853.

¹¹ *Ibid.*,

¹² Reuben W. Weaver, “Europe in 1855,” *The Star of the North* (Bloomsburg, PA), May 10, 1855.

¹³ *Ibid.*

soon to stand side by side with the United States, surpassed by no other power.”¹⁴ In the editors’ estimation, the abolition of serfdom in Russia demonstrated “another epoch of portentous meaning in the grand struggle of human liberty,” and signaled that “every true friend to liberty will look with intense interest to its final consummation.”¹⁵ Finally, Russian imperial expansion into Central Asia and the subsequent abolition of slavery in the Khanate of Khiva in 1873 earned Tsar Alexander II the publication of a memorial from the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which praised the emperor as a “benefactor of mankind” and offered the tsar the organization’s “most grateful thanks for what [he] has accomplished.”¹⁶

Russian newspapers in the empire’s capitol were emblematically silent on the topic of abolition in the Caucasus, dedicating only a few lines to the emancipation in the southern periphery. However, in contrast to the editorial stinginess of print media in Saint Petersburg, the Caucasus’ provincial, government-run newspapers like *Kavkaz*, *Terskie Vedomosti*, *Kubanskie Voiskovye Vedomosti*, and others provided extensive coverage of abolitionist developments in local communities, with articles stretching across multiple issues of the weekly publications. The 1868 issue of the *Terskie Vedomosti*, for example, declared the abolition of slavery and dependency in Terskaia oblast’ a “multi-significant (*mnogoznamenatel’nyi*) fact... and one of the most important phenomena in the life of the

¹⁴ “Abolition of Serfdom in Russia,” *The Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, OH), Jan. 28, 1858.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “Memorial to the Emperor of Russia,” *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (London), Apr. 1, 1874.

Caucasus,” which witnessed the emancipation of “27,000 souls of the dependent estates.”¹⁷ In addition, different episodes of abolition in the Caucasus had been documented in print in such government-sponsored nineteenth-century publications as *Sbornik Svedeniï o Kavkazskikh Gortsakh*, *Sbornik Svedeniï o Kavkaze*, *Sbornik Svedeniï o Severnom Kavkaze*, to name just a few. Scholarly in their aspirations, these journals aimed to deliver accounts of the region’s history, ethnography, folklore, and more. The journals were published locally in Tiflis and funded by the Caucasus Viceroyalty authorities.

Finally, the rhetoric of some Russian statesmen and intellectuals, who expressed rather vague approbation for the cause of human freedom, contributed to the creation of the narrative of Russian abolitionism. However, it was the life and tragic death of a Russian diplomat and playwright, Aleksandr Griboedov, that truly embodied the notion of Russian abolitionism in the Caucasus. Griboedov’s sincere concern for the plight of captured or enslaved Russian subjects was evident during his appointment as the Russian plenipotentiary to the Qajar Iran in the early nineteenth century. Writing in his travel journal during a short sojourn in Tabriz in 1819, Griboedov described his state of mind when contemplating the hardships experienced by the captured and sold into slavery countrymen as “madness and sorrow” (*beshenstvo i pechal’*).¹⁸ Griboedov’s travel notes mentioned the name of a Russian junior officer captured in 1804, Vereshchagin, who was castrated and later joined the ranks of the “Persian army.”¹⁹ He also described witnessing broken arms, severed ears, and caning that was apparently

¹⁷ “Osvobozhdenie krest’ian v tuzemnom naselenii Terskoï oblasti,” *Terskiia Vedomosti* №46 (Tiflis), Nov. 11, 1868.

¹⁸ Aleksandr Griboedov, *Putëvye Zapiski: Kavkaz-Persia 1818-1827* (Tiflis, 1932), 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

inflicted on some of the captives. As a declaration of Griboedov's resolve to deliver the captured and enslaved Russian subjects from the cruelty of their captors, he wrote a poignant statement: "I will sacrifice my head for the sake of my wretched compatriots."²⁰ And sacrifice Griboedov did. The Russian envoy to Qajar Iran was brutally killed in 1829 by an enraged mob in Tehran after he refused to surrender two enslaved Armenian women who had escaped from their owner's house and had sought protection on the premises of the Russian diplomatic mission.²¹

In comparative terms, Russia's participation in the global anti-slavery movement was modest and may have been easy to dismiss. Indeed, Russian principled stance against the African slave trade was largely symbolic. Apart from establishing a tenuous colonial presence in Alaska in the Pacific, the Russian Empire had no overseas colonies anywhere in the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean, or the coasts of the African continent. In contrast to the empires of Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, and France, which had developed a vast transatlantic slave-trading network, the Russian Empire did not engage with the transatlantic slave trade in any way, shape, or form. Similarly, Russian merchants did not participate in the plantation-style production and commerce of such lucrative commodities as sugar or coffee, which obviated the need for the importation of slave labor. In this way, the stakes of signing international anti-slavery agreements, which primarily targeted the African slave trade, were low for Russia, while the diplomatic prestige gained from joining such agreement was high. Nevertheless, I

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For a complete account of Griboedov's last stance and his tragic death in Tehran in 1829, as well as the diplomatic repercussions that characterized the Russo-Iranian relations in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Laurence Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran: Alexander Griboyedov and Imperial Russia's Mission to the Shah of Persia* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2006).

argue that ignoring Russia's role in suppressing and abolishing slavery in the Caucasus, a region that for many centuries constituted the most important hub of transnational slave trade in Eurasia, renders the historiography of the global abolitionist movement incomplete and prone to erroneous interpretations.

This dissertation makes a novel historiographic contribution in two ways. First, it weaves the Russian campaign to abolish slavery in the Caucasus into the narrative of the global abolitionist movement. Namely, this dissertation asserts the validity of numerous parallels that link the history of Russian abolitionism in the Caucasus with similar abolitionist initiatives of other colonial powers in the nineteenth century. For example, I argue that the tsarist administration approached the institution of slavery in the Caucasus in much the same way as the French did in North and West Africa,²² with both the French and the Russians lacking the requisite resources and political will to dismantle the indigenous institutions of slavery decisively and completely. As a result, the Russian and French colonial administrations subordinated their purported abolitionist values to the imperatives of their empire-building goals. In practical terms, this translated into implicitly tolerating slavery, turning a blind eye to small scale intra-regional slave trades, and prioritizing the property rights of slaveowners –

²² The French had formally abolished slavery in Algeria in 1848, see Benjamin Claude Brower, "Rethinking Abolition in Algeria Slavery and the "Indigenous Question"," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 49 (2009): 806. However, Brower contends that despite the legal abolition of slavery in 1848, "slavery in Algeria was kept alive by a variety of forces, including the resilience of pre-colonial institutions, clandestine practices adopted by slave traders and owners, ... and, finally, a singular lack of will on the part of the colonial administration to enforce the full letter of the law... As a result, like elsewhere in Africa, slavery in Algeria was hardly "abolished" but withered slowly." The French government also assumed an accommodating stance toward the institution of slavery in Mauritania due to the "limited resources and long supplies lines," which posed a broad range of challenges to the French colonial project in the region. Indeed, slavery in Mauritania was not abolished until 1980, see Martin Klein, "Slavery and French Rule in the Sahara," in *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa*, eds., Suzanne Miers and Martin Klein (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 74.

all in the name of the stability of the colonial regime. Furthermore, when it comes to the analysis of the legislative models of emancipation, productive comparisons could be drawn between the British policy of *apprenticeship*—an emancipation system that had been established in most British colonies as a transitional stage to full freedom “wherein slaves were to spend a number of years in a condition of partially unpaid servitude”²³—and the Russian system of *temporary obligation* (*vremennaia obiazannost’*), which required the formerly enslaved people to perform several years of unpaid labor for the benefit of their former masters in order to gain freedom. The tsarist government employed the formula of *temporary obligation* when it declared emancipation of Russian serfs in 1861 as well as the emancipation of enslaved people and other dependent estates in the Caucasus in the 1860-70s. Both the British and Russian systems gave slavery a new lease on life, only under a different name. The same model of gradual emancipation was also adopted by the Spanish government in 1880. Known as the *patronato* system, this emancipation policy required all enslaved people of working age to perform eight years of unpaid apprenticeship labor.²⁴ Just like the Russian emancipation model of *temporary obligation*, the *patronato* system abolished the institution of slavery in name but maintained the slaveholders’ traditional prerogatives. Finally, the Russian system of *temporary obligation* also bears obvious resemblance to the practice of contractual manumission, which was known in Islamic jurisprudence as

²³ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 263. Also, Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194-198.

²⁴ Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Slavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833-1874* (Pittsburg: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 162-163.

mukataba.²⁵ It entailed the signing of a legally binding contract between an enslaved person and their owner, which specified the exact amount of money that the enslaved person was required to pay their owner in order to obtain freedom within a specific timeframe. These points of conceptual abolitionist contiguity present a range of possibilities for reimagining the history of global abolition and reinterpreting transnational institutional modalities of emancipation.

Second, this dissertation expands the historiography of one of the most momentous periods in the Russian imperial history – the 1861 abolition of serfdom.²⁶ Commonly known as the Peasant Reform in the bureaucratic parlance of the government’s officials, this unprecedented feat of legislation emerged in the wake of Russia’s humiliating defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856). The defeat revealed Russia’s weaknesses and prompted the tsarist government to modernize laws and reform social institutions in the empire. One of the most celebrated reforms of the era was emancipation of millions of peasants from the shackles of serfdom. However, the reform was frustratingly slow and unfair to peasants by its very design. Although the former serfs were legally separated from the authority of their owners, the freed peasants were settled with redemption payments that prolonged their dependency to the landlords for decades and stunted any hope of true economic independence and social

²⁵ *Mukataba* (مكاتبة) draws its validity from the Qur’an 24:33.

²⁶ For an exploration of essential historiography of Russian serfdom and emancipation of Russian serfs, see Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia: From the 9th to the 19th Century* (Princeton University Press, 1971); Terence Emmons, *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014); Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Harvard University Press, 2009); Roxanne Easley, *The Emancipation of the Serfs in Russia Peace Arbitrators and the Development of Civil Society* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008); Tracy Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

mobility. Further, in addition to giving the former serfs freedom, the imperial government also embarked on ambitious task of redistributing land between peasants and landed aristocracy. Thus, the Land Reform also became part and parcel of the emancipation of Russian serfs and had equally dubious results.

On the surface, the era of emancipation may seem like a straightforward process emanating from the empire's metropole and abolishing the institution for serfdom across the vast empire simultaneously. The reality was far more complicated. In fact, it would be more appropriate to describe the 1861 Peasant Reform as a series of *emancipations* that occurred in multiple corners of the empire at different times and on different terms.²⁷ Among these Peasant Reforms, the abolition of servitude and slavery in the Caucasus has remained elusive in the English language scholarship. This dissertation seeks to correct this omission by arguing that Russian abolition of slavery in the Caucasus must be embedded in and understood as part and parcel of the era of the Great Reforms whose historical antecedents emerged from the debacles of the Crimean War (1853-1856). Although the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto did not apply to the dependent and enslaved people in the Caucasus region, the news of the emancipation in European Russia had galvanized enslaved communities across the Caucasus mountains upsetting the government's efforts to sustain social status quo and general political stability in the region. Unable to reverse the growing unrest, the tsarist authorities in the Caucasus accepted the necessity to abolish various institutions of unfree labor in the region against the vocal opposition of slaveowners and landed aristocracy. Thus, the easiest way to

²⁷ For a thorough discussion on the complexities and multiple dimensions of the emancipation reforms in the Russian Empire before and after 1861, see Willard Sunderland, "The Greatest Emancipator: Abolition and Empire in Tsarist Russia," *The Journal of Modern History* 93, no. 3 (2021): 566-567.

chronologically conceptualize the history of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus is to divide the long nineteenth century into two parts using the Peasant Reform in European Russia as the turning point. Alexander II's Emancipation Manifesto, which was issued on 19 February 1861, effectively divides the history of slavery in the Caucasus into the categories of *before* and *after*. In the decades preceding the Peasant Reform in the empire, the Russian administration in the Caucasus did not undertake any meaningful steps to systematically identify and abolish slavery in the region. During that time the Russian policies could be characterized as reactive. The chief impetus behind the government's haphazard attempts to rescue the captured and enslaved Russian subjects were the pleas for help from landlords, for whom the loss of serfs and slaves entailed a significant financial loss, and from the families and communities that yearned to be reunited with their loved ones. In the years following the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto, the tsarist government in the Caucasus received the decisive legislative push to develop a comprehensive plan for abolition of slavery and servitude in the empire's southern periphery. Had the emancipation of Russian serfs did not occur in 1861, it is very likely that the question of slavery and unfree labor would have remained unresolved for decades to come. Therefore, by examining the Russian campaign to abolish the institutions of indigenous slavery, serfdom, and various types of servitude, this dissertation sheds critical light on the history of the Peasant Reform in the Russian Empire during the era of the Great Reform.

Although I posit that the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus has important historiographic implications for Russian imperial history and constitutes an integral part of the global history of abolition, I challenge the narrative of Russian abolitionism by providing the first comprehensive, critical account of the Peasant Reform in the Caucasus, with a focus on the

period between 1801 and 1914. The year 1801 marks the beginning of Russia's formal colonization of the region, signified by the abrogation of the Georgian Bagrationi dynasty and the annexation of the two Georgian kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti.²⁸ The year 1914 witnessed Russia's poorly conceived entry into World War One, which suspended the government's efforts to eliminate the last vestiges of slavery in the North Caucasus and precipitated the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. Two main arguments undergird the research and writing of this dissertation. First, using a substantial volume of primary and secondary sources, I demonstrate that aside from rhetorical condemnations of slavery, abolitionism never became a guiding principle or clearly articulated policy that accompanied Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus. On the contrary, I argue that until the late 1860s, the Russian government was *reluctant* to emancipate the enslaved people and largely turned a blind eye to the practices of slave labor in the region. The policy of non-interference into the socio-economic order of the conquered communities, particularly in the remote regions of the North Caucasus that were hostile to Russian influence, was a deliberate tactic of Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century. In practical terms, this policy recognized slaves as the legitimate property of their owners and protected the slaveowners' rights to own slaves in return for an oath of allegiance to Russian Tsars. This toleration of slavery was accepted as *conditio sine qua non*—a necessary sacrifice to ensure the success of the Russian colonial project in the Caucasus. Although the Russian authorities exerted notable efforts in severing the commercial links that sustained a flourishing slave

²⁸ The Russian annexation of the Eastern Georgia received a thorough scholarly attention. For most recent accounts of this event see Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 64-68 and Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 250-265.

commerce between the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire in the Black Sea, the empire's capacity to enforce such measures was very limited. Moreover, guarding the porous land borders between the Russian imperial domains, the Ottoman Empire, and Qajar Iran was an even greater challenge than patrolling the sea. All the while, the slave trade in the North Caucasus remained virtually unchecked. In fact, several years prior to the declarations abolishing slavery in the region, the Russian authorities sanctioned indigenous slave trade in places like Dagestan, Chechnya, Circassia, Abkhazia, and others. However, two unrelated but equally significant factors converged in the early 1860s and allowed the tsarist government to begin contemplating reforms that could fundamentally restructure the social organization of indigenous communities in the Caucasus. The debacles of the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the ascension of Alexander II as the Tsar ushered in the era of the Great Reforms that created the requisite legislative momentum to begin addressing Russia's long-festered social wound—serfdom. The 1861 Emancipation Manifesto, which formally abolished the institution of serfdom in the empire, would become the main legislative catalyst that ultimately sanctioned a comprehensive campaign of emancipation in the Caucasus. Along with the abolition of slavery, the Russian administration undertook land tenure reforms and introduced new tax codes, which will also be considered in this dissertation. In addition, after decades of bitter fighting, the Russian army managed to establish a relatively strong hold over the remote and inveterately hostile areas of the North Caucasus in 1864. Of course, the end of the large-scale military campaigns in the region did not immediately translate into the native population's submission to Russian rule. Armed uprisings of local significance continued to test the imperial government's resolve decades after Russia's formal declaration of victory in 1864. Nevertheless, the end of the Caucasus War marked a decisive turning point in the tsarist

administration's ability to exercise control over the disparate, ingenious communities and to subordinate the local institutions of authority into the fold of the imperial governance. Thus, while the Emancipation Manifesto of 1861 gave the Russian administration in the Caucasus the political will to finally resolve the *kholopskii vopros* (the slave question) in the region, it was the conclusion of the Caucasus War in 1864 that created the political environment necessary for an effective implementation of such fundamental reforms.

Second, contrary to intuitive expectations, Russian blueprints for the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus did not entail a unilateral and immediate emancipation of enslaved people. On the contrary, the tsarist government recognized the enslaved people as the legitimate property of slaveholders. Fearful of losing the support of the slaveholding class, the imperial government appeased their grievances over the looming loss of slave labor by inviting the slaveholders to play an active role in drafting the abolitionist legislation that would establish the rule of emancipation in each region of the Caucasus. In addition, they established two types of compensation for the slaveholders. In the first case, the compensation came from the coffers of the imperial treasury, and the government provided each slaveowner with a one-time monetary reward (*voznagrashdenie*) for each emancipated enslaved person in their possession. In the second case, the compensation came from the enslaved people themselves. Namely, the terms of abolition required enslaved people to pay a redemption sum in order to gain their freedom. The amount of redemption, in turn, was calculated based on the average cost of purchasing an enslaved man, woman, or child in different regions of the Caucasus. Until the formerly enslaved people paid off the redemption sum in full, they would be entered into what the imperial government termed as the *temporary-obligated relation* (*vremenno-obiazannye otnosheniia*) with their former owners. This legally ambiguous status was meant

to serve as a transitional stage on the path towards unencumbered personal freedom. The system of temporary obligation required formerly enslaved people to perform their traditional labor duties for the benefit of their former owners, either for a period that could last up to seven years or until the redemption debt was paid off in full. Although some exceptions were made for enslaved people of senior age and for very young children, many formerly enslaved people could not fulfill the terms of their emancipation and, therefore, were unable to sever their legal dependency to their former owners. In many parts of the Caucasus, such dependency lasted until the outbreak of the Bolshevik coup. In short, at every stage of the emancipation reforms, the Russian imperial government prioritized the financial wellbeing of the landed nobility and slaveholders at the expense of the freedom and life chances of enslaved and dependent people.

The Institutional Architecture of the Russian Abolition in the Caucasus

The institutional architecture that propelled and supervised the abolitionist reforms in the Caucasus consisted of three tiers of executive and legislative authority. The first, and arguably most important, were the estate-land commissions (*soslovno-pozemel'nye komissii*) and mediation courts (*mirovoi sud*), which were created in almost every territorial-administrative unit in the North Caucasus and Abkhazia that had a sizeable enslaved population. These commissions played a critical role in conducting land surveys, studying local customary laws, and collecting testimonies from the slaveowners and the slaves alike in order to establish the precise number of the enslaved population in every administrative district. The collected data was then transferred for review and analysis to Tiflis into the hands of the Committee for Liberation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus.²⁹ The

²⁹ *Komitet po Osvobozhdeniiu Zavisimykh Sosloviĭ v Gorskikh Plemenakh Kavkaza.*

Committee was created on the orders of Grand Duke Mikhail on 16 May 1866 and constituted the second tier of the institutional hierarchy of the abolition.

The Committee coordinated the work of local estate-land commissions, processed gathered information, summoned and interviewed principal stakeholders in the abolitionist project, and served as the chief authority for approval and creation of policies that guided the emancipation operations on the local level. The Caucasus Viceroy was the nominal head of the Committee. Although the Grand Duke was not always physically present at the Committee's meetings, he had the ultimate authority to either approve or deny the legislative initiatives of the Committee's members.

The final tier of the institutional hierarchy was centered in the empire's capital Saint Petersburg and was concentrated in the affairs of the Caucasus Committee. The Caucasus Committee was created in 1840 with the chief purpose of staying abreast of the major developments in the Caucasus, serving as the highest deliberative body for all matters pertinent to the region, and drafting of policies that could effectively integrate the Caucasus into the legal and social landscape of the Russian Empire. The committee's existence reflected the strategic importance of the Caucasus for the tsarist government. The ascendance of Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov as the Caucasus Viceroy in 1862 transferred a significant amount of the executive authority into the institution of the Viceroyalty. Thus, although the imperial government in the metropole received regular dispatched from the office of the Caucasus Viceroy on the progress of the emancipation reforms in the North Caucasus, which required the approval of the Tsar, the drafting and enactment of these reforms became primarily a local affair.

Another important institutional context that influenced the course of liberation of the slaves in the North Caucasus was the peculiar system of the Caucasus Military-Civil Administration (*Kavkazskoe Voенno-narodnoe Upravlenie*).³⁰ This unique form of administrative-judicial governance was implemented in the territories of the northeastern and some parts of the northwestern Caucasus that came under the direct Russian control at the end of the Caucasus War. Military-civil administration was designed as a temporary measure that would pave the way for eventual transition into the institutional sphere of Russian criminal and civil law. Some features of this system were first implemented in Chechnya as early as 1852.³¹ The chief institutional architect behind the edifice of the military-civil administration was Prince Bariatinskiĭ, who served as the Caucasus Viceroy from 1856 to 1862.³² The Muslim communities in the North Caucasus received the right to adjudicate their civil grievances and petty criminal offenses in the so-called people’s courts (*narodnye sudy*) “in accordance with *adat* (customary law), and in the matters of faith and conscience, the shari‘a law.”³³ Several Russian and American historians have pointed out that some of aspects of Russian military-civil administration resembled “the colonial administrations of other

³⁰ For a detailed account of the history and institutional evolution of the system of the Military-Civil Administration in the North Caucasus, see Timothy K. Blauvelt, “Military-Civil Administration and Islam in the North Caucasus, 1858–83,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11, no. 2 (2010): 221–55.

³¹ Vladimir Bobrovnikov and Irina Babich, *Severnyĭ Kavkaz v Sostave Rossiĭskoi Imperii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2007), 192.

³² Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyĭ Kavkaz v Sostave Rossiĭskoi Imperii*, 191.

³³ AKAK, vol. 12, № 1196, 435.

imperial powers of the period, particularly in French Algeria and in the British colonies in India and the Middle East.”³⁴

The chief executive body responsible for the oversight and efficient functioning of the military-civil administration in different regions of the North Caucasus was the Caucasus Mountainous Administration (*Kavkazskoe gorskoe upravlenie*), which was formally established in 1865. The institutional design of the military-civil administration aimed to concentrate the main levers of the executive authority in the hands of appointed Russian military officers under the ultimate command of the Commander in-Chief of the Caucasus Army, while giving the indigenous communities the right to organize their internal affairs in accordance with the customary law

The Russian administration was confounded by the diversity and complexity of the many forms of servitude and enslavement in different parts of the Caucasus. To make sense of this complicated web of social dependency, following the first meeting of the Committee for Liberation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus in Tiflis on 4 June 1866, the Russian officials classified various institutions of slavery and servitude into three separate categories of “dependency” (*zavisimost*).³⁵ The first category was labelled as “administrative dependency” (*administrativnaia zavisimost*). This type of dependency was defined as the form of administrative submission of a population to the “judicial and police authority” of the member(s) of the highest social estate. The second category was labelled as “land dependency” (*pozemel’naia zavisimost*). This dependency entailed individual and

³⁴ See Blauvelt, “Military-Civil Administration and Islam in the North Caucasus”, *Kritika*, 227. Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz v Sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 190–94.

³⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 33 ob.

communal payments of rent, either in cash or in-kind, to the landowners for the right to use forest, meadows, agricultural or grazing lands, etc. Finally, the third category was labelled “personal dependency” (*lichnaia zavisimost’*). This type of dependency implied the “complete ownership of one person by another.”³⁶ The personal dependency included a broad spectrum of feudal servitude and enslavement. The abolitionist reforms in the North Caucasus and Abkhazia sought to dismantle all forms of administrative, land, and personal dependencies.

Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is primarily based on archival research in Armenia, Georgia, and the Russian Federation. In Armenia, I worked in the reading room of the National Archives of Armenia (Հայաստանի ազգային არխիվ), where I studied state-produced documents that chronicled the policies of the Russian imperial government in the South Caucasus. In Georgia, I benefited greatly from unmatched hospitality, kindness, and professionalism of archival staff while working in the reading rooms of the National Archives of Georgia (საქართველოს ეროვნული არქივი) and the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia (საქართველოს პარლამენტის ეროვნული ბიბლიოთეკა). My archival work in Russia’s autonomous republics in the North Caucasus proved equally fruitful, albeit bureaucratically more cumbersome. I first visited the State Archive of the Stavropol’ Region (Государственный архив Ставропольского края). Then, I had the opportunity to utilize the reading rooms of the Central State Archive of the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania (Центральный государственный архив РСО-Алания), the Central State Archive of the Kabardin-Balkar Republic (Центральный государственный архив Кабардино-Балкарской республики),

³⁶ Ibid.

and the State Archive of the Krasnodar Region (Государственный архив Краснодарского края).³⁷ I concluded my archival field work in Russia by examining vast archival repositories in Moscow at the Russian State Military-Historical Archive (Российский государственный военно-исторический архив), Saint Petersburg at the Russian State Historical Archive (Российский Государственный Исторический Архив) and the library of the Russian Geographic Society (Русское Географическое Общество).

I made a deliberate effort to use various types of archival sources in each archive that I visited. The sources that undergird the central arguments of this dissertation include correspondences between the Russian government in the empire's metropole of Saint Petersburg and the chancellery of the Caucasus Viceroy in Tiflis, as well as correspondence and government reports that had been exchanged between provincial authorities in the Caucasus on governorate (*guberniia*), provincial (*oblast'*), district (*okrug*), and departmental (*otdel*) levels. I also studied diplomatic correspondences and consular reports between Russian consuls in the Ottoman Empire and Russian imperial authorities in Saint Petersburg and the Caucasus, as well as official correspondences addressed directly to the Ottoman authorities. Another important source of archival knowledge about the institutions of unfree labor emerged through my study of police reports, court records, and statistical data generated by the tsarist administration in the Caucasus. This included perhaps one of my most important discoveries—the slave sale deeds from Circassia. Furthermore, I was fortunate to access hundreds of petitions written on behalf of enslaved and enserfed people, peasants, merchants, clergy, and others who sought the government's intervention in the matters of personal status

³⁷ Sadly, the archives of the Chechen Republic were completely destroyed during the first Chechen War (1994-1996). My planned trip to the Republic of Dagestan was postponed at the time of my field work due to security concerns in the region.

law or protection against abuses of slaveowners. Other sources included newspapers published in the Caucasus, memoirs of Russian and native statesmen and officers who acquired firsthand knowledge of enslavement and abolition practices in the region, and writings of external observers drawn primarily from the travel accounts of Europeans visiting the Caucasus in the nineteenth century.

These European, nineteenth-century travel accounts proved to be the least reliable source for the study and understanding of the institutions of slavery in the Caucasus. As a rule, such accounts reflected the orientalist fantasies and voyeuristic imaginaries of their authors rather than accurate or even semi-accurate portrayals of slavery in the region. Many of these accounts focused on enslaved indigenous women whom the authors described indiscriminately as Circassian. The act of enslavement itself was often described as a voluntary, and indeed, desirable outcome of women's limited aspirations for a better life. For example, French traveler, Edouard Taitbout de Marigny, argued that enslavement by a Turkish slaver was every Circassian woman's ambition:

To be sold is often the sole wish of a pretty girl, because she is then certain of filling a place in a Turkish harem, which they prefer to their Circassian mode of life. It is no rare occurrence to see some of them return to their county after having obtained their liberty. The accounts which they bring back of the joys of these voluptuous prisons and the sight of the presents with which they return, suffice to determine the fate of many who request to be sold.³⁸

Another French traveler, Arthur de Fonvielle, suggested that Circassian women sold into slavery eagerly accepted their destiny. He presented the enslavement of women as a preferable alternative to the precarious freedom in their native land: "...in Turkey, Circassian

³⁸ Edouard Taitbout de Marigny, *Three Voyages in the Black Sea to the Coast of Circassia* (London, 1837), 49-50.

maidens can easily get into the harem of a Pasha or, even of the Sultan himself. This happens very often, especially to the beautiful ones; the possibility of such improvement of life entertains the poor slaves, and they are not sorry to leave their native land.”³⁹ British adventurer, James Stanislaus Bell, who travelled in the Caucasus in the early nineteenth-century, claimed that in the course of a conversation with two young Circassian women of noble background, the women admitted that they too hoped to find happiness in harem slavery: “these young ladies eagerly desire to go to Istanbul to push their fortune—what we call being sold for slaves...”⁴⁰ In another of Bell’s encounters, he also described an enslaved Russian man (presumably a soldier) who, according to the author, was quite content with his enslavement and “spoke highly of the Circassians, and of this ‘family’ in particular (i.e. the family which enslaved him), stating that he would be quite happy if only he had money to get a wife.”⁴¹ Given the undeniably apocryphal nature of such accounts, which catered to the sensuous literary tastes of European readers, I regarded these sources with skepticism and avoided giving credence to uncritical and romanticized depictions of enslavement.

From the early stages of this dissertation project, I followed the methodological models of historical inquiry best exemplified by the scholarship of historians like E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and others. My goal was to write a “history from below,” investigating unfree labor in the nineteenth-century Caucasus from the perspectives of enslaved and socially

³⁹ Arthur de Fonvielle, *Posledniĭ God Voĭny Cherkessii Za Nezavisimost', 1863-1864 G.: Iz Zapisk Uchastnika-Inostrantsa*, *Materialy Dliã Istorii Cherkesskogo Naroda (Severo-Kavkazskii filial traditsionnoi kul'tury M.TS.T.K. "Vozrozhdenie"*, 1990), 28.

⁴⁰ James Stanislaus Bell, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia During the Years 1837, 1838, and 1839*, 2 vols. (London,: E. Moxon, 1840), 28-29.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

dependent people. To accomplish this goal while narrating the history of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus, I attempted to challenge the conventional epistemology of slavery in the region by decentering the dominant voices of state institutions when working with archival materials. In addition, I practiced “reading against the grain” of the primary sources in order to locate what historian Marisa J. Fuentes describes as “...the fleeting glimpses of enslaved subjects in the archives...,” and prioritize, whenever possible, individual experiences of captivity, enslavement, and the slave trade in the region.⁴² Having completed this dissertation manuscript, I must admit that the goal of writing a history of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus from below, sadly, remains unmet due to several factors.

The formerly enslaved people left no written record of their experiences of enslavement or emancipation. Nearly universal illiteracy among the common folk in the Caucasus was the norm until the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the majority of ethnic groups in the North Caucasus, where institutions of slavery were particularly widespread, lacked literary languages until the early twentieth century, when Russian and later Soviet governments attempted to adopt indigenous languages to Cyrillic, Latin, and Arabic alphabets with varying degree of success. The absence of literary languages in places like Dagestan, Chechnya, or Circassia left little opportunities for the enslaved people to create a written record of their life. Most documents that circulated in the Caucasus had been written in the regional *lingua-francas*, such as Russian, Persian, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Armenian or Georgian. While some people could converse in one or several of these languages, only a select few learned individuals could use these languages for writing.

⁴² Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1.

Also, the literary genre of “slave narratives,” which became an important tool for raising public awareness and precipitating the abolition of slavery in the United States, had never emerged in the Russian Empire. In the absence of any abolitionist organizations in imperial Russia, there was no concerted civil or government-led effort to sponsor initiatives that could encourage individuals who experienced enslavement to document their experiences. In essence, slavery in the Caucasus was taken for granted. The state and civil society considered slavery in the region as an inherent, albeit abhorrent, indigenous practice that reflected the backwardness of the native communities and justified Russian military intervention and colonization. The few exceptions to this rule are several published memoirs of Russian subjects who experienced captivity and/or enslavement in the Caucasus.⁴³ Of course, these memoirs are a valuable source of information in their own right. However, these sources had been created from the perspective of colonizers-cum-victims. As a result, these narratives of captivity tend to postulate the civilizational superiority of the Russian imperial project, and by extension, to vindicate the necessity to colonize the bountiful but untamed environment and people of the Caucasus mountains for the sake of progress. Many of these memoirs glorified the spirit of Russian spiritual and corporeal endurance, which was juxtaposed with the typical cruelty and insatiable avarice of the native population. As such, these narratives of captivity fail to consider the experiences of enslaved non-Russian people and cannot serve as representative samples of the practices of enslavement and slave labor in the Caucasus.

⁴³ The recently published series containing memoirs of Russian subjects who experiences captivity and/or enslavement in the Caucasus in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is an important contribution to the historiography on slavery and captivity in the region. The two volumes were published in Russian in 2013 in Kabardino-Balkaria. See, *Kavkaz. V plenu u gortsev*, vol. 1-2 (Nal’chik: Kotliarov Publishers, 2013).

Finally, the hundreds of written supplications that had been submitted on behalf of dependent and enslaved people to the imperial government, which were subsequently preserved in the state archives, were almost always written by someone other than the supplicants themselves. Given the ubiquitous illiteracy in the Caucasus, petitions were written by people who enjoyed the rare benefit of education. Often, the authors of such petitions were clergymen or individuals employed by or affiliated with the state. The filtered nature of such petitions poses the critical question as to what degree these documents accurately conveyed the grievances and demands of the socially marginalized communities and individuals. Equally as important are considerations of geography and mobility that inevitably imposed an additional set of restrictions on the people's ability to seek help in writing a supplication to state authorities.

For these and other reasons, my ambition to write a history of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus from below achieved only a limited success. My analysis of emancipation reforms and the experiences of enslavement in the region were inescapably informed by state-generated data and archival records. In reconstructing and interpreting the legal conventions and cultural norms that shaped the institutional practices of slavery on the eve of abolition, I relied heavily on surveys conducted by surveying teams of Russian officials. The surveying teams were charged with the task of collecting data on the social composition of native communities. These comprehensive surveys were compiled and cross-referenced using testimonies from indigenous deputies representing the interests of the dependent estates and the slave owners. The Russians were eager to learn both the total number of the enslaved people in the region as well as to understand what the status of enslavement entailed in legal, social, and economic terms. The same surveys were then used to draft specific abolitionist

policies. Of course, the records generated by the imperial bureaucracy were prone to mistakes. Hence, in studying these surveys, I remained cognizant of the colonial prejudices and political objectives that accompanied the creation and preservation of these records in the state archives. In short, I am painfully aware of the limitations that the state-centered sources have imposed on this dissertation.

Significance and Historiography

Historian of religion and slavery William Gervase Clarence-Smith aptly noted that “slavery is a topic that all too often encourages silence...”⁴⁴ This is a particularly compelling statement when one takes stock of the modern historiography of the Caucasus. Slavery and the vast slave-trading networks in the Caucasus have had verifiable existences since the emergence of the first written records.⁴⁵ One of the earliest European accounts of slavery and slave trade in the region appeared in the early fifteenth century on the pages of a travelling journal composed by a Dominican monk, Johannes de Galonifontibus, who became the Archbishop of an Iranian province Sultanieh in 1398.⁴⁶ Completed in 1404, Galonifontibus’s journal contained a series of short essays in which he described his encounters with the communities that lived in the Caucasus. In addition, to the observations of the communities’ daily life and rituals, the Italian traveler’s journal also described the instances of raids and incursions among the warring tribes in the region. The author claimed that along with the

⁴⁴ William Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

⁴⁵ Bruce Grant, *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 22.

⁴⁶ W. B. Fisher, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols., vol. 6 (Cambridge, University Press, 1968), 375.

capture of cattle and valuable property, these raids also resulted in abduction and enslavement of children and men: “One village openly attacks another [village], capturing children and men... then, they immediately sell the captured to slavers on the shore of the [Black] sea”.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Galonifontibus’s account lacks crucial details that could help a historian to discern the background and origins of the slave traders or the possible destinations of the enslaved. Still, the author’s reference to raids and capture of people is significant because it confirms the claims of many historians about the importance of the Caucasus as a major supplier of slaves on the transnational slave market. Further, Galonifontibus’s account portrays the raids as not merely manifestation of rapacity and aimless violence, but as purposeful economic strategy that sustained the transnational slave market.

Another travel account of Genovese historian and traveler, Giorgio Interiano, titled *The Life at the Site of the Zychi Who are Named Circassians: the Notable History*, also vividly described the practice of raids with the aim of capturing people for the specific purpose of enslavement, ransom, and barter:

Their country is for the greatest part swampy... By these secret ways, they clandestinely proceed to attack the poor peasants, whom they carry off with their cattle and children from one country to another, and sell or barter them away... The greatest part of the slaves sold by them are carried to Cairo in Egypt; there fortune elevates them from the lowest rank to the highest honors and dignities, as to the rank of Sultan, Admiral, etc.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Johannes de Galonifontibus, *The Caucasus People and their Neighbors in 1404* (Baku: Elm, 1980), 17.

⁴⁸ Giorgio Interiano and Aldo Manuzio, *La Vita Et Sito De Zychi Chiamati Ciarcassi : Historia Notabile* (Venetiis: Apud Aldum, 1502), 5.

Until the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 1783, Kaffa, the Crimea's chief port city and a flourishing hub of international commerce, had been Europe's biggest slave market that unfailingly supplied the Ottoman domains with slaves from the Mediterranean and Slavic regions of the European continent. The Russian expansion into the Crimea had undermined the established routes of slave commerce and, simultaneously, inaugurated the Caucasus as the new pivotal slave-trading market for the Ottoman Empire and the Qajar Iran in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The scale of the slave trade and significance of slavery as a social institution in the Caucasus was anything but marginal. It is estimated that from 1800 to 1909, the Ottomans imported some 200,000 slaves from the Caucasus, mainly Circassians, "with another 100,000 arriving with their Circassian masters in the 1850s and 1860s."⁴⁹ What could explain a high demand for slaves from the Caucasus in the Ottoman Empire and Iran? The high demand persisted through most of the nineteenth-century despite of the fact that many of the slaves, for example Circassians, were Muslim and, therefore, their purchase and enslavement would have contradicted the Islamic law, which explicitly prohibits enslavement of free-born Muslims.⁵⁰ Obviously, such theological doctrines could put a serious obstacle for the slave trade for the Ottoman merchants and had to be reconciled. Since the Shari'a strictly prohibited the enslavement of free-born Muslims, "it was much to their advantage to tacitly imply that all (or, at least, the predominant majority) of the Caucasian slaves had been born in slavery and were sold by their lawful masters".⁵¹

⁴⁹ Witzernath, *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History, 1200-1860*, 9.

⁵⁰ Mona Siddiqui, *The Good Muslim : Reflections on Classical Islamic Law and Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38.

⁵¹ Liubov Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan, *The Tsar's Abolitionists: The Slave Trade in the Caucasus and Its Suppression* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 27.

Albeit bogus, these arguments resolved the theological conundrum. Another explanation for the tenacity of the slave trade in the Caucasus is the geographic proximity of the region to the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Since the region shared a porous border with the Ottoman Empire, its merchants and slave traders were able to travel and arrange purchase and transportation of slaves. Also, the proximity of the Black Sea ports allowed the Ottoman traders to purchase and transport slaves in significant numbers from the coastal cities of the Southwestern Caucasus. Another explanation are the political and social developments in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Namely, it is important to remember that “after the independence of Greece and with the growing anti-Ottoman sentiment in the other Balkan provinces, the source base of the elite white slaves was quickly narrowing down to the Caucasus, which was becoming the only remaining supply base of the slave markets of Istanbul, Cairo, and other big Ottoman cities.” Further, it is important to take into the account the Ottoman elites’ preference for and fascination with slaves with fair skin, especially women. Unlike the vast majority of the Ottoman slaves who came from Africa and were black, the *harem* slaves were predominantly white and came from the European provinces of the empire and the Caucasus region. After the Ottoman *devshirme* system had been abolished, the procurement of the elite slaves became entirely a slave-trading business. The diminished participation of the state agents in the slave commerce reduced the supply side of the trade. This meant that the demand for the white *harem* slaves in the nineteenth-century was becoming greater.⁵² Finally, another historian of Ottoman slavery, Ehud Toledano, contends that many of “these girls [from the Caucasus] would be integrated into the Ottoman society in

⁵² Ibid.

various roles according to their looks and talents and as circumstance (or luck) determined”.⁵³ In short, in the early nineteenth-century the Caucasus became the only place in the world that could meet the peculiar and persistent demand of the Ottoman slave market for maidens with fair skin, which, in turn, ensured consistent supply of enslaved men and especially women from the mountainous region.

To be certain, the subject of slavery is not completely absent from the current historiography of the region. Scholars and students interested in the history of the Caucasus can discover succinct references and short accounts of slavery in the Caucasus in books and academic articles that address a variety of specific and general themes in the region’s history. While it would be impractical to review every book that in some fashion touches on the topic of slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus, some recent scholarly publications merit attention. In 2019, historian Hannah Barker published an important monograph, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260-1500*, which explores the slave-trading networks that linked the Black Sea basin with the Mediterranean in the early modern period.⁵⁴ Barker’s monograph explores the slave trading system that linked the trading colonies of Genoa, Venice, and the Mamluk Sultanate and argues for understanding the institution of slavery in the Black Sea basin as a “common culture.”⁵⁵ Underlying the commonalities between the practices of enslavement and that slave trade that transcended religious identities and political affinities of the Black Sea purveyors of enslaved

⁵³ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, 32.

⁵⁴ See Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

people, Barker's book is yet another reminder that at no point in history slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus was isolated from transnational networks of trade and cultural exchange. However, Barker's exploration of the institution of slavery and the slave trade in the Black Sea end in the early sixteenth century, when the question of universal abolition was simply inconceivable. Furthermore, Bruce Grant's book *The Captive and the Gift* offers an anthropological perspective on the modality of sovereignty in the context of Russian imperial incursion into the Caucasus. Grant briefly explores the phenomenon of slavery in the Caucasus in his analysis of the tropes of captivity, imperial discourse, and Russian claims to the gift of civilization bestowed upon the region's indigenous communities.⁵⁶ The author's work is a great example of intellectual counterweight for the arguments in this dissertation. Although Grant stops short of proclaiming the Russians abolitionists, his examination of imperial rhetoric invites his readers to consider this image as credible even if contrived by the Russian statesmen themselves. Charles King's book *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, gives a captivating account of the region's complicated history and features a concise section that examines the problem of captivity and slavery in the nineteenth-century Caucasus.⁵⁷ The author provides a succinct assessment of the institution of slavery that highlights the analytical complexity of this topic, and scrutinizes Russia's dubious role in the efforts to abolish the slave trade in the region. The author concludes that although the Russian Empire came to see its mission in the restive periphery as "both strategic and fundamentally humanitarian," the tsarist government's efforts to abolish slavery and the slave trade were

⁵⁶ Bruce Grant, *The Captive and the Gift*, 17, 22-25.

⁵⁷ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 53-63.

“somewhat disingenuous” with some Russian officials willfully ignoring the issue and even profiting from the slave trade itself.⁵⁸ Albeit brief, King’s arguments lend credence to my assertion, which denies the tsarist government uncontested abolitionist credentials. Further, one of the best-edited volumes on the history of the North Caucasus in the Russian Empire was written by Russian scholars and also grapples with the history of slavery in the Caucasus, albeit in general terms.⁵⁹ In a chapter devoted to the history of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus, the opening paragraphs echo the arguments of other historians by positing that the history of emancipation reforms in the region has been studied only “superficially,” and that most of the archival materials able to shed a clear light on the era of Russian abolitionism “have not yet been introduced into academic circulation.”⁶⁰ The authors’ conclusion underscores the importance of this dissertation, which seeks to offer a comprehensive view of the abolitionist campaign in the Caucasus based primarily on archival documents.

The narrative of Russian abolitionism has been a thinly researched but widely accepted thesis in Russian imperial historiography, which until recently had acquired the status of conventional wisdom. The publication of Liubov Kurtynova-D’Herlugnan’s book *The Tsar’s Abolitionists: The Slave Trade in the Caucasus and Its Suppression* in 2010 became the most recent academic voice that further advanced the thesis of Russian abolitionism in the Caucasus.⁶¹ In her book, Kurtynova-D’Herlugnan argues that “the abolitionist campaign in

⁵⁸ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 62-63.

⁵⁹ Vladimir Bobrovnikov and Irina Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz v Sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2007), 211-228.

⁶⁰ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz v Sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 211-212.

⁶¹ Liubov Kurtynova-D’Herlugnan, *The Tsar’s Abolitionists: The Slave Trade in the Caucasus and Its Suppression* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010).

the Caucasus was one of the crucial features of the Russian Empire-building process, which had its roots in the Russian national psyche, its historical mythology, and in the self-perception of the Russian ruling elites.”⁶² The author insists that the tsarist government pursued abolition with “extraordinary commitment and vigor.”⁶³ Kurtynova-D’Herlugnan explains that Russia’s alleged devotion to the abolitionist cause stemmed from the aspirations of Russian ruling elites to portray the nation as an enlightened European power capable of delivering its own civilizing mission to the “backward” societies of the empire’s peripheries. Thus, the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus served as a litmus test that could reaffirm Russian claims to the status of a “Great European Power.” Further, the author cites the deeply embedded psychological trauma of the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion of the Kievan Rus’.⁶⁴ The invasion led to enslavement of thousands of Russian women, men, and children. The memories of the invasion, according to the author, created a natural impulse to propel the abolitionist agenda. The monograph leaves its readers with the underlying conclusion that the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the nineteenth-century Caucasus was not merely a conscious and clearly articulated policy that accompanied imperial expansion, but also an “ideological banner” of the Russian imperial project in the Caucasus, according to Kurtynova-D’Herlugnan.⁶⁵

⁶² Kurtynova-D’Herlugnan, xxvii

⁶³ *Ibid.*, xxvii, 171.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

The author's optimistic, albeit erroneous, analysis of Russian colonial rule in the Caucasus with regard to the questions of slavery and abolition stems from Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan's limited archival work. Indeed, the author admits to her overreliance on published primary and secondary sources. Studying published sources, according to the author, rendered "visits to the central Russian archives practically useless."⁶⁶ The author also worked in the archives of Moscow and Krasnodar, but "only to confirm [her] suspicion that everything important had already been published."⁶⁷ I believe that had Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan had the opportunity to explore the troves of unpublished primary sources in the archives of Tbilisi alone, her monograph's conclusions would have been vastly different.⁶⁸

Finally, Liubov Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan argues that *The Tsar's Abolitionists* is uniquely original because "no scholarly work exists on the subject even in Russian."⁶⁹ This assertion is false. The topic of the Peasant Reform in the Caucasus was documented and later analyzed by historians in imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. Indeed, the historiography on the topic of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus can be divided into three distinct stages of conceptual evolution. The early foundation of the historiography of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus was laid in the decades following the emancipation reforms in the region. This imperial phase of the historiography includes publications that were created

⁶⁶ Ibid., xxviii.

⁶⁷ Ibid., xxix.

⁶⁸ Although I reject the central argument of Kurtynova-D'Herlugnan's monograph, my critique cannot deny obvious academic value of the author's book. Despite its flaws, *The Tsar's Abolitionists* certainly made an important contribution to understanding the history of slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus.

⁶⁹ Ibid., xxvi.

between 1865 and 1917 on the topic of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus. Furthermore, this imperial phase can be divided into two branches: conservative and liberal. The adherents of the conservative camp tended to celebrate the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus and attributed the ostensible success of the so-called Peasant Reform to the progressive policies of the Romanov dynasty and the civilizational superiority of Russian society. These authors, which included high-ranking officers and civil servants, ascribed everything good that happened in the Caucasus to the decisiveness and benevolence of Russian autocracy. Their historical reflections were frequently published in government-sponsored provincial newspapers, scholarly journals, and monographs. The conservative camp is best represented by such authors as Ivan Cherniavskii,⁷⁰ Fedor Smirnov,⁷¹ E. Startsev,⁷² and others.

The liberal branch of the imperial historiography also acknowledged abolition as a pivotal moment in the history of the Caucasus and its people. However, the authors had political views that seemingly aligned with such values as individual freedom and social equity, and were willing to highlight the shortcomings of the government's abolitionist reforms. Such criticism was generally mild, and they never condemned autocracy as an institution. Rather, the adherents of the liberal interpretation of the Peasant Reform in the Caucasus identified areas where abolition required government intervention and did not achieve its full potential. Many

⁷⁰ Ivan Cherniavskii served as the head of the military-historical department at the Headquarters of the Caucasus Military District, see Cherniavskii's historical essay *Kavkaz v techenii 25-letnego tsarstvovaniia gosudaria imperatora Aleksandra II, 1855-1880* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1898).

⁷¹ See Smirnov's work *Kratkaia Istoriia Kavkaza* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1901).

⁷² Startsev's article about abolition of slavery in Kabarda was published in the government-sponsored journal dedicated to history and ethnography of the Caucasus, see *Sbornik svedeniĭ o kavkazskikh gortsakh* (hereafter, SSKG), vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868).

of the authors espousing liberal perspectives held government posts and enjoyed firsthand knowledge of the various outcomes of abolition in different regions of the Caucasus mountains. The liberal strand of the imperial historiography is best represented by publications of such authors as Krasnitskiĭ,⁷³ Nikolaĭ Grabovskiĭ,⁷⁴ Nikolaĭ Tul'chinskiĭ,⁷⁵ and many others.

The second, Soviet phase of the historiography of slavery and abolition in the Caucasus began with the Bolshevik coup of 1917, which precipitated the collapse of the Russian Empire and ushered in (or rather imposed) new methodological approaches for the study and interpretation of the history of the Caucasus region. This phase spanned from 1917 through the late 1980s, and was dominated by Marxist methodological approaches, which were strictly monitored and enforced by the state. Soviet historians were expected to fully embrace Marx and Engels's theory of historical materialism as the correct and only way of explaining history. Hence, routinely citing the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and until 1956, Stalin to explain

⁷³ Krasnitskiĭ served as chair of the government-appointed commission that investigated land-tenure rights and the rights of different social estates among native Ossetian population on the eve of the abolition in the region. He published an account of his work in the government newspaper *Kavkaz* in 1865. See, Krasnitskiĭ, "Koe-cto ob osetinskom okruge i pravakh tuzemtsev ego," *Kavkaz* (Tiflis), Apr. 25, 1865.

⁷⁴ Nikolaĭ Grabovskiĭ served in the Main Headquarters of the Caucasus Viceroy in Tiflis and as the chief deputy of the Head of Kabarda district. For details see, Grabovskiĭ, "Ėkonomicheskoe polozhenie byvshikh zavisimykh soslovii Kabardinskogo okruga," in *SSKG* vol. 3, (Tiflis, 1870), 1-27.

⁷⁵ Nikolaĭ Tul'chinskiĭ also was a civil servant in the imperial government in the Caucasus. Tul'chinskiĭ's scholarly work earned him a reputation of respected ethnographer of the northwestern Caucasus. See, Nikolaĭ Tul'chinskiĭ, "Kabarda," *Kazbek* (Tiflis), May 18, 1899, and "K soslovnomy voprosu tuzemtsev Severnogo Kavkaza," *Terskie Vedomosti* (Vladikavkaz), Mar. 25, 1901.

the trajectory of historical developments in the Caucasus became a mandatory ritual for all Soviet historians hoping for their research to see the light of day.

Soviet historiography uniformly condemned tsarist colonial policies but also recognized the progressive nature of the socio-economic reforms of the Russian imperial government. Specifically, the emancipation of the dependent estates and land reform in the Caucasus in the 1860s was generally acknowledged as “half-done,” unjust, and primarily benefitting the empire’s elites. Nevertheless, historians argued that despite their many flaws, these reforms accelerated the disintegration of feudal forms of the social, economic, and political organization of indigenous societies in the Caucasus, and thrust native communities into capitalist modes of material production. The drastic changes manifested themselves through the proliferation of private property, industrialization, and the growth of the proletariat as a distinct social class. In short, the *bourgeois* nature of the tsarist reforms planted the seeds of capitalism in the Caucasus, and as capitalist modalities of economic production and social organization took root, they gradually heightened the class consciousness of the people. The communist revolution was the natural outcome of this class conflict, which paved the way for the next stage of history.

Soviet historiography also managed to reconcile the awkward question of Russian domination in the Caucasus by insisting on the progressive role of the Russian people in the civilizational advancement of the native societies following the 1917 Bolshevik coup. It is important to note that the historians’ assessment of Russia’s role in the lives of the indigenous societies of the Caucasus region underwent several changes. These changes were largely in response to several political cataclysms that occurred in the Soviet Union. Namely, in the years following the Bolshevik coup, the historians adhered to Lenin’s thesis of the “Great

Russian chauvinism” (*velikorusskiĭ shovenizm*). This thesis denounced the political and cultural domination of ethnic Russians at all levels of society, especially in the regions where ethnic Russians constituted a national minority. The same historians used Lenin’s famous phrase to describe the Russian Empire as the “prison of the people” (*tiur’ma narodov*). The narrative of the Great Russian chauvinism coincided with the government’s policy of *korenizatsiia*,⁷⁶ which systematically promoted members of the titular nations into positions of political power, discouraged the use of the Russian language in the Union republics, and provided substantial institutional support for native languages, literature, and education. However, in 1937 Stalin declared the national question of the Soviet Union resolved. The policy was formally suspended, but many aspects of *korenizatsiia* remained, albeit in modified form.⁷⁷

and some cases even reversed. Henceforth, Russian culture and language acquired the status of being first among equals, or just first. The palpable shift in political rhetoric served as a signal for scholars to reevaluate their assessment of the ways in which the shadow of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus fit into the narrative of modern Soviet history. The result of this assessment became the celebration of unity between the Caucasus as well as the

⁷⁶ Nativization.

⁷⁷ To learn more about the history of *korenizatsiia* in the Soviet Union, the reader will benefit from looking up Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Harvard University Press, 2002); Lowell Tillelt, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Ronald Suny, *The Revenge of the Past Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993).

recognition of Russian people as the region's elder and wiser brothers. This view of the Caucasus history reflected the government's "Friendship of the People" doctrine, one that promoted unity, fraternity, and shared socialist aspirations among all people of the Soviet Union. This phase of Soviet historiography, that spanned between 1937 to the late 1980's, presented the purportedly voluntary entry of the Caucasus region into the Soviet Union as a turning point in the history of the region. This moment restored justice and paved the way toward a brighter collective future. In essence, the people of the Caucasus were no longer subordinate to the Russian nation but ostensibly became equal partners in building a utopian communist society. This new historiographical narrative made its way into many monographs and edited volumes dedicated to the various dimensions of history of the Caucasus and its people. For instance, a Soviet historian of Abkhazia, Georgii Dzidzariia, commemorated the one-hundred-and-fifty-year anniversary of Abkhazia's joining Russia with the argument that, given the geopolitical circumstances of the early nineteenth century, joining Russia "was the only right decision, which spared the Abkhaz people from ethnic divisions, feudal discord... and at last averted the threat of enslavement by the sultanic Turkey."⁷⁸ A similar sentiment was expressed by a Soviet historian of Dagestani origins, Khidir Ramazanov, who analyzed the origins of Dagestan's industrial sector by arguing that "it is difficult to underestimate the positive significance of Dagestan's joining Russia, the event that contributed to the objectively

⁷⁸ Georgii Dzidzariia, *Prisoedinenie Abkhazii k Rossii i ego istoricheskoe znachenie* (Sukhumi, 1960), 3.

favorable conditions for acceleration of Dagestan's economy by means of borrowing the know-how of industrial production from much more developed Russia."⁷⁹

Lastly, Soviet historians blamed the proliferation of slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus region on the Ottoman Empire's constant demand for enslaved people. For instance, Soviet historian of the Caucasus, Anatoliĭ Fadeev, linked the arrival of the Turkish merchants and soldiers on the eastern shores of the Black Sea in the late fifteen century to the sharp intensification of the slave trade in the Caucasus, which witnessed "exportation of nearly 12,000 slaves into Turkey every year."⁸⁰ Soviet historian of Kabarda, Georgiĭ Kokiev, blamed the "sultanate Turkey" and its vassal—Crimean Khanate—for depleting Kabarda's population from as early as the eighteenth century as a result of slavery.⁸¹ Finally, another Soviet historian, Dzidzariia, similarly condemned Ottoman rule in the Caucasus, and in Abkhazia in particular, for causing the "extraordinary scale of the slave trade," which sent thousands of "glowing with health and strength Abkhaz people to the Turkish slave markets or to the languishing death in enslavement of the mountaineers in the North Caucasus."⁸² Indeed, many Soviet historians of the Caucasus had an unfailing proclivity to analyze the Ottoman history

⁷⁹ Khidir Ramazanov, "Razvitie promyshlennosti v Dagestane vo vtoroi Polovine XIX veka," in *Proniknovenie i Razvitie Kapitalisticheskikh Otnosheniĭ v Dagestane*, ed. Vladilen Gadzhiev (Makhachkala, 1984), 53.

⁸⁰ Anatoliĭ Fadeev, *Chto dolzhen znat' kazhdyĭ ob istorii Abkhazii: Obzor Obshchestvenno-Istoricheskogo Muzeia* (Sukhum, 1933), 17.

⁸¹ Georgiĭ Kokiev, "Kabarda pod gnĕtom Sultanskoĭ Turtsii i eĕ vassala – Krymskogo Khanstva," in *Istoriia Kabardino-Balkarii v Trudakh G.A. Kokieva* (sbornik stateĭ i dokumentov), originally published in *Sotsialisticheskaia Kabardino-Balkariia*, Nov. 27, 1940.

⁸² Dzidzariia, *Narodnoe Khoziaĭstvo i Sotsial'nye Otnosheniia v Abkhazii v XIX veke* (Sukhumi, 1958), 350.

from an extreme, one-dimensional perspective. Citing the works of Marx and Engels, these historians unapologetically described the Ottoman Empire as being “at the lowest and most barbaric stage of feudalism.”⁸³ According to their interpretation of history, the Ottomans had been a constant source of political intrigue and instability in the Caucasus. This destabilizing influence encouraged religious fanaticism, fostered social stagnation, and instigated endless intercommunal violence. The anti-Ottoman antagonism of the Caucasus region’s Soviet historiography was meant to convince the public that the conquest and colonization of the Caucasus by imperial Russia was, after all, a force for good because they precipitated the abolition of slavery and delivered the emancipation of the enslaved and socially dependent communities.

Summary of the Chapters

This dissertation follows the chronology of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus starting from the annexation of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801, and traces policies of the imperial government aimed at managing the indigenous institutions of slavery, dependency, and serfdom. The noun ‘management’ is a key word, which I use not as a term of derision, but as a descriptor of the broad range of governmental efforts devised to regulate disparate institutions of dependency and slavery across the Caucasus region. Each chapter of this dissertation provides evidence that at every stage of the Russian conquest and colonization of the Caucasus, the tsarist government was reluctant to abolish slavery because of the ways in which such far-reaching reforms risked alienating the indigenous ruling elites, whose constantly wavering political affinities could deny Russia’s imperial pretensions in such a

⁸³ Dzidzariia, *Vosstanie 1866 goda v Abkhazii* (Sukhumi, 1955), 4.

geopolitically strategic region. Therefore, rather than trying to eradicate slavery in the Caucasus, the government pursued policies of toleration and mitigation. By trying to lighten the suffering of enslaved and dependent people, the government could claim a moral victory in its quest to deliver the gift of civilization to “wild mountaineers.”

Chapter 1 analyzes how the empire addressed the status of various subaltern communities in the Caucasus by focusing on the policies that regulated the bodily autonomy of enslaved, enserfed, and dependent people. I argue that, from the early stages of the Russian conquest and colonization of the Caucasus, the imperial government had no real intentions of abolishing the existing systems of dependency. The toleration of such dependency and the protection of slaveowner property rights became *conditio sine qua non*—an indispensable strategy for expanding imperial hegemony in the region. To illustrate this argument, I focus my analysis on how the tsarist authorities regulated the institution of serfdom in Kartli-Kakheti (eastern Georgia) after the annexation of the kingdom in 1801. The terms of the annexation guaranteed Georgian elites and landowners the protection of their custom-based rights and privileges, including the right to own serfs. Since serfdom in Georgia was a particularly harsh institution that mirrored slavery in all but name, the Russian administration recognized the need to make serfdom in eastern Georgia more humane. To that end, the government established a special committee to revise the King Vakhtang Digest, an autochthonous body of laws compiled by King Vakhtang VI in the early eighteenth century. The purpose of the revisions was to eliminate the most archaic articles related to serfdom while preserving the integrity of local customs that regulated the Georgian nobility’s right to control the bodily autonomy of their serfs. In short, the Russian reforms of the King Vakhtang Digest never sought to dismantle the institution of serfdom. Rather, the revisions were meant to solidify serfdom in Georgia on

a more modern and slightly more humane footing. Further, Chapter 1 also explores similar legislative strategy of preserving the indigenous institutions of servitude and enslavement in the khanates and regions of the South and North Caucasus between 1801 and 1861.

Chapter 2 examines the imperial government's reform efforts to abolish serfdom in the South Caucasus, a process that had formally commenced in 1864 with the abolition of serfdom in Georgia and that continued to unfold until 1912. In this chapter, I argue that the emancipation of enserfed peasants in the South Caucasus must be understood not as an act of long-standing (albeit delayed) abolitionist policies in the Caucasus, but rather as a reform that was made possible only with the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto, which abolished serfdom in the heartland of the empire. Moreover, the abolition of serfdom in Georgia was precipitated by growing peasant unrest, which demanded immediate freedom from the authority of Georgian landowners and the right to own land. The so-called Peasant Reform in Georgia benefitted the financial interests of landowners and serf-owning nobility by perpetuating the continual dependency of former enserfed people on their former owners using a system of temporary obligations. This system ultimately came to an end in 1912, following the government's legislative intervention.

Chapter 3 shifts attention to the North Caucasus by focusing on the abolition of slavery and dependency in Dagestanskaia oblast'—present day Dagestan. In this chapter I contend that the imperial government was well-aware of the existence of slavery in Dagestan well before its abolition in the 1860s. However, following the principle of *conditio sine qua non*, the government chose to tolerate indigenous forms of slave labor to secure the political loyalty of the ruling elites in the region. Abolition in Dagestan benefitted slaveholders and failed to deliver freedom to nearly sixty thousand dependent *raiat* peasants, whose subaltern social

status required them to perform a variety of labor obligations for the benefit of their patrons. These obligations continued to afflict the lives of thousands of *raiat* peasants until 1913, when the imperial government issued a special decree definitively abrogating the unfree labor obligations of Dagestani peasants to landlords.

Chapter 4 investigates the abolition of slavery and dependency in Terskaia oblast', a region that comprises the present-day republics of Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria in Russia's North Caucasus. The abolition in Terskaia oblast' was a major step in the government's cautious campaign to abolish all forms of slavery and dependency in the North Caucasus. In this chapter I argue that the terms of emancipation of enslaved and dependent people in the region had been drafted with disproportionate input from slaveholders. The imperial government was complicit in stalling emancipation and was responsible for establishing a system of temporary obligations that delayed freedom for thousands of formerly enslaved men, women, and children.

Chapter 5 explores the abolition in Kubanskaia oblast', another region in Russia's North Caucasus that today includes the republics of Karachay-Cherkessia, Adygea, and Krasnodar Kraï. Following the legislative patterns that had been tested in neighboring Terskaia oblast', the government's insistence on protecting the financial wellbeing of slaveholders and social elites in the region undermined the emancipation, and artificially prolonged the dependency, of formerly enslaved people to their former owners. In addition, the tsarist government had to contend with violent resistance to abolition. The abolition in Kubanskaia oblast' occurred at the heels of the Caucasus War and in the shadows of *muhajirstvo*—a combination of forced displacement and voluntary emigration of indigenous communities in the Northwestern Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire. In this chapter, I also study an important, albeit

geographically contained, instance of violent anti-abolitionist resistance in Circassia, which has received little attention in the region's historiography. Known as the Khodz' Insurrection of 1868, this organized uprising against the government's plans to emancipate enslaved people presented a major challenge to the state and its mission to usher in a peasant reform in the North-Western Caucasus. Although the insurrection failed to spread outside of Circassia and was ultimately quelled by overwhelming military force, it served as a menacing reminder that the issue of slavery was a powerful enough cause to galvanize and unite the despondent by the specter of abolition population.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines the imperial government's attempt to abolish slavery in Sukhumskii otdel, an administrative unit of the Russian Caucasus Viceroyalty that today incorporates present-day Abkhazia. There, the government's efforts to survey the region and prepare requisite legislative ground for the abolition of the institution of slavery in 1866 provoked the biggest anti-abolitionist rebellion in the Caucasus. The uprising, which became known as the Lykhny Rebellion, forced the imperial government to suspend its plans to implement the peasant reform in the region. The rebellion necessitated the deployment of Russian army units from across the Caucasus region and witnessed a months-long confrontation between the Russian military and the rebels. It was not until 1870, when the tsarist administration embarked on a campaign to permanently dismantle slavery in Sukhumskii otdel, that the rebellion was quelled. However, the memory of the Lykhny Rebellion was never far from the minds of Russian policymakers charged with developing a plan to facilitate the emancipation of enslaved and dependent people in the region. Thus, the government invested a lot of time and effort in trying to devise an emancipation scheme that would generously compensate the Abkhaz slaveholders for their loss of property. The result

of this policy and of its abolitionist compromises was the institutionalization of unfree labor in Abkhazia (albeit on a temporary basis) as well as the impoverishment of formerly enslaved and dependent people.

The Epilogue of this dissertation takes stock of Russian abolitionist endeavors in the Caucasus and reflects on the dubious outcomes of the peasant reform in the region. The story of the Turkish slaver ship transporting enslaved people from the Caucasus to Istanbul—which opens this dissertation—is illustrative of the series of confusing but historically instructive encounters between the Russian imperial edifice and the institutions of slavery and the slave trade that proliferated in the Caucasus. Acknowledging the historic nature of the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus, I argue that the history of Russian abolitionism must be embedded within the historiography of the global abolitionist movement. However, the Russian anti-slavery politics in the nineteenth-century Caucasus must be analyzed critically, eschewing glorifying narratives that equate Russian imperialism with the liberation of enslaved indigenous communities; thus, this dissertation brings much-needed nuance to this history. Russian abolitionism in the Caucasus was reluctant, and it drew its legislative momentum not from a clearly articulated commitment to human freedom, but from much more prosaic events that occurred far outside of the Caucasus Mountains.

CHAPTER 1

The Empire and The Subaltern Body:

Myths and Realities of the Russian Abolitionism in the Caucasus (1801-1861)



Figure 2. Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus 1801-1829. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 16.

Introduction

After many months of arduous travels, titular councilor Gadzhi Mirza Mamed Agalarov and two ensigns, Gadzhi Kazbek Vizirov and Gadzhi Ismail Agha Mamed Agha Ogly,¹ could finally breathe a deep sigh of relief. The familiar outlines of buildings, meandering streets, open squares, and bazaars that sprawled haphazardly along the Kura River signaled a welcoming end to their months-long journey. Tiflis was within their sight. Although the physical fatigue from their travels was difficult to ignore, the three men felt jubilant. Indeed, there were many reasons to feel joyous. Chief among them was the safe completion of their pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, a momentous occasion for any practicing Muslim, especially in the middle of the nineteenth century when international travel was unpredictable and dangerous.²

The pilgrims' return to the Caucasus in May 1844 would probably have gone unreported had it not been for a group of three African children and a woman who accompanied the three men. This unusual sight was registered when the pilgrims' caravan arrived at the border

¹ It is important to note that according to the official records, the names of the three men begin with Gadzhi, or Гаджи in Russian. This is not a coincidence. The Russian spelling of the name most likely indicates the honorary title of a *hajji*, a prefix added to a name of a person who has successfully completed the hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, which every able Muslim must perform at least once in their lifetime. It is important to remember that a *hajji* enjoyed a considerable degree of social influence in his community. People seeking resolution of a problem, however big or small, would often seek guidance and advice of a *hajji*. Also, the tasks of collection of taxes and safekeeping of private and communal funds would often be entrusted to a man who completed the hajj.

² The topic of the hajj in the Russian Empire inspired brilliant scholarship in the recent past, including these two mutually intelligible monographs: Lâle Can, *Spiritual Subjects: Central Asian Pilgrims and the Ottoman Hajj at the End of Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). Eileen Kane, *Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

quarantine zone near the city of Aleksandropol.³ The presence of the Africans bewildered the Russian authorities, so much so that the interim head of Aleksandropol's district office (*uezdnoe upravlenie*) reported the strange encounter to his superior, Georgia-Imereti's⁴ Civil Governor Vasiliĭ Sotnikov, in Tiflis. The report consistently referred to the three pilgrims as *chinovniki* (civil servants), thus unambiguously identifying them as functionaries of the Russian government. Further, the document explained that the group of African children consisted of three boys. Two of the boys were named Mabuk and the third boy was named Abdullah.⁵ In addition, the children were accompanied by one woman by the name of "Gioli-Saba."⁶ Reportedly, the woman was unrelated to the boys. When the three men were asked to explain how the "Africans" came into their possession, they stated that they had purchased the three enslaved boys and the woman in Egypt after completing the hajj.⁷ The Russian border officials' attempts to interrogate the children and the woman came to naught, as no one in the quarantine zone could speak Arabic fluently.

Although no one was able to communicate with the boys and the woman, the head of the Aleksandropol district suspected that the three boys and the woman had been enslaved. This clearly violated Russian laws as well as the empire's international commitment to disrupt

³ Aleksandropol – present day city of Gyumri, Armenia.

⁴ Georgia-Imereti governorate (*Gruzino-Imeritinskaia guberniia*) was a Russian imperial administrative unit in the Caucasus with the capital in Tiflis. The governorate was established in 1840. However, in 1846 the administrative division of the governorate changed again and the name Georgia-Imereti was dropped.

⁵ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 8602, l. 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the transatlantic slave trade. Specifically, the report cited article 1161, volume ten of the digest of Russian civil laws, which explicitly prohibited “commerce in Africans.”⁸ The report referenced the 1841 Treaty of London (*Londonskii Traktat*), which legally bound the Russian Empire, Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Belgium to “eradicat[ing] the African slave trade.”⁹ Those suspected of participating in or facilitating the slave trade were required to be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Yet, this is not what came to pass in Aleksandropol. The Russian authorities allowed the three pilgrims to continue their journey to Tiflis unobstructed, under the condition that upon their arrival in the capital, the three men would report to the office of the Governor to further explain how the African boys and the woman came into their possession.¹⁰

Why did the border officials permit enslaved Africans to remain in the custody of three Russian pilgrims? The key to understanding this decision is rooted in Russia’s institution of serfdom. What compelled the Russian authorities at the quarantine zone in Aleksandropol to allow the three men to continue their journey to Tiflis in the company of their slaves was the men’s insistence that the African boys and woman were *dvorovye liudi*—a category of enserfed people who lived in the household of their owners and depended entirely on their owners for food, clothing, and shelter. Using this reasoning, the men convinced the border officials that their ownership of the enslaved people was perfectly compatible with the laws of the Russian Empire. In addition, the three pilgrims assured the authorities that the boys

⁸ Ibid., l. 1 ob.

⁹ Ibid, l. 1 ob.

¹⁰ Ibid., l. 2.

would be manumitted and given the status of free persons at the age of twenty-five.¹¹ No promises were made about the future fate of the enslaved African woman.

What ultimately happened to the enslaved Africans after they crossed the border into the domains of the Russian Empire is unknown. It is plausible that the Russian authorities in Tiflis freed the enslaved African boys and woman and helped them return home. It is also easy to imagine that the three men ignored their instructions to report their arrival to the capital and confined the enslaved Africans to the privacy of their homes.

This chapter explores how the Russian empire, embodied through institutions and laws and personified by civil and military leadership, defined the rights and life chances of subaltern estates within the socio-political milieu of the Caucasus region between 1801 and 1861. The ascendance of Russian colonial hegemony in the Caucasus opened a new horizon of possibilities for restructuring the social hierarchy of power in the imperial periphery. As historian of the Caucasus Ronald Suny aptly noted, the Russian empire was “caught between maintaining the privileges and distinctions that kept the traditional elites in power or considering reforms along liberal lines that would have undermined the old ruling classes.”¹² The extent to which the tsarist administration was prepared to tolerate or endorse indigenous institutions of social subordination was at the heart of Russia’s imperial project in the Caucasus. The institution of serfdom had been an integral feature of Russia’s own social order, and it loomed large over the empire’s efforts to govern the Caucasus mountains. More than a tool to economically exploit the peasantry, serfdom in Russia reflected the ruling elites’

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ronald Suny, *Red Flag Unfurled: History, Historians, and the Russian Revolution* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2017), 134.

imagination of the optimal social hierarchy, one that promoted the lowest ranks' order and obedience to the elites. Historically, the Russian monarchy perceived the peasantry as an obedient resource for the realization of the monarchs' geopolitical ambitions, and believed that it owed its labor and life to the authority of tsars and tsarinas. The inveterate paternalism of Russian monarchs reinforced the supercilious perception of Russian peasants as witless and stubborn children who could not make rational choices without the supervision of the state and the nobility. In essence, serfdom had elevated the Russian administration's tolerance for indigenous institutions of unfree labor in the Caucasus. In this chapter, I argue that, starting from the annexation of eastern Georgia in 1801, the imperial government remained firmly committed to sustaining the indigenous institutions of social subordination and unfree labor in the Caucasus. To support this argument, this chapter will examine the legislative evolution of policies that regulated the relationship between those whose agency, body, labor, and property were subordinated in part or in full, and those who claimed ownership over them. A close examination of these policies reveals that, save for the introduction of some curbs and conditions on the right to own enslaved or enserfed people, the tsarist government never considered abolition a viable policy for the restructuring of the social organization of indigenous communities in the Caucasus.

The Empire and Serfdom in Georgia

“Article 159. In accordance with the third rule of the Synod of Gangra¹³ a pernicious man is he who sows discontent between a master and his servant, so that he [servant] becomes

¹³ Synod of Gangra – it is believed that the Synod was held in 340 (some scholars dispute this and put the date of the gathering between 362 to 370). The synod adopted 21 rules, which entered the legal canon of the Christian Orthodox Church. The Synod also anathematized Manichaeism and, among other things, condemned encouraging slaves to escape from their masters.

neglectful in his duties to his master; for Apostle [Paul] in his letter to Timothy¹⁴ said: master must maintain his slaves in decent condition even if they are not Christian, and in his [Paul's] letter to Titus¹⁵, he [Paul] commands slaves to be assiduous for their masters and possess unshakable obedience [loyalty] to them."¹⁶

- *Laws of the King Vakhtang VI - Greek Laws*

When the Russian Empire annexed the eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801, serfdom was a deeply entrenched and widespread institution of social subordination, which demanded immediate government oversight. What distinguished serfdom in Georgia from its Russian analogue was an even greater degree of arbitrary authority that the Georgian serf-owners exercised over enserfed people. Indeed, as historian David Lang aptly noted, serfdom in Georgia “was in many ways indistinguishable from outright slavery.”¹⁷ Many Russian statesmen came to see the institution of serfdom in Georgia in the same terms. For instance, writing a report in 1814 to then the Commander-in-Chief in Georgia, Nikolai Rtishchev, an unnamed Russian official sounded alarm about the ubiquitous chattel-like sale “of young boys and girls in Imereti.”¹⁸ These children were reportedly enserfed and “passed through numerous hands of dishonest landowners” through legally dubious sales, which had been notarized in local government offices.¹⁹ The following excerpt from the report illustrates

¹⁴ 1 Timothy, 6:1-2.

¹⁵ Titus, 2:9-10.

¹⁶ SEA, f. 1, op. 1, d. 502, l. 6.

¹⁷ David Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 50.

¹⁸ NAG, f. 16, op. 1, d. 1597, ll. 1-5. Imereti is a historic region of Georgia situated in the western part of the country.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the author's indignation: "the sale of young boys and girls in Imeretian villages is taking place with the greatest insult to humanity; these young Imeretians, who never belonged to a landowner, are surrendered to them for the most meager of prices and by means of deceitful purchases that take advantage of the parents' penury and squalor."²⁰ Another official report that addressed the state of enserfed peasantry in Georgia in 1829, written by then-Civil Governor of Georgia, Pëtr Zaveleïskiï, noted that "virtually all peasants who belong to *pomeshchiki* (landlords) do not own real estate and must do everything that their lord commands; landlords can sell, pawn, or gift their peasants and otherwise treat them in any way they want."²¹ Some Georgian landlords themselves described their right to own serfs as "*gospodskoe rabstvo*"²² (lordly enslavement), while enserfed peasants lamented their plight in petitions to the Russian administration by equating their status to that of "enslavement."²³ In short, even by Russian standards, the institution of serfdom in Georgia was remarkably oppressive.

Violence and abuse of many kinds were a constant menace to the lives of enserfed people in Georgia in the nineteenth century. The imperial archives testify to the acts of wanton cruelty endured by many enserfed people in the decades following Russian annexation. For example, in 1818 the Russian authorities investigated reports implicating a Gurian²⁴ Princess

²⁰ Ibid, l. 4.

²¹ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 3877, l. 1 ob.

²² SEA, f. 3, op. 2, d. 68, l. 69.

²³ Ibid., l. 85 ob.

²⁴ Guriia is a historic region located in the western part of Georgia.

Mariia Gurieli in selling her enserfed people into Ottoman slavery.²⁵ Another instance of the slave trade in Georgia was reported to the Russian officials in 1817. The incident involved a member of Georgian nobility, Prince Teĩmuraz Machabelov, who was accused of selling four Ossetian people from the village of Khurvaleti into Turkish slavery.²⁶ The grave accusation was recorded in a petition submitted to the government officials by a resident of the same village, an Ossetian man Tevdor Tavgazashvili. The petitioner pleaded with the Russian authorities to punish Prince Machabelov who allegedly “violently took the four Ossetians,” who happened to be his relatives, from Tevdor’s house and “later sold them to the Turks who stayed with Machabelov in his house.”²⁷ The petition reached then Governor of Georgia, Fedor Stal’, with instructions to “conduct a thorough investigation and if the allegations [against Prince Machebelov] proved to be accurate, send those who are guilty to the court and to provide those who were offended with protection and justice.”²⁸ Nearly two months after the Ossetian peasant’s petition was delivered to the chancellery of the Russian Governor in Georgia, the imperial authorities in Gori issued its report.

The report largely confirmed the accusations against the Prince. The Russian officer who drafted the report, Major Titov, had personally led the investigation. According to Titov’s findings, Prince Teĩmuraz Machabelov and his brother Grigoriĩ, along with a band of their servants, had forced their way into the house of the Ossetian petitioner and forcefully

²⁵ SEA, f. 2, op. 1, d. 760, ll. 1-42.

²⁶ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 2009, ll. 1-7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 1 ob.

kidnapped one woman, two of her sons, and her daughter.²⁹ Indeed, the Georgian noblemen did not deny kidnapping the woman and her children. However, they claimed that the peasants were not sold into slavery, but were given away to other nobles in the Gori district. However, the Russian authorities could not find any trace of the peasants anywhere in Georgia with the exception of the young woman (the daughter of the stolen Ossetian woman). The investigation revealed that the young girl was sold to a resident of Gori, Avtandila Shvilev, who, in turn, took the girl to Akhaltsikhe where he traded the girl for his son who was in Turkish captivity.³⁰ The whereabouts of the rest of the family could not be determined, which led the Russian officer to conclude that they were likely “sold into slavery abroad.”³¹ The details of the incident were then forwarded to the Gori district court presumably to prosecute the brothers Machabelovs. However, the archival folio does not contain any additional documents that evidence prosecution or punishment of the Georgian noblemen who sold four Ossetian peasants into the Ottoman slavery.

Outside of the slave trade, Georgian landlords administered their own justice to enserfed people, and sometimes meted out punishments in the most unusual and cruel ways. Such was the case of the torture and human branding of enserfed peasants who were accused of practicing sorcery. The incident was recorded in 1828 in a village near Tiflis.³² A serf peasant by the name of Maria Goirova was accused of witchcraft after treating an ill boy using

²⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 3 ob.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 8795.

herbs and other natural remedies. Upon hearing the news of the unconventional medical treatment, the woman's owners, Mikeladzev and Laliashvili, locked the enserfed woman and her helpers in a barn where they tortured the women into confession by inflicting deep cuts onto their bodies in the shape of a cross. Further, in an incident recorded in Tiflis in 1836, the wife of the Commander of the Don Cossack regiment, Colonel Studenikin, punished her two female serfs with a whip for an unknown transgression. The punishment inflicted such terrible injuries on the two enserfed women that they died of their wounds within hours.³³ In another incident also recorded in Tiflis in 1840, Princess Pelageia Dzhaparidze was reported to have cut off the ear of her female servant, Tiniia, using the open blade of a straight razor after erroneously accusing Tiniia of having an affair with her husband Joseph.³⁴ Further, a petition submitted on behalf of an enserfed widowed woman, Tuta Gvalibianoshvili, in 1849 accused Tuta's owners, Prince Levan and Luarsab Tsulukidze, of selling her daughter Duduka to *aznaur* (a Georgian nobleman) Beko Avaliani, and of taking her young son and other daughter as servants in their household.³⁵ In this case, the imperial administration in Kutais acknowledged the separation of Tuta Gvalibianoshvili from her children but refused to intercede on her behalf, citing Imeretian³⁶ customary law that entitled landowners to the entirety of the property—including wife and children—that belonged to a deceased male serf peasant who died without leaving an heir. Finally, a collective petition submitted on behalf of

³³ SEA, f. 16, op. 1 d. 5182, l. 2.

³⁴ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 6955, ll. 4-5 ob.

³⁵ SEA, f. 3, op. 1, d. 1355, ll. 6-7 ob.

³⁶ Imereti is a region located in western part of Georgia.

enserfed peasants in the Kutais Governorate in 1854 complained to the Russian authorities that their landlords were demanding the payment of a *sachekme*—a custom that required a family of enserfed peasants to pay their landlord a specified amount of money to obtain permission to marry off their daughter—that far exceeded the amount established by the custom of their land.³⁷ The government did not challenge the custom, but instead instructed local police to monitor the situation to ensure that the obligatory *sachekme* payments made by the enserfed peasants were commensurate with the peasants' wealth.

Further complicating the arbitrariness of serfdom in Georgia was the absence of clear legal norms that could regulate the relationship between enserfed people and serf-owners. What governed the institution of serfdom in Georgia at the turn of the nineteenth century was a nebulous maze of regional and oral customary laws and conventions (which were nearly impossible to verify) and an archaic digest of Georgia's written autochthonous laws known as the Laws of the King Vakhtang VI (*zakony tsaria Vakhtanga*), which were compiled into a single digest between 1703 and 1709.³⁸ The digest was not a uniform and thematically organized body of laws. On the contrary, it was an eclectic compilation of various legal traditions which included: the Laws of Moses³⁹, Greek laws⁴⁰, Armenian laws⁴¹, the laws of

³⁷ SEA, f. 3, op. 1, d. 2942, ll. 4-5.

³⁸ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 1-18.

³⁹ These laws were primarily selected from the Old Testament, the Book of Deuteronomy.

⁴⁰ The laws that were extracted from the Byzantine legal traditions that address the matters of the civil, criminal, and church law.

⁴¹ The Armenian laws constituted the biggest part of the diverse body of laws in the digest. These laws were extracted primarily from the Law Code of Mkhitar Gosh, which was created in the twelfth century by a medieval Armenian scholar. The Armenian laws addressed both

Catolicos⁴², the laws of the King Giorgi⁴³, the laws of Agbuga⁴⁴, and the laws of the King Vakhtang VI himself.⁴⁵ By all accounts, these laws were vexing to interpret and reflected the values of the medieval era.⁴⁶

In short, at every stage of Russian imperial expansion in Georgia, the tsarist administration was confronted with a broad range of issues stemming from the unchecked right of serf-owners to exploit and commodify the bodies of enserfed people. Countless petitions written by or on behalf of Georgian peasants claiming abuse or unlawful enserfment frustrated the Russians' ability to effectively govern the country and diverted already-scarce resources into keeping peasant unrest at bay. Evidently, serfdom in Georgia required reform. An analysis of the government's legislative attempts to manage and simultaneously humanize the institution of serfdom is instructive for understanding the imperial administration's broader, two-pronged strategy of tolerating and ameliorating the indigenous institutions of unfree labor in the entire Caucasus region.

the civil and ecclesiastical topics and were in turn inspired by the Justinian codex of the Byzantine law.

⁴² Laws extracted from the Georgian Nomocanon which enumerated the list of right and obligations of Orthodox clergy.

⁴³ Autochthonous Georgian laws created in the early fourteenth century during the reign of King Giorgi V the Splendid.

⁴⁴ Laws issued by King Beko II, ruler of a feudal Georgian principality, Samtskhe-Saatabago, in the late fourteenth century. The laws were further expanded by Beko's grandson, Agbuga, whose name became synonymous with the laws themselves.

⁴⁵ Laws that had been published and codified during the reign of King Vakhtang VI.

⁴⁶ To read the legal digest in its entirety see *Sbornik Zakonov Gruzinskogo Tsaria Vakhtanga VI*, ed. Dmitri Bakradze (Tiflis, 1897), 1 - 439.

Two factors have influenced the government's approach to the institution of serfdom in Georgia. First, two manifestos issued in 1801, first by Russian Emperor Paul I and later by Alexander I, formally proclaiming the annexation of eastern Georgia became the foundational legislative acts that effectively committed the tsarist government to protecting serfdom in the country.⁴⁷ The two documents were meant to reassure Georgian political elites that their power, wealth, and influence would not diminish under the Russian tsars. To that end, the manifestos explicitly promised to protect the nobles' property rights, including the right to own enserfed people. Then, in 1827, Tsar Nicholas I issued a royal decree that declared all Georgian nobles and princes equal in rights and entitled to the same privileges as Russian nobles. In the eyes of the Russian legal system, this decree further cemented the Georgian nobility's right to own enserfed people.

Second, in the decades following the Russian annexation of eastern Georgia and the gradual incorporation of independent Georgian principalities in the west into the fold of empire, the government was wary of imposing the Russian legal system to govern the local population.⁴⁸ The tsarist administration was concerned that sudden changes in the country's institutional infrastructure and laws could alienate the populace, thus rendering the entire system of civil and judicial governance dysfunctional and inaccessible to the native

⁴⁷ To read the full text of Paul I and Alexander I manifestos that declared the annexation of the eastern Georgian kingdom of Karti-Kakheti, see *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, (hereafter PSZ), *Pervoe sobranie. 1649 – 1825* (St. Petersburg, 1830), vol. 26, №19721 and №20007.

⁴⁸ The same concerns had influenced the government's policy in the realm of finances and economy. For instance, the tsarist administration continued to strike the same distinctive Georgian silver and copper coinage in the state mint in Tbilisi until 1834, when the standard Russian currency was introduced as the exclusive medium for financial transactions in the country. For details see, Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia*, 50.

population. Therefore, preference was given to autochthonal Georgian laws and customs, which Russian statesmen regarded as better suited for all matters of Georgian civil administration. Russian law was used exclusively for settling criminal offences, or when Georgian laws could not provide effective judicial guidance. The decision to privilege Georgian autochthonal legal conventions while selectively applying Russian criminal law inaugurated a system of incongruent legal plurality.⁴⁹

Starting from 1801, the imperial administration implemented a series of reforms that attempted to align the institution of serfdom in Georgia with the legal framework that governed serfdom in Russia, all the while continuing to give legal precedence to Georgian laws and customs. Although the Russian government never considered abolition a viable policy, it made concerted efforts to regularize serfdom and to establish what it considered a fair and uniform system of seignorial obligations. It is important to note that the government's efforts to regulate serfdom were primarily focused on eastern Georgia, and that over time, the imperial administration did establish the necessary institutional infrastructure to exercise direct control over the population. In contrast, the government was unable to enact the same reforms in western Georgia. The principalities of Imereti, Guria, and Mingrelia, for instance, had historically enjoyed broad autonomy in their internal affairs as Russian protectorates and

⁴⁹ The concept of “legal plurality” is an intentional reference to the seminal work of historian Jane Burbank who described the juridical dimensions of Russian imperialism as the practice of recognition of “an array of local religious and customary practices within [its] enormous polity and legalization of these sources of authority by integrating many kinds of local courts into the legal system.” See, “An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (2006): 402.

were formally annexed by the Russian Empire decades later.⁵⁰ Thus, the institution of serfdom in western Georgia remained idiosyncratic and far less regulated up until its abolition in 1867.

The first target of the state's gentle reforms was the landowners' and nobles' common practice of enserfing the Orthodox clergy. The imperial administration was appalled by the debasement of Orthodox Christianity with the stigma of serfdom. On July 7, 1808, Tsar Alexander I issued "the highest decree" emancipating all Georgian clergy from "serfdom, *obrok*, and all other obligations owed to nobles and princes heretofore."⁵¹ However, the Orthodox clergy's social dependence upon their former owners continued uninterrupted in places like Imereti (western Georgia) until as late as the 1840s.⁵² Moreover, the Tsar's decree emancipating Orthodox "priests and deacons" did not extend to children of the clergy who were born before 1808. These children remained the property of their owners, despite protests from the Church.⁵³ In addition, as part of the initiative to detach the institution of serfdom from the Orthodox church, in 1811 the government abrogated the category of *tserkovnye pomeshchiki* (church landlords), who enjoyed custodianship of the lands, property, and peasants belonging to the Church.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ As historian of the Caucasus, Charles King, observed, "the full subjugation of all the Georgian lands would occupy the entire first half of the nineteenth century." See, Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press), 30.

⁵¹ SEA, f. 3, op. 2, d. 63, l. 1. To read the entire text of Alexander I decree emancipation Georgian Orthodox clergy from dependency of Georgian nobles and prices see PSZ, *Pervoe sobranie. 1649 – 1825* (St. Petersburg, 1830), vol. 30, №23146.

⁵² SEA, f. 3, op. 2, d. 63, l. 1 ob.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ll. 6 – 7.

⁵⁴ PSZ, *Pervoe sobranie. 1649 – 1825* (St. Petersburg, 1830), vol. 30, №24696.

Further, one of the most significant milestones in the government's endeavors to bring clarity and order to the relationship between serf-owners and enserfed people in Georgia occurred in 1822. On 16 April of that year, the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus, General Ermolov, sent a letter addressed to the Governor of Georgia, Major-General Roman Khoven, ordering him to create a new translation of the Laws of the King Vakhtang because, according to Ermolov, the previous translated editions "lack[ed] clarity and contain[ed] numerous flaws."⁵⁵ The task of translating the laws anew was also intended to identify and jettison the most archaic of the Georgian laws that were incompatible with the spirit of the nineteenth-century's legal enlightenment. At the same time, the new translation would retain statutes that the government could feasibly use in bringing the much-needed clarity and consistency to relations between the enserfed people and their owners. The government's decision to give the breath of life to the moribund Laws of the King Vakhtang represented a symbolic compromise that allowed the Russian administration to refurbish Georgian serfdom on somewhat modern footing, without compromising its commitment to respect Georgia's autochthonous laws and customs. Ermolov proposed the appointment of a special committee composed of men "who kn[e]w the Georgian language flawlessly and who [we]re keenly familiar with the Russian legal proceedings."⁵⁶ The four-person committee proceeded to scour through Georgian laws, extracting every article that addressed the institution of serfdom in the country. Then, the committee drafted an updated digest of laws, dropping obsolete statutes like Article 171 of the Greek Laws, which prescribed burning an enserfed person alive for their failure to reveal the infidelity of their master's wife, or article 360, which required the

⁵⁵ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 2959, l. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

beheading of an enserfed person suspected of poisoning their owners.⁵⁷ In 1824, the Governor of Georgia reported to Ermolov that “in the course of two years the committee produced the most complete and clear translation of the Laws of the King Vakhtang, a translation that could not be achieved in the past twenty years despite earnest efforts.”⁵⁸ The finished product, to be sure, still contained many arcane clauses that betrayed the laws’ medieval origins. However, having been cleansed from particularly offensive articles that prescribed killing enserfed people in cruel and unusual ways for even minor offenses, the updated digest of Georgian laws established an intelligible source of legal knowledge that could (at least in theory) inform the imperial policies in relation to the institution of serfdom in the country.

The decision to grant legal precedence to oral customary law and to the Laws of the King Vakhtang in regulating the institution of serfdom in Georgia was controversial. Numerous government officials noted that even the updated version of the laws was obscure, outdated, and ultimately incompatible with the realities of the political dynamics and social challenges that the Georgian society had faced in the first half of the nineteenth century. The dual governing system of Russian and Georgian laws fostered confusion and judicial irregularity that frustrated both the native Georgian population and Russian officials. These frustrations were registered as early as 1810, when a Georgian Prince, Shiosha Tumanov, addressed the General Assembly of the Supreme Government of Georgia.⁵⁹ Prince Tumanov

⁵⁷ SEA, f. 1, op. 1, d. 502, ll. 8-10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 29.

⁵⁹ The Supreme Government of Georgia (*Verkhovnoe gruzinskoe pravitel'stvo* in Russian) was established in 1801 by the tsarist administration as a consultative legislative body attached to the office of Governor (*glavnokomanduiushchii*) of Georgia. The government was comprised of four “expeditions” (departments). Each expedition was chaired by a Russian official and included members of Georgian nobility and Russian advisers. The Supreme

pleaded in vain to abandon the Laws of the King Vakhtang and to adopt laws that “were aligned with the Russian legal system” in order to improve the government’s efficiency.⁶⁰

Despite calls to permanently drop the Laws of the King Vakhtang, the Russian administration continued to utilize them in all matters of civil governance for nearly six decades. Only the royal decree of 20 October 1859 finally suspended the use of the Georgian digest of laws and mandated the universal implementation of the “general laws of the Empire” in Georgia and those parts of the Caucasus where the Laws of the King Vakhtang had been used before.⁶¹ Even then, the Vakhtang’s laws did not disappear completely. Certain articles of the amended legal digest, which the Russian administration regarded as “absolutely indispensable,” were compiled and added as a special addendum to the “general digest of the civil laws of the Russian Empire.”⁶²

In parallel with the task of translating and cataloguing Georgia’s autochthonous laws, in 1823 Ermolov instructed the General Assembly of the Supreme Government of Georgia to assemble a working group of leading members of Georgian nobility with the purpose of establishing a standardized schedule of seignorial obligations that the enserfed people would be expected to perform for the benefit of their owners.⁶³ This legislative initiative marked another stage in the government’s decades-long quest of “clarifying” the relations between

Government of Georgia continued to fulfill its duties until 1838 when the imperial government introduced numerous administrative reforms that overhauled the system of internal governance in the Caucasus.

⁶⁰ SEA, f. 1, op. 1, d. 233, l. 5.

⁶¹ PSZ, *Vtoroe Sobranie. 1825 – 1881* (St. Petersburg, 1861), vol. 34, №34980.

⁶² Ibid. Specifically, *Svod Zakonov Grazhdanskikh* (St. Petersburg, 1857), Vol. 10.

⁶³ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 7, l. 9 ob. See also, f. 2, op. 1, d. 1206.

serf-owners and enserfed people. After three years of consultations and interviews, the General Assembly admitted that the indefinite nature of serf obligations in different regions of eastern Georgia—which depended entirely on the whims of serf-owners—made it impossible to identify a common denominator of serf obligations. Nevertheless, the legislative body proposed several recommendations aimed at standardizing the seignorial obligations of the enserfed people. The committee divided the enserfed people into two categories of dependency based on the labor obligations assigned to them. Thus, the committee recommended limiting the maximum number of mandatory workdays for the enserfed people, whose obligations already included the performance of *gala*⁶⁴ and *kulukhi*⁶⁵ two days per week. In turn, the enserfed people who did not perform *gala* and *kulukhi* would be required to give three days of work to their owner each week. In addition, the General Assembly also proposed standardizing the seignorial duties of the enserfed people. These duties were enumerated in nine general points and⁶⁶ included the requirements of: tilling the serf-owner's land at their discretion; sowing seeds and watering fields; reaping crops; storing, milling, and delivering milled seeds using their own carts to a destination of the serf-owner's choosing; working in the serf-owner's gardens and delivering wine to their cellars; performing *gala* and *kulukhi* duties; paying *sachekme* in the amount between ten and sixty silver rubles for every

⁶⁴ *Gala* (Georgian) – a customary feudal duty imposed on enserfed peasants in Georgia requiring either a requirement to till their owners' agricultural land for a specified number of days or delivery between $\frac{1}{6}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ of harvested crops. See, *Sbornik statisticheskikh svedeniĭ o Kavkaze*, ed. Nikolai Voronov, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1869), 39.

⁶⁵ *Kulukhi* (Georgian) – a customary feudal duty imposed on enserfed peasants in Georgia consisting of delivery between $\frac{1}{7}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ of an entire quantity of produced wine or wort. See, *Sbornik statisticheskikh svedeniĭ o Kavkaze*, ed. Nikolai Voronov, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1869), 39.

⁶⁶ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 9 ob. – 10.

widow and (virgin) woman entering marriage; providing construction materials and laboring on any construction project at the discretion of the serf-owner; providing horse drawn carts and transporting goods at the discretion of the serf-owner; and many more.⁶⁷

The proposals developed by the General Assembly in 1823 did not gain traction and were ultimately shelved until 1831, when senators Mechnikov and Kutaïsov—who were visiting the region from Saint Peterburg on an auditing mission—studied these proposals for the second time. The senators, whose task was to identify areas where government efficiency was lacking and propose reforms to remedy the situation, concluded that the proposals had little merit and should be scrapped. They argued that, since the imperial government granted the Georgian nobility equal status with Russian nobles, the same laws that governed the status of enserfed peasants in Russia should be applied on equal terms in Georgia. Moreover, senator Mechnikov suggested doing away with the use of the Laws of King Vakhtang in Georgia and introducing Russian laws instead.⁶⁸ The senators took their recommendations to the meeting of the State Council in Saint Petersburg where Tsar Nicholas I considered the proposed reforms. However, before taking any legislative actions, the Tsar requested a second opinion from then the Commander-in-Chief of Georgia, Baron Grigoriï Rozen.

Rozen's response arrived in Saint Petersburg on 11 February 1832.⁶⁹ Unlike senators Mechnikov and Kutaïsov, Rozen saw no need to interfere with the complicated microcosm of relations between Georgian serf-owners and their enserfed people. Rozen's arguments could

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gaprindashvili and Zhordaniia, *Ocherki Istorii Gruzii, vol. 5 Gruzii v XIX veke* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1990), 117.

⁶⁹ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 7, l. 10.

be summarized into one laconic question: why try fixing a problem when none exists? First, Rozen noted that Georgian serf-owners had not submitted demands to standardize any in-kind or monetary obligations of their serfs. Second, he contended that since Georgia had never had a single standard for measuring the seignorial obligations of enserfed people, any attempts to impose a uniform system of serf obligation would sow chaos and encourage enserfed people to challenge their subaltern status. As for the incidents of maltreatment of enserfed people at the hands of their owners, Rozen cited the 1825 and 1826 government decrees, which granted the state the right to assume custodianship over households of enserfed peasants to protect them against abusive behavior of landlords.⁷⁰ Thus, the Commander-in-Chief in Georgia advised the Tsar to leave the institution of serfdom in Georgia unaltered for the foreseeable future, lest the government alienate the serf-owners or the serfs. The State Council confirmed Rozen's position and declined to introduce significant legislative changes that could put the relations between enserfed people and their owners on a new legal footing. Nevertheless, several legislative measures did address some idiosyncratic aspects of the Georgian institution of serfdom.

First, the imperial government introduced restrictions on the right to own serfs in Georgia. Specifically, in 1832, the imperial government issued a decree restricting the right to own serfs only to people of noble lineage.⁷¹ This legislative act primarily targeted *mokalaki*, a category of well-to-do peasants, as well as urban merchants and craftsmen who had the means to purchase enserfed people. The decree gave *mokalaki* a grace period of four years to either

⁷⁰ *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, (hereafter SZ), vol. 9, Zakony o Sostoianiiakh (Saint Petersburg, 1857), 223-224.

⁷¹ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 7, l. 4 ob.

sell or manumit their serfs.⁷² In addition, the reforms also addressed the plight of enserfed noble families. In 1833, the imperial administration abolished the status of personal dependency that kept *kniazheskie dvoriane* (princely nobles) bound to landlords.⁷³ In the same year, the government recognized the formerly dependent nobles as equal to the rights and statuses of Russian nobility. According to the government's report, the decree emancipated 160 noble families from the dependency of twenty-one princely families.⁷⁴

The next attempt to homogenize relations between enserfed people and their owners in Georgia occurred in 1841. This initiative was tied to a broad range of fundamental administrative reforms that had been introduced in different parts of the Caucasus in the same year.⁷⁵ The special royal decree instructed imperial authorities in the Caucasus to prepare a comprehensive summary of the state of serfdom in the country and to provide recommendations to make Georgian serfdom more compatible with the Russian legal system. Once again, however, the Russian administration failed to deliver any meaningful results, in part because the two men who were appointed to oversee this assignment, Vasil'kovskiï and Prince Chavchavadze, died of natural causes while serving in office.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie, 1830-1885* (St. Petersburg, 1834), vol. 8, №6311.

⁷⁴ SEA, f. 221. op. 1, d. 7, l. 4 ob. The official reports also noted that although the emancipated families received personal freedom, the disputes over property and enserfed peasants that belonged to the emancipated nobles continued to plague the relationship with their former patrons with both sides claiming the right of ownership to the land and peasants. The disputes necessitated another round of the government's intervention, which culminated with the passage of a decree by the Governing Senate in 1836. The decree stipulated that property disputes between the Georgian Princes and formerly dependent nobles must be adjudicated in special arbitration courts.

⁷⁵ See, SZ, vol. 2 *Osobennye Gubernskie Ucherezhdenniia* (Saint Petersburg, 1857), 189-284.

The creation of the Caucasus Viceroyalty in 1844 spurred yet another round of legislative consultations and fact-finding missions with the aim of normalizing the institution of serfdom in Georgia. In 1847, the Council of Chief Administration in the Caucasus delivered a comprehensive proposal regulating the relations between landowners and their enserfed peasants to the Caucasus Viceroy, Prince Vorontsov, for consideration.⁷⁶ The proposal merged the standard articles of Russian law and selected provisions of Georgian autochthonal laws and customs—which the Council regarded as indispensable to the regulation of serfdom in the region—into a single legal digest. The Viceroy carefully studied the proposal but hesitated to recommend the document to the Tsar. Prince Vorontsov needed a second opinion to ascertain the viability of the proposal. Specifically, the Viceroy required the opinion of the people who mattered the most to the empire—the Georgian nobility. Thus, he ordered the creation of temporary committees in four districts of the Tiflis Governorate, each tasked with evaluating the proposal from the perspective of the landlords. The committees were comprised of Georgian nobility and appointed government officials. Glaringly absent from the committees’ deliberations were the enserfed people. After several months of discussions and consultations, each committee submitted their report to the Caucasus Viceroy on the feasibility of the proposed changes to relations between enserfed people and their owners. Prince Vorontsov studied the reports and concluded that the amendments—which the committees had recommended to the draft of the proposal—would almost certainly serve to “strengthen the authority of the landlords, giving the enserfed peasants nothing in return.”⁷⁷ The Viceroy also noted that any substitution of dissimilar serf obligations with an unvarying set of obligations

⁷⁶ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 7, l. 14 ob.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 15 ob.

needed to consider the unique economic conditions, such as quality of land, of every region in Georgia. Therefore, the Viceroy made the case to the imperial authorities in Saint Petersburg to continue administering the institution of serfdom in the region in accordance with the already-established customs and laws. However convoluted those customs might be, he proposed keeping them in place until the government could survey the land and confirm the land tenure rights in Georgia. The Caucasus Committee in Saint Petersburg accepted the Viceroy's arguments and temporarily shelved any proposals to reform serfdom in Georgia. As for the plans to survey the arable land and revise the land tenure rights in Georgia, the imperial government did not embark on this reform until 1862, two years before serfdom was abolished in Georgia.⁷⁸

The Empire and Servitude in the Khanates of the South Caucasus

As the tsarist government continued to consolidate its authority in eastern Georgia, other regions of the South Caucasus came under Russian imperial control. Between 1801 and 1829, dozens of small pashaliks, sultanates, khanates, and shamkhalates were added into the domains of the empire. These territories included the three Muslim-majority regions of the Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, which the imperial administrations designated as “distances” (*distantzii*). Among these regions were the Borchaly, Kazakh, and Shamshadil distances.⁷⁹ In addition, the decisive military gains against the Qajar Iran allowed the Russians

⁷⁸ One more notable reform relating to serfdom in Georgia occurred in 1852. In that year the government had formally abolished the category of church peasants (*tserkovnye krest'iane*). This law effectively barred the Orthodox Church in Georgia from owning enserfed people. The emancipated peasants were released from the obligations to perform obligatory labor for the benefit of the Church and came under jurisdiction of the state as state peasants (*kazennye krest'iane*).

⁷⁹ For a detailed description of environment, economy, politics, and social organization of Borchaly, Kazakh, and Shamshadil distances see *Obozrenie Rossiiskikh Vladeniĭ za*

to claim the Khanates of Quba, Shirvan, Baku, Sheki, Ganja, Karabakh, Talysh, Nakhichevan, and Erevan. Today, the former territories of these khanates comprise the sovereign borders of countries like Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the imperial government exercised a tenuous control over these territories through the appointment of *pristavy* (bailiffs), who personified and represented the interests of the state in the distances. The real authority to govern the daily affairs of the people in these territories was invested in a network of indigenous ruling elites who accepted Russian suzerainty. Thus, as in Georgia, the imperial administration leaned on the local elites to maintain order and stability in the region. To that end, the government was all too willing to recognize and protect the existing practices of unfree labor, albeit with certain modifications aimed at making servitude and enslavement more humane. Abolition played absolutely no role in the imperial politics of the khanates in the South Caucasus.

No single definition could provide a complete explanation of the hierarchy of social power and subordination within the numerous khanates of the South Caucasus. Each territory represented a microcosm of local politics and social dynamics, shaped by long histories of interaction with or vassalages to the Ottoman Sultans, Iranian Shahs, and/or Georgian princes. Therefore, a simple dichotomy of freedom vs. unfreedom cannot fully capture the broad spectrum of personal dependency, servitude, and slavery that existed in these regions.

On the eve of Russian imperial expansion into the region, the communities in the khanates of the South Caucasus were generally organized as decentralized feudal fiefs governed by noble and princely families. Most of the ruling elites claimed hereditary titles of nobility.

Kavkazom, v statesticheskom, etnograficheskom, topograficheskom i finansovom otnosheniakh, vol. II, (Sankt Peterburg, 1836), 213-290.

Others, however, received their noble accolades as a tribute to their loyal service. The title of Agalars, for example, was generally granted to individuals who distinguished themselves in the service of a Sultan or a Georgian prince and was typically passed from father to son, with the understanding that it could be revoked at the ruler's discretion. In territories with a significant Armenian population, the estate of nobility was known as Melik and Agalar. In territories with a predominantly Turkic population, the ruling elites were known by such titles as Khan, Bek, Sardar, Mirza, Naib, or Agalar. Most arable lands in the khanates nominally belonged to the state. Khans, in turn, distributed land grants known as *miulk* or *tiul* to individuals who distinguished themselves in their services to the Khans, thus creating a class of landowners known as *miulkodar*⁸⁰ and *tiulist*⁸¹.

The common folk who lived in these territories were comprised of a great multitude of identities, including Armenians, Kurds, Ingiloyes, nomadic Turkic tribes, Turks, Iranians, Yazidis, and others. Most of the urban and rural population enjoyed tenuous personal freedom, which meant that individual peasant families could not be bought, sold, or used as a collateral by the ruling elites and landowners. Nevertheless, the life, agency, and labor of the peasants who lived on *miulk* or *tiul* land, and who constituted approximately one-third of the entire peasant population, were circumscribed by customary rules of servitude that differed greatly based on factors like climate, geography, and the political organization of each khanate.

⁸⁰ *Miulkadar* (*мюлькадар* in Russian), originates from the Turkish *Mülk* – a freehold land whose owners could sell, mortgage, or lease it as an inalienable private property. See Huri İslamoğlu-İnan, *Agrarian Power Relations and Regional Economic Development in Ottoman Anatolia during the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 59.

⁸¹ A land-grant given to a person as a reward for their military or political service to the state or services rendered to a Khan. Holder of a *tiul* was entitled to one-tenth of the entire agricultural production.

Generally, the terms of servitude demanded that the peasants give a portion of their entire agricultural produce to the landowners; on top of that, it also required them to perform a variety of other labor services, such as delivering firewood, preparing meals, repairing buildings, providing household servants, etc. In addition to giving a portion of their harvest to the landowners, some peasant communities were also required to till the land and perform a variety of labor obligations for the benefit of the ruler of a khanate.

When the Russian imperial administration assumed the reins of authority in the khanates of the South Caucasus, it immediately pursued a policy of cooptating the indigenous elites. Russian officials believed that securing the cooperation and loyalty of the people who personified the institutions of local political authority would ensure the stability and social order of the region. To that end, the government diligently collected data and intelligence on all noble families who controlled local *magaly* (villages). For instance, in a secret dispatch to the Civil Governor of Georgia in 1830, the Commander in Chief of the Caucasus, Ivan Paskevich, ordered the creation of a census counting all noble Muslim families, Agalars, and Naibs in both Elisavetopol okrug⁸² and the Muslim-majority districts in eastern Georgia.⁸³ Russian bailiffs, who were assigned to each administrative district in the region, provided a thorough list of the indigenous nobility that commanded a considerable degree of authority in their respective regions. The lists included such information as the nobles' names, a concise assessment of their political influence among the local population, an evaluation of the nobles' loyalty to the Russian rule, a description of any peculiar traits, and information on whether they had supported Russian military efforts during the wars against the Ottoman

⁸³ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 1-9.

Empire and Qajar Iran.⁸⁴ The noble and princely families deemed by the government to be politically reliable continued to enjoy the same social privileges and property rights as they had before, which were now bolstered by the imperial state.

Of particular importance to the government's efforts to police the population, extract taxes, and maintain general social order in different regions of the South Caucasus was the estate of Agalars (*Агалары*). Serving as chief representatives of the executive authority in villages and hamlets across the South Caucasus, Agalars' quasi-feudal position of authority allowed them to exercise a great deal of power over people in their charge. Indeed, for all practical purposes, the peasants in such villages lived in a state of collective dependency to Agalars. The tsarist administration itself characterized the rule of Agalars as completely "arbitrary," "despotic," and virtually "without any institutional limitations."⁸⁵ In the absence of an established schedule of labor obligations, the dependent peasants worked for the benefit of Agalars for as long as they were commanded to do so. In addition to having unchecked power over people under their control, Agalars also had the right to collect toll payments from merchant caravans that passed through the villages under their control.

The despotic nature of Agalars' rule did not discourage the government from institutionalizing their authority. The first effort to regulate the relationship between Agalars and the people under their charge occurred in 1818. General Alekseï Ermolov, then the Commander in Chief of the Caucasus, initiated reforms that were meant to circumscribe the otherwise unrestrained power of Agalars over the agency and labor of dependent peasants. The General's own account of the Agalars' unchecked authority, which appeared in

⁸⁴ Ibid, ll. 5-8ob.

⁸⁵SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5618, l. 5-7.

Ermolov's memoirs, presented the situation in stark terms: "In the Muslim distances of Borchaly, Kazakh, and Shamshadil, Agalars have assumed control over common plebs to such an extent that free people as they are, albeit custom-bound to perform certain obligation, turned into slaves completely."⁸⁶ The decree was an ideal opportunity to consolidate Russian rule by abolishing all forms of unfree labor in the South Caucasus. However, abolition was far from Ermolov's mind. Rather than abolishing the Agalars as a social class and bringing the formally dependent population under the direct governance of the imperial state, Ermolov issued a decree, "Charter on the Agalars" (*Polozhenie ob Agalarakh*), which aimed to eliminate the worst of the Agalars' abuses and make their political authority and social privileges, including the right to exploit peasant labor, conditional upon Russian approval.

First, the decree formalized the status of Agalars as appointed heads of villages and settlements. However, rather than being the prerogative of one's birthright, such an appointment became conditional on Agalars' service and political loyalty to the Russian state. Second, Agalars were officially subordinated to the authority of Russian bailiffs and became responsible for policing rural communities, calling up local militia, catching thieves, resolving minor disputes, and, most importantly, collecting taxes. In addition, Agalars who demonstrated unquestionable loyalty and proved their willingness to fight against foreign threats to the Russian rule were awarded with monetary grants and given military ranks and state salaries.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Zapiski A.P. Ermolova vo Vremia Upravleniia Gruziei, 1798-1826*, (Moskva: Vysshaia Shkola, 1991), 299.

⁸⁷ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 4189, ll. 1-3. The archival folio informs the Civil Governor of Georgia Zaveleiskii about the decree issued by the "Sovereign Emperor" granting the military rank of an ensign (прапорщик) to an Agalar from Kazakh distance for his service and loyalty

In return for their service to the state, Ermolov's decree entitled Agalars to receive ten percent of the total amount of collected taxes in every village and assigned them a specific number of households as their personal servants, known as *nukers* (*нукеры*). As a rule, these privileges were also extended to members of Agalars' immediate family.⁸⁸ However, the servitude obligation was no longer the collective responsibility of an entire village. Ermolov's decree prescribed the obligation to perform unfree labor for the benefit of Agalars' families to be rotated between different households at annual intervals, which would be determined by votes from the entire village community. In essence, Ermolov's reforms lightened the collective burden of rural communities to perform arbitrary labor and services, but institutionalized subjugation of individual households to the whims and exploitation of Agalar families.

The assignment of peasant-servants (*nukers*) remained under the purview of district bailiffs, who could request the Russian authorities in Tiflis to approve or deny new assignments. The archives indicate that *nukers* were assigned not only to members of the indigenous nobility and people with a distinguished record of service to the Russian government, but also to members of the Muslim clergy.⁸⁹ In order to maintain the privileged social status and material benefits that were associated with the title of Agalar within the same family, Agalars petitioned the Russian government to pass the title and the right to govern

during the Russo-Persian War of 1826-1828. The decree exemplifies the practice of the Russian imperial government of co-opting and rewarding loyal indigenous elites.

⁸⁸ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5475, ll. 1-5.

⁸⁹ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5636.

villages to their sons or close male relatives.⁹⁰ In most cases, the Russian administration approved such requests and regarded the transfer of the noble titles within the same family with favor. However, it was also not unusual for Russian authorities to deny the Agalars' requests on the grounds that a petitioner's relatives had not demonstrated their value to the Russian rule. For example, an Agalar from Borchaly distance, village of Upper Sarali, Mussa Aghi Khudi Agha Ogli, submitted a petition addressed to Georgia's Civil Governor, Major-General Dmitry Akhlestyshev, on 2 March 1839.⁹¹ In his petition, Agalar Mussa Aghi explained that his "ancestors had all been Agalars in the village [Upper Sarali] and I [Mussa Aghi] have ruled over the village upon their death."⁹² However, Mussa Aghi's "old age" had prevented him from fulfilling his duties. In his petition, the Agalar claimed that village's residents "ha[d] long recognized [their] kindness" and, therefore, requested that Mussa Aghi's son, Abdullah Agha, assume the title of Agalar and continue the work of his father as the chief authority of the village.⁹³ After receiving and examining the petition, the Governor forwarded the document to the bailiff of Borchaly distance with an order to evaluate the merits of the petitioner's request and to recommend whether the Agalar's son, Abdullah Agha, deserved the right to succeed his father. The bailiff submitted his response on 22 May 1839, recommending not to appoint Abdullah Agha as the new Agalar in the village. He cited Abdullah's "young age", "lack of experience", and the fact that "he has yet to provide any

⁹⁰ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 4395, ll. 1-5.

⁹¹ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5957, ll. 1-4.

⁹² Ibid, l. 3.

⁹³ Ibid.

kind of service to the government” as justifications for his decision⁹⁴ The bailiff concluded his report with a statement that the appointment of Abdullah as the head of the village would “only increase the number of Agalars useless to the government and, at the same time, impose a greater burden on the people.”⁹⁵

On the other hand, the policy of cultivating loyal indigenous elites allowed individuals from non-noble backgrounds to climb the ladder of social mobility by serving and protecting the interests of the Russian government in the region. Archives from the Russian administration contain petitions from people of non-noble descent who requested either maintenance, subsidies, and/or other rewards for their services to the Russian Tsar. Many of these petitions were viewed favorably and approved by the highest level of the Russian government in the region. Consider, for instance, a petition submitted to the then-Commander in Chief of the Caucasus, Ivan Paskevich, from a resident of the village Dagkesaman in the Kazakh distance, Skandar Murad Ogly, who described himself as “a Muslim of common origins.”⁹⁶ According to the petition, Skandar had served the Russian government with notable distinction. He was a member of the Muslim cavalry regiments during Russia’s war with Iran in 1826-1828 and during the war with Turkey in 1828-1829. According to the archives, Skandar demonstrated exemplary bravery during the two wars. As a result, he was awarded with a military rank of lieutenant, which entitled him to a government salary. In addition, he was decorated with a medal with Saint George ribbon and the Order of Saint Anna, fourth

⁹⁴ Ibid, l. 2.

⁹⁵ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5957, l. 2 ob.

⁹⁶ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 4394, l. 4.

degree with an inscription: “For Bravery.”⁹⁷ When Skandar submitted his petition to Paskevich in 1831, he cited the challenges of poverty as motivating him to seek the assistance of the Russian authorities. In the petition, Skandar requested that the government “either assign him several *nukers* to perform services and agricultural duties or put him in charge of some insignificant village on the rights of Agalar.”⁹⁸ The petition was then forwarded to the chief bailiff of the Kazakh distance with the instruction to evaluate the merits of Skandar’s military service and provide an assessment of his loyalty to the Russian government. After several months of waiting, the office of the bailiff submitted its response. The bailiff provided a glowing recommendation and suggested putting Skandar Murad Ogly in charge of two “Muslim villages” that consisted of 28 households and that did not have Agalar authority over them. Thus, with a stroke of a pen, Skandar Murad Ogly was elevated from the status of a common Muslim veteran of two wars to the head of two villages, whose residents became obligated to provide him with a variety of services and labor obligations.

Ermolov’s attempt to curb the ability of the ruling elites to exploit the labor of rural communities in the South Caucasus had failed. In fact, the government’s practice to liberally assign *nukers* to Agalar families as a way of purchasing their loyalty had actually expanded the scope of servitude to even those villages and peasants who did not traditionally perform any feudal obligations. As evidence of this failure, we can turn to archival documents, which preserved many petitions written by or on behalf of peasants who accused the state-appointed heads of villages of abusing their authority, neglecting their duties, embezzling communal

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 4394, l. 1.

funds, and extracting far more taxes from the peasants than the law prescribed.⁹⁹ Between 1818 and 1840, residents of numerous villages submitted their grievances to Russian officials in Tiflis, complaining about unreasonably large numbers of servants that their villages were required to provide to Agalars and the members of the Muslim clergy. In the predominately Armenian communities, Armenian patriarch Ioanna reported widespread abuses committed by the appointed village heads and Meliks who demanded exorbitant payments of money and deliveries of gifts from peasants in their charge to permit wedding ceremonies, among other things.¹⁰⁰

Further, reports of physical abuse and violence against servant-peasants flooded the government offices. Indeed, the abusive nature of the Agalar institution quickly becomes apparent after studying petitions drafted by residents of villages who were required to provide *nukers* to Agalars.¹⁰¹ In one such report, registered in 1839, the Russian bailiff of Borchaly described an incident in which an Agalar violently attacked his servant-peasants.¹⁰² The report described the bailiff's encounter with a *nuker* from the village of Araplemi who was assigned into the service of Agalar Lieutenant Kagraman Agha. Reportedly, the bailiff found the servant laying on the road with "a bloodied face and signs of severe beating."¹⁰³ The bailiff's report also indicated that it was not first time that the Agalar had been accused of mistreating

⁹⁹ See for instance, SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5615, ll. 1-135.

¹⁰⁰ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5609, ll. 1-4.

¹⁰¹ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d 5175, ll. 1-25. For more examples of the petitions submitted to the Russian authorities from peasants complaining about abuses suffered from unaccountable rule of appointed village heads, see also, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5380, l, 5, 40.

¹⁰² SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5959, ll. 1-8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, l. 2.

his servants, as Kagraman Agha was “repeatedly warned and rebuked” for physically abusing his servants.¹⁰⁴

The institutionalization of Agalars’ authority emboldened the indigenous ruling elites to insist on the subordination of peasants placed in their charge based on a model mimicking the institution of serfdom in Russia. Indeed, rather than weakening the social influence of the nobility, Ermolov’s reform did the opposite. It entrenched the nobility’s power and increased the burden of servitude on rural communities already vulnerable to exploitation. The spirit of Agalars’ entitlement to peasant labor is evident in the petitions submitted to the imperial administration. For instance, in a petition submitted in 1838 by an Agalar from the Kazakh distance, Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Aghi Yusef Ogli, to the then-Civil Governor of Georgia, Major-General Dmitriï Akhlestshev, the Agalar complained that the peasants living in the village entrusted to him, Daghnesaman, had refused to harvest grain in his fields.¹⁰⁵ The Agalar accused the peasants of willful disobedience and blamed the Russian bailiff for refusing to either punish or compel the peasants to “gather his bread.”¹⁰⁶ The response from the district’s bailiff, however, argued that Hassan Aghi Yusef Ogli was demanding the peasants’ labor under the erroneous presumption that the state peasants living in his village were equally as obligated to perform the agricultural work for his benefit on account of his privileged social status. The Agalar’s demands, according to the bailiff, “far exceeded his entitlements that the government outlined in the Charter on the Agalars,” and would not have been necessary had Hassan Aghi not “forced” the peasants to sow far more grain than he was

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ SEA, f. 16, op. 1 d. 5626, ll. 1-9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., ll. 6-6 ob.

entitled to.¹⁰⁷ In another petition submitted to the Russian government in 1838 by Abdullah Agha Yusef Oglı, a son of a recently deceased Agalar in Elisavetopol district, Abdullah Agha requests that the Russian authorities assign him a third of Samukhsk *magal* (village), which had been governed by his father but was transferred to Abdullah's male cousins on account of his young age at the time of his father's passing.¹⁰⁸ Abdullah Agha argued that, since his ancestors and his father had ruled "a third of the residents Samukhsk magal for generations," he had the legitimate right to be placed in charge. His appointment, according to Abdullah Agha, would not upset the socio-economic balance in the village since "in accordance with the custom introduced in the Muslim provinces a long time ago, the heads of villages always used servants for tilling, sowing, delivery of firewood, and other obligations which are in no way burdensome for peasants because they do it of their own accord."¹⁰⁹

The institutionalization of servitude in the South Caucasus occurred in tandem with the tacit toleration of slavery. The archives provide a testament to the fact that the imperial administration was fully aware of the use of slave labor in the region but took no decisive steps to ban slavery, nor to emancipate the enslaved people. Although the scale of slavery in the South Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century is very difficult to ascertain, the presence of enslaved people was a common feature in rural communities and urban centers of the region. One of the most remarkable documents from this period that sheds a bright glimmer of light on the plight of the enslaved people was a petition submitted to the Civil Governor of Georgia, Roman Khoven, on 28 May 1826, by an enslaved woman Amina, a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., l. 4 ob.

¹⁰⁸ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 5625, l. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., ll. 3-3 ob.

The petition contained Amina's plea to protect her against the abuses of her owner and restore her status as a free woman. Amina contended that although Agadzhan Sultan had been assigned three households of servants, he and his kin had never taken servants from her native village. In fact, asserted Amina, Agadzhan Sultan had enslaved and kept her in his house through violence. To make matters worse, evidently Agadzhan Sultan was so penurious that he could not provide Amina and his other servants with essential things like "bread."¹¹¹ Amina also lamented that she had neither a "proper dress nor shoes," which put her in a "precarious condition."¹¹² The petition ended with Amina's final appeal: "For God's sake, help me, for I am oppressed by him [i.e. Agadzhan Sultan]."¹¹³

Amina's pleas made a big impression on the Governor of Georgia. Khoven instructed the Russian bailiff in the Borchaly distance, Prince Sumbatov, to thoroughly investigate the grievances of the enslaved woman. Sumbatov submitted his report to Khoven on 1 June 1826. According to Sumbatov's investigation, Amina's grievances were unfounded. He confirmed the widow's enslavement but denied her claims to freedom. The bailiff cited Ermolov's 1818 Charter, which legally entitled Agalars to the labor of their servants.¹¹⁴ The collective vote of the villagers of Kapanakhchi fated Amina to become Agadzhan Sultan's servant. Since the Agalar changed his permanent residency to another village, the people of Kapanakhchi felt that they were under no obligation to demand Amina's release from servitude. Thus, the temporary servitude turned into permanent enslavement for Amina. Moreover, the archival

¹¹¹ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 3377, l. 2.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., l. 2 ob.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., l. 4.

documents indicated that the heavy weight of servitude fell not only on Amina's shoulders, but also on her two sons.¹¹⁵ Prince Sumbatov found no wrongdoing in the situation and insinuated that Amina had willfully lied in her petition to Governor Khoven. As for the terrible conditions of Amina's servitude, the Russian bailiff apparently made no effort to investigate the allegations of the widow's abuse...

Evidently, Amina's status as a widowed woman made her vulnerable to exploitation. Patriarchy was and still remains a powerful force that structured the lives of communities across the Caucasus mountains, leaving women without a male guardian at risk of many kinds of abuse. However, it was the Russian policies that legalized Amina's indefinite servitude and that, for all practical purposes, induced her permanent enslavement. The bailiff's failure to investigate allegations of Amina's maltreatment underscored the government's attitude of noninterference in respect to indigenous practices of unfree labor. Abolition was far from the minds of Russian officials, who were primarily concerned with enforcing existing hierarchies of power in the South Caucasus.

Ermolov's 1818 Charter succeeded in purchasing the political loyalty of the ruling elites in the khanates of the South Caucasus. The symbiotic relationship between the indigenous nobility and the state offered the imperial administration a relatively reliable means of governing and policing the region's predominantly rural population. However, the Charter also created far more problems than the Russian government could have anticipated. While the ruling elites enjoyed the formal recognition of their authority, they continued to follow the old ways of arbitrary and customs-based control over the agency and labor of the rural communities. In addition to increasing the peasants' vulnerability to arbitrary levies and

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

abuses, the government's policy also transformed assigned households of *nukers* into peasant serfs and solidified the dependency of Agalars, Beks, and Meliks on the coerced labor of their servant-peasants. This dependency continued to grow stronger until 1840, when the government introduced several administrative reforms that redefined the relationship between Agalars and their peasant-servants.

On 10 April 1840, the government unveiled sweeping administrative and fiscal reforms, which were outlined in the Charter for the Governance of the Transcaucasus Region (*Ucherezhdenie dlia Upravleniia Zakavkazskim Kraem*).¹¹⁶ The new Charter officially came into force on 1 January 1841. Overall, its primary goal was to harmonize the civil and fiscal administration of the South Caucasus with the rest of the Russian empire. The fiscal reform, for example, mandated the payment of taxes and other dues in cash rather than as produce harvested from the peasants' land. In addition to the switch to a new model of taxation, the reforms formally abrogated the Melik and Agalars' ownership of land and suspended their control over the agency and labor of peasants. Instead of the traditional service obligations, the new law required *nukers* to pay Agalars in cash. The reforms effectively deprived the ruling elites of their traditional source of income and undermined their social status that had grown stronger during the decades of Russian rule. Although the peasants felt anxious about switching to cash to pay taxes, they welcomed the curtailment of Agalars' authority in their daily lives. Unsurprisingly, these changes provoked widespread protests from the ruling elites and landowners, who flooded the government with petitions to restore their rights.

The brewing resentment alarmed the government and engendered efforts to ameliorate the crisis. In response to the mounting pressure and growing discontent among the Agalars, in

¹¹⁶ PSZ, vol. 15, № 13368.

1842 the Commander-in-Chief (*glavnoupravliaushchiĭ*) in the Caucasus, Evgeniĭ Golovin, announced the formation of a special committee charged with the creation of a new charter (*polozhenie*) concerning the Agalars' rights and privileges.¹¹⁷ The special committee began its work in earnest in the same year, collecting information about the Agalars' former rights and inviting Agalar deputies to participate in the drafting of the new charter. A chorus of Russian statesmen in the Caucasus criticized the reform as politically shortsighted and contrary to the empire's interests. Writing in 1842, one unnamed official, for example, argued in favor of restoring the Agalars' rights to control rural communities because "it is far easier for the government to fetter the loyalty of a few individuals and use their influence on the people rather than govern the plebs on its own, which presents a myriad of difficulties on account of the savageness and limited outlook among these people."¹¹⁸ Then, in 1846, the Caucasus Viceroy, Prince Mikhail Vorontsov, went even further and called the decision to dispossess the Agalars a clear "mistake."¹¹⁹ Writing to the Emperor in his annual report on the state of affairs in the Caucasus, Vorontsov argued that the government should "tie Agalars and Beks to the land so that they can be involved in agriculture. These measures," according to Vorontsov, "would inspire a new commitment from the Beks and Agalars to Russian government."¹²⁰ For the Viceroy, an empowered and wealthy indigenous nobility spelled order and security in the contested imperial borderland, even if it meant further subjugating peasant communities.

¹¹⁷ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 6699, l. 1 ob.

¹¹⁸ NAG, f. 4, op. 1, d. 162, l. 35 ob.

¹¹⁹ AKAK, vol. 10, № 14, 11.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

In the nineteenth century, the Caucasus was the zone of legal exemptions and particularities, which were frequently implemented to accommodate the existing legal and social norms that had been practiced in the region's communities. The laws that governed the relationships between the government, landowners, and peasants in the empire, for instance, were frequently suspended from implementation in the Caucasus due to the Russian authorities' administrative limits in enforcing them. Such was the case with the laws that redefined the relations between the Agalars and their peasants. When the Governing Senate in Saint Petersburg adopted the Project Concerning the Rules for the Collection of Monetary Dues from the State Peasants on 12 December 1844, it received the emperor's "highest approval" and was subsequently delivered to the heads of the *gubernias* (governorates) in the empire.¹²¹ The project contained twenty-seven articles that categorized all taxes collected from the state peasants into four groups and delegated the responsibility of collecting the taxes to the local authorities on the county and village levels. However, upon the Chief Governing Council of the Transcaucasian region's review of the project and following consultations with the office of the State Properties in the Caucasus, the Viceroy to the Caucasus, Golovin, petitioned the emperor to suspend the implementation of the project in the Caucasus because its enforcement would have been "inconvenient"—a euphemistic term used to describe an impossible task.¹²² The Viceroy recommended retaining the existing tax collection mechanisms "until the opportunity would present itself to build an effective institution of governance in counties and villages" across the entire region.¹²³ In essence, the Russian

¹²¹ PSZ, vol. 19, № 18519.

¹²² SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 9106, ll. 1 – 1 ob.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, l. 1 ob.

administration in the Caucasus conceded that the region was not yet ready to embrace the legal norms and practices that governed the relationship between the state and its subjects in the rest of the empire. The emperor and the Caucasus Committee in Saint Petersburg agreed to suspend the project's implementation indefinitely and maintain the region's already-existing tax-collection practices.

Thus, on 6 December 1846, the Caucasus Committee in Saint Petersburg issued a rescript that defined and enumerated the property rights and privileges of the Agalars, Beks, and Meliks in the South Caucasus.¹²⁴ According to the rescript, the ruling elites in the South Caucasus regained lands that had been previously requisitioned by the government. Then, on 28 December 1847, the government adopted a Charter titled, "On the Mutual Relations of Agalars and Residents Settled on the Lands Returned to the Agalars in Accordance with the Government's Rescript of 1846."¹²⁵ This Charter formally sanctioned the administrative and police authority of the Agalars over rural communities and stipulated a list of obligations that the peasants needed to provide to the Agalars who now owned the land on which the peasants lived. For example, chapter two of the Charter mandated that peasants offer male servants upon landowners demands, provide one tenth of their entire harvest to landowners, and among other things, offer one worker equipped with draft animals or agricultural tools from each household to work on the landowners' fields. The government's recognition of the Agalars, Beks, and Meliks' claims to land as unalienable private property brought them closer to the status of Russian nobility and served as a de facto enserfment of the peasants who lived in these villages. Beks and Agalars continued to govern villages and to extract taxes and labor

¹²⁴ PSZ, vol. 21, № 20672.

¹²⁵ PSZ, vol. 22, № 21825.

from the population until the 1861 decree formally removed them from power.¹²⁶ The peasants, however, remained in a state of dependency to the ruling elites until 1870, when the government finally abolished all forms of servitude in the South Caucasus.

Conclusion

Russia's decades-long conquest and colonization of the Caucasus portended momentous changes in the lives of the indigenous communities. Abolition, however, was not one of them. The Russian imperial administration in the Caucasus had encountered multiple institutions of dependency, with enslavement being the most complete type of domination over an individual's body, agency, and labor. These encounters engendered little appetite for an abolitionist campaign. On the contrary, the instinct of imperial self-preservation prompted the tsarist administration to conserve the social status quo and gradually align the indigenous institutions of dependency with the already-familiar conventions of Russian serfdom. Indeed, the shadow of Russian serfdom loomed large over the empire-building project in the borderlands of the Caucasus mountains. It elevated the government's threshold of tolerance for slavery and normalized a broad range of customary servitude practices that structured the lives of thousands of people in the region. Thus, the imperial government regarded the preservation of the existing hierarchies of social power as a key component in maintaining the stability of Russian rule in the Caucasus.

A careful analysis of the legislative evolution of the government's policies regulating the relationship between the elites and their subordinates in the South Caucasus confirms the absence of an abolitionist agenda in the governing priorities of the imperial hegemon. In

¹²⁶ Vagan Rshtuni, *Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Armenii v 1870 gody* (Erevan: Akademiia Nauk Armianskoï SSR, 1947), 158.

eastern Georgia, and later in the west, the imperial administration displayed unwavering commitment to the protection of the rights and privileges of the Georgian nobility, which Emperor Alexander I stipulated in the 1801 manifesto declaring the annexation of the Georgian kingdom. The government officials expended copious amounts of time and resources to translate, codify, and enforce Georgia's autochthonous laws, which reinforced the landowners' right to own serfs. Although some *sosloviia* (social estates) were emancipated from the oppressive burden of serfdom, like the Orthodox clergy, the institution of serfdom itself showed no signs of weakening under Russian rule. Russia's imperial rights regime permitted a peculiar coexistence of Georgia's customary laws with Russian laws, with both solidifying the inviolability of serfdom.

A similar legislative dynamic occurred in the khanates of the South Caucasus, where the practices of unfree labor lacked institutional scaffolding but were no less oppressive than serfdom in Georgia. Beginning with Ermolov's 1818 Charters on Agalars, the Russian imperial administration recognized and consistently bolstered the customary rights of the indigenous ruling elites to exploit the labor of rural communities. A brief legal intermission in 1841—which suspended the Agalars, Beks, and Meliks' rights to demand labor from peasants living under their control—was recognized as a strategic mistake by the government and promptly reversed within several years. Moreover, the government invited the ruling elites to actively participate in the legislative deliberations and drafting of new policies, which legally entitled the indigenous nobility to own the land as inalienable property and to control the labor and agency of rural communities. The government-sponsored exploitation of the rural communities by the indigenous ruling elites in the khanates of the South Caucasus continued unabated until 1861.

How did the empire regulate the relationship between the subaltern estates and the elites in the North Caucasus between the years of 1801 and 1861? This is a tricky question to answer given that, over the six decades of Russia's concerted efforts to conquer the North Caucasus, the government maintained only nominal control over the territory and its people. The policies of the imperial administration were thus dictated by the exigencies of war and of popular resistance to colonial policies. These policies changed frequently and typically reflected the personal attitudes of the Caucasus Viceroys rather than a grand strategy of governance and social organization in regards to the restive imperial periphery. Nevertheless, as haphazard as the government's policies were, the government's reluctance to dismantle the indigenous institutions of dependency and slavery in the North Caucasus was always a prominent, common thread that tied together the state's disparate decrees, edicts, and proclamations.

The substance and goals of Russian imperial policies in relation to the enslaved and subaltern communities in the North Caucasus changed in accordance with the political and colonial interests of the empire. In the eighteenth century, when the Russian empire was expanding its presence in the region through the construction of military forts and settlements in the plains and foothills of the North Caucasus, the empire lured the enslaved people into its domains by promising freedom in exchange for conversion into Orthodox Christianity.¹²⁷ This policy aimed at weakening the feudal authority of Circassian, Ossetian, Chechen, and Dagestani princes by striking at a chief source of their wealth. This was hardly a humanitarian measure. For one thing, emancipation from enslavement was conditional on religious

¹²⁷ *Kabardino-Russkie Otnosheniia v XVI-XVIII vv.*, ed. vol. 2 (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1957), 23, 115-116, 122-123.

conversion. In 1740, Prince Obolenskiĭ, commander of the Kizliar fortress,¹²⁸ issued orders forbidding any trade in enslaved Christians in Chechnya and Kumykia.¹²⁹ Whether his order had any meaningful impact on the regions' trade of enslaved Christians is doubtful. Then, in 1743, the Governing Senate in Saint Petersburg adopted a law titled "Rules for the Settlement of Kabardinian and Saltan-Ul'sk Residents and Captives who accept the Holy Baptism."¹³⁰ The law required runaway slaves to convert to Orthodox Christianity before residing in the Don or Volga Cossack settlement or in the towns of Voronezh guberniia. In 1804, the imperial government singled out Armenian slavers from Nakhichevan, forbidding them from purchasing slaves in the northwestern Caucasus and, "dragg[ing] them shackled in irons," selling them in the Crimea.¹³¹ The imperial authorities used the issue of runaway slaves as political leverage in negotiating treaties and compelling cooperation from the indigenous political elites. When the necessary security guarantees and diplomatic concessions were extracted, the imperial government would easily renege on its commitment to grant freedom to escaped enslaved people, regardless of their conversion status, and would even offer assistance in returning the escapees to their owners.

¹²⁸ Kizliar (often spelled Kizlyar) – a city located in the present-day Republic of Dagestan in the Russian Federation. The Russian imperial army established the fortress of Kizliar in 1735. The fortress served as an important imperial outpost of Russia's North Caucasus Line and a trading post that attracted merchants from the Middle East, Central Asia, and the North Caucasus.

¹²⁹ Feliks Totoev, *Obshchestvennyĭ Stroĭ Chechni: vtoraiia polovina XVIII veka – 40 gody XIX veka* (Nal'chik, 2009), 225.

¹³⁰ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Pervoe sobranie. 1649–1825* (St. Petersburg, 1830), (hereafter PSZ), vol. 11, № 8696.

¹³¹ PSZ, vol. 28, № 21246. The law provided exceptions for legitimate ransoming of the enslaved Christians.

The Russian imperial administration was well-aware of the existence of slavery and the slave trade in the North Caucasus. In the early 1860s, the largest concentration of enslaved communities were dispersed across the remote mountainous ranges, foothills, valleys, and plains of places like Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetiia, Ossetiia, Kabarda, Circassia, Kuban', and Abkhazia. Also, a small number of enslaved people were roaming the steppes with the Nogaï and Turkmen nomadic communities in the Stavropol' guberniia, and a sizeable population of enslaves lived in the Kuban' and Terek Cossack settlements.¹³² However, the abolitionist ideals, which undoubtedly inspired some Russian officers and statesmen, gave way to the more pragmatic and time-tested methods of imperial conquest and governance. The need for security superseded abolitionist sensibilities, and the tsarist government used the tactic of cooptating indigenous elites in the service of Russian imperial interests. If in the South Caucasus Russia integrated the ruling elites directly into the imperial system, in the North Caucasus, the government left local power structures largely untouched and tried to project its power by way of local potentates.¹³³ Thus, by pledging allegiance to Russian Tsars, the indigenous ruling classes secured significant political and economic protections. This allowed the elites to enjoy complete political autonomy in their internal affairs and to retain existing privileges, including the right to collect taxes and own enslaved people. For instance, in an 1807 agreement stipulating the terms of acceptance of Russian suzerainty over the Chechen settlements of *Bol'shie* and *Malye Atagi*, the Chechen communities secured the right

¹³² The administrative boundaries of the Stavropol' Governorate approximately correspond to the present-day Stavropol'skii Kraï and parts of the Republic of Kalmykiia, Russian Federation.

¹³³ Jeronim Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation: The North Caucasus under Russian Rule* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 26.

to seek and return their slaves in the territories under Russian control or to receive a redemption payment in the amount of 100 silver rubles for each runaway enslaved person.¹³⁴ A similar concession was promised to the people of Kabarda in Ermolov's proclamation of 26 June 1822. Responding to the grievances of the indigenous communities, the commander-in-chief in the Caucasus promised to return all escaped slaves to their rightful owners.¹³⁵ The tactic of co-optation proved to be a cost-effective mechanism of imperial control, which enabled the Russian Empire to gradually expand its political hegemony without expending already scarce resources. The politics of imperial cooptation also facilitated the emergence of an aristocratic class and the proliferation of servitude and slavery in places like Dagestan, where the indigenous ruling class traditionally had limited authority. Nevertheless, as scholars of Dagestan like Enver Kisriev and Robert Bruce Ware noted, "the imposition of the Russian model of sociopolitical organization led, on the one hand, to the elevation of pseudo-aristocracy of loyal local elites, and, on the other hand, to the enslavement of the formerly free *djamaat*, or village, populations, who were reduced to the misery of forced labor."¹³⁶

The next major effort to address the question of Christian enslavement in the North Caucasus occurred in 1828, when the then-Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus, General Paskevich-Yerevanskiĭ, contemplated several proposals for a gradual emancipation of

¹³⁴ AKAK, vol. 3 (Tiflis: Tipografiia Kantseliarii Glavnonachal'stvuiushchego grazhdanskoi chast'iu na Kavkaze, 1866–1904), №1149, 671.

¹³⁵ Fedor Leontovich, *Adaty Kavkazskikh Gortsev: Materialy po Obychnomy Pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza*, vol. 1 (Odessa, 1883), 260.

¹³⁶ Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 17.

enslaved communities of Christian and non-Christian creeds.¹³⁷ The enslavement of non-Christian folk was tacitly tolerated. Then, in 1835, the State Council in Saint Petersburg issued a directive instructing the imperial administration in the North Caucasus to emancipate the “enslaved people of Christian creed” in the possession of Muslim and Christian owners.¹³⁸ The directive, however, was of little practical consequence. Reporting on the question of enslavement in the North Caucasus in 1848, local Russian officials testified that the attempts made by local authorities to identify and emancipate the enslaved Christians in the indigenous communities of the region had failed.¹³⁹ The authorities attributed the failure to enforce the 1835 decree to the visit of Prince Aleksandr Chernyshev, then the Minister of War, which happened in 1842. During his tour of the North Caucasus, members of the Nogaï ethnic group approached Chernyshev and protested the government’s attempts to ascertain the religious identity of their slaves, demanding that the tsarist authorities not interfere with their rights to own enslaved people. Fearing the possibility of a looming insurrection, the Minister ordered an indefinite halt to any efforts to emancipate Christian slaves. The report concluded with a candid admission that the emancipation of enslaved Christians in the region could happen only when the enslaved people took their own initiative to seek freedom.¹⁴⁰

In short, until 1861, Russian abolitionist efforts in the North Caucasus were inconsistent, limited, and ineffective. Frequent changes in political and military leadership in the imperial administration in the first six decades of conquest and the consolidation of sovereign rule in

¹³⁷ AKAK, vol. 7, № 896, 933.

¹³⁸ SEA, f. 4, op. 2, d. 815, ll. 4-8.

¹³⁹ Ibid., ll. 5 – 5 ob.

¹⁴⁰ SEA, f. 4, op. 2, d. 815, l. 7.

the North Caucasus translated into equally frequent changes in policies concerning slavery and emancipation in the region. While the government undertook gentle measures to emancipate enslaved Christians and to ransom captured soldiers and deserters, the Russians accepted the legitimacy of the enslavement of non-Christians and generally did not interfere with the right to own slaves in the indigenous communities of the North Caucasus. The situation remained unchanged until the era of the Great Reforms reached the North Caucasus in the mid-1860s.

CHAPTER 2

The Echoes of the Great Reforms in the Caucasus:

Abolition of Serfdom and Dependency in Georgia

Introduction

If we measure the historical timeline of the Russian Empire using conventional analytical benchmarks of *change* and *continuity*, the 1861 moment immediately stands out as a colossal rupture and a momentous turning point, which could justly divide Russian history into the before and after categories. Indeed, the abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire struck a deep fissure in the ossified hierarchy of the imperial society. Of course, there is a reason why Alexander II's rule came to be known as the epoch of the Great Reforms, as opposed to the Great Revolutions. The imperial government did its utmost to ensure that the so-called Peasant Reform would not fundamentally undermine the existing structures of social power. As a result, the legislative design of the reform benefitted large landowners and left the former serfs very little room for upward social mobility. Nevertheless, for all its flaws, the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto triggered a series of irreversible social changes that reached all corners of the empire. These changes were particularly profound in the Caucasus.

This chapter examines the history of the abolition of serfdom and other forms of social dependency in the South Caucasus region, which today is comprised of the Republic of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. It is premised upon two arguments: first, the 1861 emancipation of serfs in European Russia undermined the social status quo in the South Caucasus. The reform galvanized the dependent and enserfed peasants to demand freedom and the right to own land. The growing popular unrest, in turn, precipitated the emancipation.

Hence, the abolition of serfdom and social dependency in the South Caucasus was a fundamental reform implemented from above as much as it was compelled from below. Moreover, the abolition in the region was interlinked with the land tenure reforms, which upended the indigenous norms of landownership and further undermined the social status quo. Second, the outcomes of the emancipation and land reform in the South Caucasus were far removed from the ideals of universal abolitionism. The Russian imperial government had no interest in using the abolition as a historic opportunity to restore justice and deliver economic restitution to the historically downtrodden class of enserfed and socially dependent peasants. On the contrary, the tsarist administration was committed to the preservation of social prerogatives and economic privileges that belonged to the indigenous social elites. As a consequence, the government betrayed the promise of abolition, and freedom was delayed for the former serfs and enslaved people in the South Caucasus.

This chapter's analysis follows the chronological timeline of the abolitionist reforms in the South Caucasus. The imperial government first introduced a series of emancipatory measures in the Tiflis Governorate (Eastern Georgia) in 1864. The abolition of serfdom in the Tiflis Governorate – the seat of the Russian imperial authority in the entire Caucasus region – was of particular importance. Eastern Georgia was the first territory annexed by the Russians in the South Caucasus. In essence, the administrative region served as the testing ground for Russian abolitionist designs, which later set the course for the emancipation of enslaved and dependent people in other regions of the Caucasus mountains. It was the formal abolition of serfdom in Eastern Georgia that prompted the tsarist authorities in Tiflis and Saint Petersburg to focus their attention on the Kutaisi Governorate (Western Georgia), where the institution of serfdom was as widespread as slavery. Thus, serfs and enslaved people were

emancipated in different parts of the Kutaisi Governorate between 1866 and 1871. Finally, after formally abolishing the institutions of serfdom and slavery in Georgia, the tsarist administration turned its attention to the Erivan Governorate (Armenia) and the Baku Governorate (Azerbaijan), where indigenous institutions of servitude were abolished at approximately the same time in 1870. The differing abolition dates in the South Caucasus reflected the government's rather prudent recognition of the region's spectacular ethnic, cultural, and political diversity, which would not tolerate one-size-fits-all policies of emancipation. In this way, the abolition of slavery, serfdom, and social dependency in the South Caucasus was a gradual process, which was punctuated by the government's conciliatory negotiations with indigenous elites and the strategic management of the emancipated people's expectations for the "gift of freedom."

As we consider the historic significance of the Peasant Reform in the South Caucasus, we must remember that each date that marked a solemn declaration of emancipation merely signified a prelude to eventual freedom, rather than the immediate and unconditional advent of freedom. The Russian imperial government had intentionally withheld freedom from the formerly enslaved or enserfed people as a concession to the region's nobility in an attempt to purchase the elites' loyalty to the monarchy. Indeed, the government worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the class of indigenous aristocracy and nobility to draft the emancipation policies that could best protect their financial wellbeing and retain a privileged social status. Despite the government's historic opportunity to unconditionally abolish all forms of unfree labor in the South Caucasus, it refused to do so, and as a result, emancipated serfs and enslaved people remained socially and economically dependent upon their former owners until 1912. The government's reluctance to unconditionally abolish all forms of unfree labor in the South

Caucasus when it had the historic opportunity to do so resulted in the continuation of social and economic dependence of emancipated serfs and enslaved people to their former owners until 1912.

The Tiflis Governorate

“Excepting the soul, everything else belongs to the landlord.”¹

The Tiflis Governorate² was the logical choice for the implementation of the first of several phases of emancipation reforms in the Caucasus. The decades of relatively stable Russian rule had established a functional system of Russian bureaucracy as well as institutions of executive authority that allowed the tsarist government to undertake the daunting task of abolishing serfdom. Slaves, as a legal category, had largely disappeared from the Tiflis Governorate by the middle of the nineteenth century. Still, Georgia had a significant serf population. The institution of serfdom in Georgia was particularly onerous because upon annexing the Eastern Georgian kingdoms into the domain of the Russian Empire in 1801, the tsarist government pledged to preserve and protect the local customs that regulated the relationships between serfs and their landlords (albeit with some amendments). This practice of legal pluralism created conditions of servitude that were even more oppressive than the

¹ This quote appears on the pages of a memorandum concerning emancipation of the serfs in Georgia drafted by Prince Ivan Bagrationi-Mukhranski. The Georgian noble quoted this brief passage from the Laws of the King Vakhtang arguing that the quote testifies to the landlords’ historic respect to the serfs’ personhood and at the same time arguing that historically all of the serfs’ movable and immovable property rightfully belonged to the landlords. For the full text of Bagrationi-Mukhranski’s statement, see SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 19-19 ob.

² Tiflis Governorate was formally established as an administrative unit of Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus in 1846 with the capital in Tiflis. The governorate was composed of ten *uezds*. The administrative borders of the governorate remained largely unchanged until its abrogation in 1917. Today, most of the governorate’s territory comprises the borders of modern Republic of Georgia.

Russian version of the institution. This was especially true for the household serfs (*dvorovye liudi*), who were frequently abused and, for all practical purposes, treated as human chattel by their owners.

On the eve of the Peasant Reform's unveiling, Georgian noblemen held nearly a quarter of the governorate's entire population in their private possession. According to the official census data collected by Russian statisticians in 1860-1861, the governorate's entire population stood at 538,201 people.³ The total number of *pomeshchiks* (landowners of noble origins and princes) stood at 1,751 people or slightly more than 0.32 percent of the population. Despite the small size of the estate, the *pomeshchiks* owned 17,281 serf households or 122,247 serf "souls" of both genders.⁴ The Orthodox Church owned an additional 55,399 church serfs. The number of peasants belonging to the state stood at 344,169.⁵ The high ratio of serf ownership per each *pomeshchik* stood in stark contrast to the meager size of landholding estates among the Georgian nobility. In fact, of 1,751 *pomeshchiks* who, according to the official census, owned serfs, 214 did not have any land property whatsoever.⁶ The acute scarcity of arable land and the inability of some landlords to settle their serfs on their estates forced certain peasants to enter into land rental agreements with landowners elsewhere in

³ SEA, f. 84, op. 1, d. 858, l. 2. The statistical data indicates that of the 1,751 *pomeshchiks* in the Tiflis Governorate in 1864, 1,537 *pomeshchiks* owned land and serfs and 214 *pomeshchiks* owned serfs without any land. Further, 869 of the *pomeshchiks* owned on average less than 21 serf "souls". 729 *pomeshchiks* owned between 21 and 100 serf "souls". 137 *pomeshchiks* owned between 101 and 500 serfs and 12 *pomeshchiks* held in their possession between 500 and 1000 serf souls. Finally, the statistical report suggests that only 2 Georgian *pomeshchiks* owned more than 1,000 serfs each.

⁴ Ibid., l. 1.

⁵ Ibid., l. 2.

⁶ Ibid., l. 1.

Georgia. The serfs who entered into such contracts were known as *khizany* (хизаны). This category of peasants would live and cultivate the land of a Georgian nobleman in return for the regular payment of rent. Such rental payments were made in addition to other labor and monetary obligations that the serfs still owed to their original owners. It is easy to see how the vicious cycle of hopeless indebtedness continued to afflict generations of serf families. Furthermore, a large segment of Georgian gentry was hopelessly indebted. Many Georgian nobles were forced to mortgage their estates to the government. The official statistics suggest that by 1864, 30,714 serfs had been mortgaged to the government.⁷ Overall, more than a quarter of all the nobles' estates in Georgia had been mortgaged to the imperial treasury with the entire debt estimated at 1,810,840 silver rubles.⁸ Thus, for Georgian nobility, the ownership of serfs did not simply denote the mark of aristocratic privilege. For many of these nobles, their serfs were the only source of regular income or equity that could be passed on generational inheritance or used as a collateral for the obtainment of loans. It is hardly surprising, then, that Georgian nobles responded to the plans to abolish serfdom in Georgia with acrimonious protests and anxiety for the future of the aristocratic class.

Following the publication of the Emancipation Manifesto on 19 February 1861, Tsar Alexander II – through the channels of the Caucasus Committee – instructed the then Viceroy of the Caucasus, Prince Aleksandr Bariatinskiĭ, to begin making necessary arrangements for the eventual emancipation of serfs in Georgia. Until the work of drafting viable provisions for emancipation was completed and approved by Georgian nobles, the 19 February Manifesto was to remain mute and invalid in the Caucasus. The justified fears of peasant disturbances

⁷ Ibid., I. 3.

⁸ Ibid.

compelled Russian officials to avoid making public proclamations or even mention the advent of the reforms. The text of the Manifesto itself remained deliberately hidden from the public eye. Hence, when the Exarch of Georgia, Evseviĭ, received the text of the Manifesto, the head of the Chief Authority of the Transcaucasian Region (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Zakavkazskim Kraem*), Alekseĭ Kruzenshtern, instructed the Exarch to take all necessary measures to ensure that it would not be read in churches or parishes in the country.⁹

The Russian administration in the Caucasus proceeded promptly with preparations for the implementation of the Peasant Reform. In March of the same year, the Viceroy informed Georgian nobility of the government's plans to abolish serfdom in Georgia, albeit on reasonable terms that could cushion its impact on the already precarious financial wellbeing of the Georgian aristocracy. Unsurprisingly, Georgian nobles protested, arguing that the country's special status in the empire and that the "tradition exempted them from emancipating serfs."¹⁰ Bariatinskiĭ was sympathetic to the nobles' laments, but he could not defer implementation of the reform indefinitely. The urgency of the reform became particularly stark in light of violent peasant uprisings that took place in the Principality of Mingrelia in 1857.¹¹ The peasant revolt channeled its rage against the relentless exploitation perpetuated by local landowners who sought to recover their lost property in the aftermath of looting and ravages caused by the Turkish landing in the region during the Crimean War

⁹ Simon Avaliani, *Krest'ianskiĭ Vopros v Zakavkaz'e* (Odessa, 1912), 190.

¹⁰ Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 296.

¹¹ Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 296-297.

(1853-1856).¹² Similar peasant revolts were recorded in Imereti in 1857, Guria in 1862, Kartli in 1863, and finally, in Tbilisi itself in 1864.¹³ In general, serfs in Georgia had a long list of valid grievances against their owners and the institution of serfdom as a whole. Every year hundreds of serfs' petitions were submitted to Russian authorities. These petitions allege a disturbing pattern of abuses inflicted on the serfs by their landlords. The documents serve as a testament to the scope of the peasants' growing frustration with the system of Georgian serfdom. Occasionally, the serfs' despair engendered organized violence that could only be contained with overwhelming military force from the army. By the early 1860s, rumors of the impending emancipation stoked tensions to an even higher degree; the situation was becoming untenable.

To ensure the successful resolution of the peasant question and to safeguard the fragile political stability in Georgia, the Russian administration was eager to empower the Georgian gentry into playing a direct role in shaping the language and legal provisions of the reform. The Russian officials hoped to kill two birds with one stone: simultaneously facilitate the emancipation of the serfs while remedying the gentry's fear of a world without seigneurial bondage. Similar to the deliberation processes that took place in the heartland of the Russian Empire, Georgian nobles were thus invited to form committees. These committees were charged with the explicit task of developing a draft proposal for arranging the conditions of

¹² The peasant rebellion also provided Russian government with a convenient pretext to compel the principality's ruling house of Dadiani to renounce their claims to the throne, install direct Russian rule in Mingrelia, and abrogate the principality's autonomous status by 1867. For more information on the revolt see Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 97 and Robert Lang, *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 95-96.

¹³ Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia*, 99.

the serfs' livelihood after their emancipation. The plan envisioned formation of such committees in each *uezd* (county) of the Tiflis Governorate that had a sizeable population of serf peasants.¹⁴ Five members elected by the *uezd* gentry were expected to fill the committees' membership. Finally, after a period of six months, each committee was expected to provide a list of proposals for the serfs' emancipation to the central committee in Tiflis that delineated the status of the former serfs in relationship to their landlords. The disparate nature of landlord-peasant relations in various provinces necessitated a broad presentation of the gentry's interests in the drafting of the reform. Thus, the Russian administration in Tiflis sought a broad range of perspectives to ensure the widest possible support for the government's abolition.

However, the plans for the formation of the county committees were quickly scrapped. The Georgian nobles chose instead to create more inclusive *uezd* assemblies, which did not have limits on membership, thus theoretically permitting all nobles to participate in the drafting of the reform. To supervise and guide the work of the local assemblies, the Russian administration established a central committee entitled the Transcaucasian Committee for the Reorganization of Seigniorial Peasants (*Zakavkazskii Komitet po Ustroistvu Pomeschchikh Krest'ian*). The central committee was chaired by three individuals: State Secretary, Alekseï Kruzenshtern (who was later succeeded in his post by Baron Alexander Nikolai in September 1863), Governor of Tiflis Governorate Konstantin Orlovskii, and Marshal of the Georgian Nobility, Prince Aleksander Dzhambakur-Orbeliani. In the spring of 1864, the latter was

¹⁴ There were total of five *uezds* (counties) that were identified as having serf communities: Tiflis *uezd* – 24,329 serfs, Gori *uezd* – 59,931 serfs, Telavi *uezd* – 14,521 serfs, Signaghi *uezd* – 16,510 serfs, Elisavetopol' *uezd* – 127 serfs. These figures exclude serf population of towns. For reference, see SEA, f. 84, op. 1, d. 858, l. 1 ob.

controversially replaced with overwhelming support from the Georgian gentry by one of the most energetic voices in the debate surrounding the Peasant Reform in Georgia: Dmintri Kipiani. Finally, members of the Viceroy's advisory council also actively participated in the deliberations of the central committee – all were members of the Georgian nobility.¹⁵ Conspicuously absent, of course, were the voices of the peasants. No effort whatsoever was made to invite the serfs' deputies to participate in the affairs of the committee, neither at the local level nor at the regional one... Meanwhile, the text of the 19 February 1861 Emancipation Manifesto was translated from Russian into Georgian and distributed to the members of the central committee as well as the local assemblies of the gentry across the entire Tiflis Governorate. Deliberations over the applicability of the Russian manifesto in Georgia began in earnest.

The first congress of the districts' nobility took place in Tiflis on 15 June 1861. The congress participants resolved that every member of the Georgian gentry should have an opportunity to submit his proposals regarding reorganization of the seignorial serfs' livelihoods. The plan envisioned formation of the gentry assemblies on the level of each *uezd*, with the ultimate goal of compiling the feedback and proposals of the nobles on the local level for further review and incorporation into the final draft of the reform project. However, to the great irritation of the Russian administration in Tiflis, the work at the local level of the gentry assemblies proceeded with palpable procrastination. The deadlines to submit the gentry's proposals to the central committee were ignored and the committee itself became idle. The second congress of the gentry took place on 25 April 1862. After some confusion, the most

¹⁵ For a more detailed description of the central committee's membership, see Avaliani, *Krest'ianskiĭ Vopros v Zakavkaz'e*, 193.

consequential outcome of the congress was the appointment of Dmintri Kipiani as the liaison between the central committee in Tiflis and the local assemblies of the gentry.¹⁶ From that point on, Dmitri Kipiani became the main voice of the Georgian gentry in matters pertinent to the drafting of the Peasant Reform project in the Tiflis Governorate.

Kipiani proceeded with the difficult task of collecting the gentry's statements on the conditions for the serfs' emancipation, an undertaking that took Kipiani more than a year to complete. If the Georgian nobles were not obstructive, they were certainly reluctant to respond to the government's and, by extension, Kipiani's calls for information regarding the practices and customs that determined the relationship between the landlords and their serfs. Such legislative foot-dragging, it was hoped, would delay implementation of the Peasant Reform in Georgia indefinitely. Conceivably, this strategy could have worked. After all, the Georgian gentry managed to stave off any meaningful changes to the social status-quo of their estates for over two years after the publication of the 19 February 1861 Emancipation Manifesto. However, the arrival of the Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolayevich as the new Viceroy in the Caucasus in March 1863 added more urgency to what had become a stagnant process of legislative inertia.

The collection of the landlords' opinions (*mneniia*), compiled by Kipiani into a single narrative, present a candid insight into the minds of the Georgian nobility that were faced with the inevitability of the reform. Overall, Kipiani received close to 226 responses from the gentry assemblies and close to 20 separate projects authored by individual landlords and

¹⁶ The confusion over Kipiani's election stemmed from his less illustrious noble background and miscommunication among the Georgian nobility about the organizational changes in the membership of the central committee.

members of the princely families.¹⁷ Analysis of the nobles' testimonies reveals the ubiquitous anxiety surrounding the permanent relinquishment of the nobles' seignorial prerogatives. Kipiani summarized the gentry's sentiments by labeling the looming prospect of the emancipation reform as nothing short of a "calamity."¹⁸ Acknowledging the virtually boundless, albeit legally stipulated, authority of the Georgian landlords over their peasants, Kipiani disputed the insinuation that the institution of serfdom burdened the Georgian serfs with undue hardships. On the contrary, Kipiani suggested that the Georgian nobility have come to see their peasants as members of the extended family whose fortunes or afflictions were tied to the gentry's own destiny: "the mutual dependence has linked the landowners and peasants together; over time [the landlords'] profession of humanism has softened that link and a common benefit and mutual intercession has created the union of equality. Woes and happiness, profits and losses, all was shared between us [the gentry] and our peasants."¹⁹ It is worth noting that the argument of familial harmony and paternal guardianship that was allegedly at the heart of the Georgian landlords' relationship with their serfs is a constantly reoccurring trope in the gentry's rhetorical defense against the emancipation of the serfs. Of course, the gentry's justification of serfdom as an institution built on the principles of benevolent paternalism was mendacious if not cynical. Hundreds of serfs' petitions that implored the Russian authorities to protect the peasants from the cruelty and beguiling of their landlords could testify to the depressing reality of serfdom in nineteenth-century Georgia.

¹⁷ SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 4, l. 3-4. See also, Avaliani, 258.

¹⁸ Avaliani, 252.

¹⁹ Ibid, 254.

Kipiani was too intelligent to assume that romanticized and largely fictional portrayals of familial serf-master concord would be enough to dissuade the Russian administration from pursuing the policies of emancipation; compromises had to be made. Thus, as Kipiani's project demonstrates, the Georgian gentry acquiesced to the government's plans somewhat. The draft of the project declared the landlords' willingness to make the difficult sacrifice of bestowing the gift of personal freedom on the Georgian serfs with two important caveats. First, the gentry insisted that all of the land, without exceptions, and the peasants' immovable property (i.e. buildings, barns, gardens, meadows) had to remain in the undisputed possession of the nobles. Second, the gentry beseeched the government to compensate the landlords for losing a broad range of household chores and services that were traditionally done by their serfs. The former serfs, according to the project, would acquire the hereditary rental rights to the land, similar to the status of *khizan* peasants. Any outcome of the reform that would not leave the gentry as the sole owners of the land, the nobles argued, would almost certainly reduce the landlords to the status of "beggars." Kipiani highlighted the acute scarcity of arable land in Georgia as the chief reason for protecting the gentry's exclusive right to own the land. Control over the land, in turn, would give the landlords the last practical lever of social and economic control over the emancipated peasantry, thus ensuring the preservation of the "natural moral order."²⁰

Kipiani finally finished the project of the reform in March of 1863, which he then presented to the *uezd* assemblies of the gentry. His project was formally ratified by the members of the Georgian nobility during the governorate's congress of the gentry in late May

²⁰ Ibid., 259.

of 1863; 539 nobles approved the project and 16 proposed alternative reform projects.²¹ The dissenting voices argued that even minimal concessions to the peasants would have a devastating impact on the welfare of the landlords in Georgia. For example, Governor Konstantine Orlovskii contended that the circumstances that gave rise to the institution of serfdom in Russia differed drastically from the historic forces that necessitated the creation of serfdom in Georgia. Thus, according to the governor, the Russian solutions were inapplicable to the Georgian realities. Orlovskii believed that “emancipation of the serfs, even without any land, would place the nobility in a hopeless state of affairs.”²² He therefore implored the central committee to take all necessary precautions to ensure that the noble estate would not become bankrupt.²³

The text of Kipiani’s project was delivered to the Viceroy on 6 July 1863. The Viceroy then instructed the Transcaucasian Committee to examine the document and begin preparing the final project of the Peasant Reform in the Tiflis Governorate that would merge the opinions and appeals of the Georgian gentry with the fundamental provisions of the 19 February Emancipation Manifesto. The committee, whose membership also included Dmitri Kipiani, proceeded with the task of analyzing the project and considering the peculiarities of Georgian serfdom. The chief stumbling block that frequently paralyzed the work of the central committee was the question of land tenure. While the gentry explicitly demanded keeping all the land in its possession, government officials were skeptical that the emancipation of

²¹ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Vtoroe sobranie. 1825 – 1881* (St. Petersburg, 1867), (hereafter PSZ), vol. 39, part 2, №41347. See also, Avaliani, 211.

²² SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 4, l. 7 ob.

²³ For the full text of Orlovskii project see SEA, f. 221, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 3-17 ob.

peasants without land would contribute to the stability and economic development of Georgia. If anything, the prospect of the landless and destitute masses of peasants flocking to the cities in search of work and shelter was alarming enough for the Russian administration to reject the proposal. After many frustrating debates and legislative deliberation, the central committee resolved that the emancipation of the serfs without land might spell a greater disaster than the impoverishment of some Georgian landlords. Thus, the committee reached a difficult decision, albeit with major reservations from some members: in principle, Georgian serfs would be entitled to receive a plot of land as their unalienable property upon emancipation from the landlords' ownership. The question of the recompense, on the other hand, did not create any controversy. The Russian government in the Caucasus was sympathetic to the gentry's pleas. Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, both in private and public, fully endorsed the plans to compensate the landlords. The Viceroy estimated that the imperial treasury would have to provide two million silver rubles to compensate the Georgian landlords for the loss of the serfs' labor and the service obligations to their masters.²⁴ Tsar Aleksandr II obliged his brother's request, acknowledging the loyalty of the Georgian nobility to the Russian throne and noting the special nature of the local relations between the Georgian serfs and their landlords, something that did not exist elsewhere in the empire. After nearly a year of rigorous work and several derailing disagreements, the central committee finally finished its work and prepared to send the results of its labor to Saint Petersburg for the approval of the Tsar.

The project of the Peasant Reform in the Tiflis Governorate was delivered to the Caucasus Committee in Saint Petersburg on 28 June 1864. On the orders of the Caucasus Viceroy, two Georgian nobles, Bagrationi-Mukhranskiĭ and Mikhail Tumanov, accompanied the document

²⁴ Avaliani, 402.

all the way to Saint Petersburg and made themselves available to provide any clarifications regarding the intended meaning and text of the document. To streamline the review process and avoid any bureaucratic lethargy, the membership of the Caucasus Committee was merged with the Chief Committee for Organization of the Rural Population.²⁵ Tsar Alexander II personally followed the work of the joint committee. Similar to the conclusions of the central committee in Tiflis, the joint committee in Saint Petersburg rejected the idea of creating a class of hereditary land renters or *khizany* from the emancipated Georgian serfs. The officials in Saint Petersburg firmly believed in the necessity of securing the former serfs' property rights to the land. After nearly three months of legislative deliberations, the Local Provision text (*Mestnoe Polozhenie*) for the emancipation of the serfs and the organization of the peasants' land tenure rights within the Tiflis Governorate was presented to the Tsar and received the monarch's highest approval on 13 October 1864.²⁶

The proclamation announcing the abolition of serfdom in the Tiflis Governorate was officially issued in Tiflis and other district capitals (Gori, Signaghi, and Telavi) on 8 November 1864. To commemorate the momentous occasion, Russian authorities organized an elaborate ceremony on the Gunib Square, adjacent to the palace of the Caucasus Viceroy in Tiflis.²⁷ To borrow from Richard Wortman's thesis, the ceremony represented a clear

²⁵ The Chief Committee for Organization of the Rural Conditions (Glavnyĭ Komitet ob Ustroĭstve Sel'skogo Sostoianĭia) existed from the advent of the Peasant Reform in 1861 until the committee's abrogation in 1882. The committee had been highest executive and legislative body for the organization of the rural population in the empire on the homogenous basis. The chair of the committee was Grand Duke Konstantine Nikolaevich.

²⁶ For the full text of the Local Provisions see PSZ, vol. 39, part 2, №41349.

²⁷ SEA, f. 84, op. 1, d. 858, ll. 4-4 ob.

example of a performative scenario of power on the periphery of a vast empire.²⁸ It commenced with a morning prayer service in the Sioni Cathedral, followed by a large gathering in the square in which nobles from the Tiflis *uezd* ascended onto a specially erected event platform. The platform physically elevated the Georgian gentry above the peasants; a deliberately engineered emblem of Georgia's pecking order. Also invited to the ceremony were *starshina* and two peasant deputies from every estate in the *uezd*. The peasants huddled on the margins of the square close to the tents that sheltered several Orthodox priests. Facing the congregation of the nobles and peasants from above of a staircase were the Marshal of the Georgian Gentry, the Lieutenant Governor of Tiflis, and the members of the Transcaucasian Committee for Reorganization of Seignorial Peasants. After everyone was assembled in their assigned locations, a silence of anticipation enveloped the square. The solemn ceremony began with reading of the Local Provisions of the Emancipation Manifesto in the Tiflis Governorate by the Lieutenant Governor, Georgi Vlastov. The speech was simultaneously translated into the Georgian language. When the reading was complete, a brief prayer service ensued asking for God's blessings and wishing the Russian monarch many years of successful rule. The ceremony culminated with the entrance of the Viceroy onto the palace's balcony, where the Grand Duke presided over the reading of his appeal (*vozzvanie*) to the emancipated serfs. The appeal called on the peasants to recognize the goodwill of the Georgian gentry and the benevolence of the Russian Tsar in granting them personal freedom, imploring the

²⁸ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.

peasants to take full advantage of the gift of freedom.²⁹ After the formalities of the ceremony had been fulfilled, the peasants' deputies received a copy of the emancipation manifesto translated into the Georgian language, as well as the rules governing the transition from serfdom into the estate of personally free peasant proprietors. The peasant deputies were then invited to walk to the Nicholas Square where "treats" (*ugoshcheniia*) were distributed in the name of the Russian Emperor. Meanwhile, the Georgian nobles were escorted into the grand hall of the Viceroy's palace. There, the Georgian gentry listened carefully to the Rescript issued by Alexander II concerning the compensation (*voznagrashdenie*) that the Russian imperial treasury was prepared to disburse to Georgian elites for the loss of their human chattel. The reading of the rescript was followed by a breakfast ceremony, which was attended by the Viceroy himself.

There is no doubt that the abolition of serfdom in the Tiflis Governorate marked a paramount moment in the series of profound social reorganization of the Caucasus isthmus. However, the implementation of the long-awaited Local Provisions, which were specifically tailored to the peculiarities of the institution of serfdom in Georgia, failed to sever the oppressive bonds of dependency that for centuries had defined the relationship between serfs and their masters. A careful analysis of the terms of the land tenure rights, or the rules that regulated the process of emancipation, and the disconcerting reality of the peasants' economic outlooks in the post-emancipation era all suggest that the emancipation reform was adopted with the best interest of the landlords' welfare in mind.

²⁹ The conceptualization of the serf emancipation reform as the imperial gift of freedom to the peasants is a gentle nod to Bruce Grant's book *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

The Promises and Realities of Abolition of Serfdom in Eastern Georgia

The set of laws and provisions, which were collectively associated with the Emancipation Manifesto of 1861 in the Tiflis Governorate, were actually four separate but legally intertwined documents:

1) The Additional Rules for the Decree of 19 February 1861 for the Peasants Exiting from Serf Dependency in the Tiflis Governorate (36 Articles).³⁰

2) The Local Provision for Land Organization for the Peasants Settled on the Lands of their Landlords (174 Articles).

3) Rules for Organization of Rural Communes, Their Public Governance, and the State and Public Dues (19 Articles).

4) The Rules Concerning Distribution of Monetary Compensation to the Landlords for the Loss of the Personal Obligations (*Lichnye Povinnosti*) of their Peasants (24 Articles).

These four edicts established the legislative and institutional infrastructure that governed the process of the serfs' emancipation and their eventual transition into the class of free land proprietors. The specific provisions of these edicts were tailored to the unique characteristics of the Georgian serfdom. The creation of the additional provisions demonstrated the government's sensitivity to and recognition of the idiosyncratic nature of the social underpinnings that had over centuries forged the institution of serfdom in the region. It also reflected a broader tactic of the central authorities in Saint Petersburg to implement policies of serf emancipation that responded to the social, economic, and geographic realities of the empire's peripheries. Of special concern to the tsarist government was the Georgian gentry's

³⁰ *Dopolnitel'nye k Polozheniiam 19-go Fevralia 1861 goda Pravila o Krest'ianakh, Vyshedshikh iz Krepostnoi Zavisimosti v Tiflisskoĭ Gubernii* (Saint Petersburg, 1864).

purported acute vulnerability to destitution and social irrelevance in post-emancipation Georgia. Concern for the landowners' welfare had permeated the pages of these edicts. The articles of emancipation and, crucially, the project of land distribution between peasants and landlords were drafted with multiple caveats, confusing exemptions, and ambiguous annotations. In addition to making the language of the law dense and convoluted, these caveats created a set of legal loopholes that enabled the more cunning among the landlords to exploit the peasants' illiteracy and lay claim to a greater amount of land. The difficult task of delineating the boundaries of land ownership on the landlords' estates required the state to create a necessary institutional foundation, with newly appointed agents of reform who were charged with the daunting endeavor of enforcing the emancipation policies.

Bringing the objectives of the Peasant Reform in Tiflis Gubernia to life required the creation of a requisite institutional support. To supervise the implementation of the reform, the government set-up the institution of the peace arbitrator (*mirovoĭ posrednik*) and established the central Office of Peasant Affairs (*Gubernskoe po krest'ianskim delam Prisutstvie*).³¹ Local Offices of Peasant Affairs were also established in each of the governorate's *uezd* with a sizeable population of serf peasants. Peace arbitrators received a salary from the state and were expected to fulfill the critical role of impartial referees and trusted intermediaries between the former serfs and their owners. They played a critical role in resolving conflicts related to the terms of serf emancipation and land tenure rights. As a safeguard against corruption and unfair mediation practices, the law permitted the peasants and landlords to submit complaints against peace arbitrators to the central Office of the Peasant Affairs in Tiflis.

³¹ *Dopolnitel'nye k Polozheniiam 19-go Fevralia 1861 goda Pravila*, 6-7.

The legislature gave the Caucasus Viceroy a significant degree of executive latitude and legislative authority to oversee implementation of the reform. Article 36 of the Additional Rules, for example, permitted the Viceroy to revise and make changes to the legal provisions approved in Saint Petersburg “in accordance with local peculiarities as deemed necessary [by the Viceroy].”³²The Viceroy was also vested exclusively with the power to appoint peace arbitrators from among the local gentry across the entire gubernia as well as the ability to sanction the formation of the so-called peace district (*mirovoi uchastok*) where it was necessary.

The most fundamental change to the personal status of the serf peasants was outlined in Article 1 of the Additional Rules, which declared the abrogation of the institution of serfdom “forever” in the Tiflis Gubernia.³³ On paper, the unequivocal language of the article had fulfilled the dreams of so many generations of Georgian serfs to reclaim the integrity and autonomy of the peasant body. In practical terms, the abrogation of serfdom meant that landlords no longer had the legal right to sell, purchase, loan, or arbitrarily resettle peasants as their chattel property. For the first time in their lives, the former serfs obtained the right to marry without negotiation or permission from their masters. The legal assurance of the peasants’ personal freedom opened the elusive doors of advancement in social and economic realms wide open. But the road to complete independence from the oppressive authority of the landlords proved to be thorny and financially draining for the vast majority of peasants.

In fact, the gift of freedom was a ruse veiled in a benevolent rhetoric of liberation. A close reading of the rules and provisions that governed the implementation of the regional peasant

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ Ibid., 1.

reforms reveals the sober reality of the emancipation scheme. The reform instituted onerous bonds of unequal economic dependency between the former serfs and their masters. The government's emancipation scheme was premised on the recognition that, in principle, all of the land belonging to the landlords was their rightful property. However, the fear of withholding land from the gentry and inevitably creating a mass of destitute, landless, and disgruntled peasants in the process compelled the government to adopt a compromise. The landlords' estates were to be divided in half. One half of the landholding would remain in ownership of the landlords, while the other would be divided equally among the peasants.

Following the proclamation of the emancipation reform, the government instructed the local officials to reorganize the serf settlements (*pomeshchechi seleniia*) into villages or peasant hamlets (*posad*). Article 5 of the Local Provisions entitled each peasant household built on land belonging to a landlord to retain the household plot (*usadebnaia osedlost'*), i.e. the lands immediately adjacent to the peasant's house, and to maintain unfettered access to gardens, grasslands, plowing lands, and grazing pastures that had been in the peasants' use before the enactment of the reform. The aggregate of these lands was officially labelled as the peasant allotment (*krest'ianskiĭ nadel*).³⁴ The process of delineating the lands between landlords and peasants was premised upon a principle of mutual voluntary agreements (*vzaimnoe dobrovol'noe soglashenie*). The terms of such agreements were outlined in a statutory charter (*ustavnaia gramota*), which stipulated the monetary dues (*obrok*) or in-kind payments owed by peasants to their landlord as rent. To be legally binding, such agreements assumed the mutual consent of the peasants and landlords and required the certification of a

³⁴ *The Local Provision for Land Organization for the Peasants Settled on the Lands of their Landlords* (Saint Petersburg, 1864), 2.

peace arbitrator in the presence of “trustworthy” witnesses. At this stage of the reform, the peasants entered into a dubious legal category of “temporarily obligated peasants (*vremennoobiazannye krest'iane*).” Similar to emancipation reforms implemented in the heartland of the Russian empire, the Local Provisions established a so-called “waiting period” of two years, during which the former serfs and landlords were obligated to agree on the precise size and location of the peasant land allotments as well as the amount of payments that peasants owed to their landlord for the use of land. Until the *ustavnaia gramota* was drafted, agreed upon, and certified by a peace arbitrator, the peasants were required to perform the same labor obligations (*begara, barshchina*) and pay the same monetary dues (*obrok*) from before the enactment of the reforms. Thus, the landlords had little incentive to promptly finalize surveying and officially dividing the lands on their estates. Once the boundaries of landownership were drawn and the dues owed by the peasants to their landlords were established, the peasants were legally required to cultivate their allotments and pay rent for a period of nine years.³⁵ Failure to fulfill this obligation risked the forfeiture of a peasant’s claim to his or her allotted landholding. In essence, this nine-year term requirement tied the peasants to the land and ensured that the landlords would continue receiving a stable revenue of peasant dues for nearly a decade. After this period of nine years, the peasants had two options: they could opt to retain a portion of their original allotment (approximately two acres) as their private property, while losing claim to rest of the allotted landholding, or purchase the entire allotment through a system of complicated and steep redemption payments.³⁶

³⁵ *The Local Provision*, 19.

³⁶ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 105.

The Local Provisions set the following annual payment rates to be paid by the temporarily obligated peasants: for a household plot, the peasants were required to pay 3 silver rubles per tract of land equal in size to a day's worth of plowing.³⁷ Then, the peasants were required to process and deliver one quarter of the grape harvest (*kulukhi*) from their grapevines to their landlord as wine. Payments for the use of fruit gardens were to be negotiated by mutual voluntary agreements between peasants and their landlord. Finally, the peasants were required to pay *gala* (a quarter of all agricultural produce) and a third of all the hay collected on their allotted grasslands. The Provisions also froze the amount of peasant dues for a period of twenty years.³⁸ After twenty years, landlords or peasants could petition to revise the amount of the annual payments.

These seemingly straightforward and ostensibly fair provisions came with a number of important caveats. First, Article 6 stipulated that in the event that the collective aggregate of the peasants' lands exceeded the size of a landlord's land by more than half, the landlord had the legal right to carve out the lacking land from the peasant allotments to make up the difference.³⁹ Thus, peasants belonging to landlords with small landholdings watched their already small allotments diminish even further. Article 7 established a maximum size to the peasants' allotment of grassland and plowing lands required to be surrendered to each peasant

³⁷ The exception was made for household plots located "in places where trade, industry or dense population can secure high earnings"; such plots could be valued in higher monetary value, which could not exceed 120 silver rubles for land equal in size to one day of plowing. See article 144 of the *Local Provisions*, 26.

³⁸ *The Local Provision*, 31.

³⁹ *The Local Provision*, 3.

household (excepting vineyards and gardens).⁴⁰ The maximum land allotment with access to an irrigation canal was equal to a plot of land that could be plowed in ten days, and a land allotment with no access to irrigation was equal to a plot of land that could be plowed in twenty days.⁴¹ Beyond these limits, the landlords were not legally required to surrender any more land to their peasants. When the aggregate of land used by a peasant household prior to the reform exceeded the maximum limit set by the Local Provisions (i.e. ten plowing days of irrigated land or twenty plowing days of non-irrigated land), the landlord had the legal right claim and repossess the extra land into his sole ownership.⁴² Further exceptions were made for plowing lands without access to irrigation but which were considered exceptionally fertile. This legal loophole permitted the landlords to further slash the size of land allotment that was in use by of a peasant household on the eve of the reform.⁴³

Other legal caveats benefited the landlords. For instance, the process of land surveying and the delineation of property lines that legally separated peasant householdings from landlord landholdings often engendered disagreements. Unsurprisingly, the landlords would try to retain the best land for themselves, leaving that which was less suitable for agriculture and gardening to the peasants. The laws that prescribed the so-called issue of *chrezpolostnost'* (irregular and impractical separation of land into strips belonging to the peasants and

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The unusual way of measuring the size of the landholdings based on the number of plowing days is based on Georgian custom of measuring allotments of arable land. When converted to Russian system of measurement in use in the nineteenth century, one plowing day was roughly equal to 1,200 square *sazhen'* or 5462.7 square meters.

⁴² *The Local Provision*, 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

landlords) were likely to be resolved in the landlords' favor: in order to consolidate the landlord's property into a unitary landholding, peasants' meadows, vineyards, and/or gardens were often requisitioned.⁴⁴ *Melkopomestnyi*⁴⁵ landlords whose aggregate arable and grazing landholdings were equal to less than sixty plowing days were exempt from any obligation whatsoever to surrender land to the former serfs.

Further, although the law dictated that all immovable property belonging to the peasants – such as windmills, beehives farms, barns, stables, and sheds – must remain in their possession, the property that remained outside of the peasants' household plot (*usadebnaia oseedlost'*), i.e. properties located at a physical distance from the household plot, were not automatically considered as belonging to peasants, even if the properties formed part of the peasant allotment (*krest'ianskiĭ nadel*). The law also made it possible for landlords to confiscate or demolish these structures in the case that a landlord claimed ownership over land that contained the peasants' immovable property.⁴⁶ These claims required approval from the government and stipulated commensurate compensation to the peasants. However, the cost of

⁴⁴ Although such measures required permission of the central Office of the Peasant Affairs in Tiflis and required monetary compensation, this caveat created an additional legal loophole that enabled the landlords to submit unwarranted claims to the lands that had been long cultivated by the peasants. For more details see *The Local Provision*, 10-11.

⁴⁵ *Melkopomestnyi pomeshchik* - a landlord whose entire landholding was less than a measure that equaled to one hundred and twenty plowing days.

⁴⁶ The Local Provisions established a number of other clauses and exceptions (too many to describe them all in the body of this chapter) to the emancipation rules that in theory permitted the landlords to take unfair advantage of the regulations by claiming ownership over lands that had been in the peasants' possession and use before 1864 under the subjective pretexts of *chrezpolostnost'* (excessive fragmentation of a landholding) or proximity of peasant household plots and structures to a landlord's estate. For specific examples of such legal loopholes see articles 56, 57, 58, 62, 64, 66, 67, 69, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 78, 87, 95, 97, 107, 108, 109, 128, 129, 130, 131, 139, 161.

such changes was far more painful for the peasants' financial wellbeing than for that of the landlords.

The use and exploitation of forests became another sticking point in the relationship between the landowners and the former serfs after the emancipation. Before the implementation of the Peasant Reforms, the serfs' access to forests and their resources was regulated based on verbal agreements with the landlords. Such agreements varied from one estate to another and from one region of Georgia to another. This verbal or custom-based agreement allowed peasants less regulated access to forest and left a degree of ambiguity with regard to the ownership and access to timber that peasants frequently used for construction and as fuel for cooking. The Local Provisions granted landlords the exclusive rights to own and exploit forest resources. Article 30, for example, clearly stipulated that landlords were under no obligation to provide peasants with timber.⁴⁷ Instead, the peasants were expected to negotiate the terms of monetary compensation for the right to cut trees and collect wood the forests.

Dvorovye Liudi (The Household Serfs)

Of particular interest to this dissertation is the category of serfs whose legal status and material conditions frequently resembled that of slaves in the Caucasus, and whose plight historians often struggle to trace. This category of serfs is known as the household serf (*dvorovye liudi*). The overall number of household serfs in the region was comparatively small, and their origins heterogeneous.⁴⁸ Some of the household serfs were orphaned at a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7

⁴⁸ Statistics regarding the precise number of the household serfs in the Tiflis Gubernia on the eve of the Emancipation Reform is currently not available.

young age after the passing of their serf parents. Others joined the ranks of the household serfs as a result of an ancient Georgian custom that required serf families who lived on their master's estate to give their adolescent children (generally girls) as household servants until they reached puberty or were deemed appropriate to be given away in marriage.

Household serfs usually lived in or near the house of their masters. Such physical proximity meant that the bodily autonomy of the household serfs was especially vulnerable to abuse. Violence and sexual harassment were constant presences in their lives. The threat of ill-treatment was especially severe for female household serfs who lived in the immediate proximity of their male owners and could not count on the protection of communal or familial networks. The household serfs who lived on the premises of their masters' estates did not possess any private property (excepting their clothes and other minor items) and were entirely dependent on their owners for provision of shelter, food, and clothing. Thus, household serfs were particularly vulnerable to destitution and exploitation.

As everywhere in the Russian Empire, the institution of household serfdom in the Caucasus was not monolithic. A household serf's quality of life was generally hinged upon the wealth of their master. Household serfs performed a variety of services for their masters and worked in many different occupations, as coachmen, butlers, cobblers, cooks, valets, maids, wet nurses, servants, etc. The landlords who struggled financially or sought additional sources of income sometimes loaned their household serfs to work on the estate of another landowner or of a factory. In this case, a portion of the household serfs' salary would go to his or her master. In some instances, household serfs were permitted to leave their landlord's estate and seek employment in cities, provided that the master would receive a portion of the serfs' earnings.

The process of the household serfs' emancipation in the Tiflis Governorate did not result in the creation of region-specific provisions. Rather, it was regulated by the *Polozhenie* of 19 February 1861 that emancipated the household serfs in European Russia.⁴⁹ In addition to granting the household serfs the gift of personal freedom, the *Polozhenie* also asserted their right to enter marriage freely, "without permission of their owners."⁵⁰ The edict also recognized any movable possessions that were in the household serfs' possession prior to the enactment of the emancipation reform as the serfs' inalienable property.⁵¹ This is, perhaps, where the good news ended.

While the law gave the household serfs personal freedom, it delayed their full emancipation. Although it explicitly prohibited serf-owners from selling their household serfs as human chattel, the serfs were legally required to continue performing the same labor obligations to their masters or to make regular payments in cash (*obrok*) for a mandatory term of two years.⁵² The amount of the *obrok* payments during this mandatory service was deemed to be equal to the amount household serfs had paid to their masters before 1 January 1860. Otherwise, the *obrok* payments could not exceed the amount of thirty silver rubles for every male serf and ten silver rubles for every female serf per year.⁵³ The law gave serf-owners the right to dismiss their household serfs prior to the expiration of the two-year mandatory service

⁴⁹ *Proekt Polozheniia o Dvorovykh Liudiakh Vyshedshikh iz Krepostnoi Zavisimosti* (hereafter, *Proekt Polozheniia o Dvorovykh Liudiakh*), (Saint Petersburg, 1861).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵² *Proekt Polozheniia o Dvorovykh Liudiakh*, 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

term at any moment and without the serfs' consent. Conversely, the household serfs could separate from their masters only with a notarized permission of their owners.

The principle of the delayed freedom was designed to achieve two interconnected goals. First, the delay was meant to cushion the serf-owners' anticipated financial losses and to give the Georgian gentry additional time to adjust to post-emancipation realities. Second, the tsarist government fretted over the potential of the emancipation reform to unleash chaos in the region. The prospect of suddenly having hundreds of personally free but itinerant former serfs wandering through the countryside or flocking to the cities in search of housing and employment was a serious concern for the local authorities. Thus, by postponing the liberation of household serfs for two years, the government hoped to establish a less volatile period of transition from serfdom to freedom.

On top of the principle of delayed freedom, the law also imposed onerous conditions on the serfs' mobility. In theory, during the two years of the mandatory service, the household serfs could petition the local officials to obtain a passport and leave their landlords' estate to continue fulfilling their service obligations elsewhere. However, the serfs could not leave their masters unilaterally. The decision to move elsewhere in the region required notarized permission from their owner.⁵⁴ Thus, the serfs' ability to move and search employment in the region was circumscribed by the financial interests and caprice of their former owners.

Additionally, the *Polozhenie* preserved a certain degree of penal authority within the landlords' hands. Although the law had finally stripped the gentry from the prerogative of corporal punishment, it permitted the landlords to imprison "disobedient and churlish" serfs

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

for a period of up to three days.⁵⁵ The conditions and location of the serfs' confinement were left open to the landlords' interpretation. More severe transgressions committed by household serfs required police involvement.

Finally, the *Polozhenie* explicitly excluded household serfs from being eligible to receive a plot of land following the expiration of the mandatory term of servitude. Certain exceptions were made for household serfs who were settled on a plot of land prior to the enactment of the reforms. These serfs could negotiate the terms of the land ownership with the landlord or petition the government to retain the use of their allotted land in exchange for regular payments of rent and the possibility of the eventual redemption the entire landholding. However, because most of the household serfs traditionally lived in the homes of their owners, they were not legally entitled to receive any land. Thus, upon completion of the two-year term of the mandatory service, the former household serfs faced an uncertain future with no land to anchor their hopes and plans for the future.

The law did offer the household serfs some legal protections against possible abuses from their masters. For example, during the term of mandatory service, the serf-owners were legally required to continue providing the serfs with the same maintenance (i.e. food, clothing, shelter), including those serfs who "due to the old or young age, mental or physical disability," were unable to perform any work. After the passage of two years, however, the serf-owners had no legal obligations to continue taking care of the sick and the old.⁵⁶ Further, the household serfs who experienced abuse could submit a grievance to a local office of the peace arbitrator or, if a peace arbitrator was unavailable, seek the help of a local Marshal of the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

Gentry. If the allegations of abuse proved credible, the household serf could obtain his or her freedom before the expiration of the two-year term of the mandatory service.⁵⁷

In addition to these legal protections (however feeble they were), the *Polozhenie* provided the household serfs with several subsidies following their completion of the two-year mandatory service. First, the former serfs were temporarily exempted from military conscription. The exemption extended to four recruitment calls if a former household serf was assigned to a rural community and two recruitment calls if he was assigned to an urban community. In addition, the former household serfs could expect to receive a temporary tax relief. Specifically, these serfs were exempted from payment of state and municipal dues for a period of eight years if a serf was assigned to a rural community, and a period of four years if a serf was assigned to an urban community.⁵⁸ Lastly, the law established something akin to a social safety net for decrepit and chronically ill household serfs who were unable to find meaningful employment. This system was financed by the former serfs themselves. Namely, the *Polozhenie* required all former male household serfs who completed the terms of the mandatory service to pay an annual tax of one silver ruble “for the care of the needy” until an expiration date determined by the same tax exemption laws.⁵⁹

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of the emancipation reforms on the welfare and life chances of the emancipated household serfs in the Tiflis Gubernia. The archival documents

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Proekt Polozheniia o Dvorovykh Liudiakh*, 17-18.

⁵⁹ When the amount of the collected taxes for the care of the chronically ill, elderly, and/or orphaned household serfs was insufficient, the government’s Office of the Public Welfare (*Prikaz Obshchestvennogo Prizreniia*) was supposed to provide the requisite funds. For more details see *Proekt Polozheniia o Dvorovykh Liudiakh*, 18-19.

offer little guidance in interpreting how the lives of the former household serfs changed after they completed their two-year terms of mandatory service. Thus, historians must resort to building conjectures based on the experiences of the general population of former serfs in the gubernia. We can assume with confidence that many of the household serfs reveled in anticipation of a newfound freedom and welcomed the emancipation reform with joy. But whether the former serfs' expectations for a better life translated into a tangible or even subjective measure of improvement in the quality of their lives is difficult to discern/infer/divine.

With what little information we have, we can surmise that the former serfs' road to personal dignity and financial independence was a treacherous one. Because the household serfs were not entitled to receive a plot of land after emancipation, they faced a small range of options for their future livelihood. Following the completion of the mandatory service, the emancipated household serfs were required to register (*pripisat'sia*) with authorities of a local rural or urban community. The registration, and hence membership, into a rural community required the consent of the entire male congregation of a village. In contrast, the requirement for communal consent was waved when former household serfs sought registration in a city or community of state peasants.⁶⁰ Those of the former serfs who lived in cities and possessed marketable skills were in a better position to begin a new chapter in their lives and strike out on their own. Unlike the countryside, where agricultural production, animal husbandry, and small artisanal crafts dominated the local economy, urban spaces offered a greater variety of employment opportunities, which also included nascent industrial enterprises. The former serfs who were contracted by their former owners to work in a mine or factory usually

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

remained in place while seeking more lucrative employment. The emancipated household serfs living in the countryside could leave the estate of their masters and pull on a grapevine of familial networks to find an opportunity to settle within a rural community.

Some of the former serfs, however, lacked both the skills to find employment in a city and crucial familial relations that could help them gain membership in a village community of peasants. These household serfs opted to stay on the estates of their former masters. Article 30 of the *Polozhenie* stipulated that future labor relations between the emancipated household serfs and their former masters could proceed “only on the basis of voluntary agreements.”⁶¹ However, the law failed to define the terms or mutual obligations between landlords and their would-be workers in such agreements, opening doors for exploitative labor relations.

Conclusion

The outcome of the 1864 Peasant Reform in the Tiflis Gubernia left a dubious legacy. On one hand, the Russian imperial government initiated a series of fundamental social and economic reforms (however imperfect historians may judge them to be), which in their totality began to gradually dismantle archaic, profoundly oppressive, and deeply entrenched institutions of serfdom in Georgia. The momentous nature of the abolition of serfdom in Georgia becomes particularly evident in the context of the Georgian nobility’s well-documented resistance to the emancipation of their serfs as well as the imperial government’s plans to endow the peasants with land. The imperial metropole had been an unambiguous catalyst for what was, without exaggeration, a historic reshaping of the social fabric of the entire southern periphery in profound and irreversible ways. The historic weight of these changes must not be underestimated.

⁶¹ *Proekt Polozheniia o Dvorovykh Liudiakh*, 14.

On the other hand, the Peasant Reform's ostensibly benevolent intention to liberate the serfs from their owners' cruel and oppressive authority was dwarfed in comparison to the material benefits and social privileges that were afforded to the Georgian gentry in the aftermath of the reform. The Georgian gentry, in its majority, had been a loyal steward and ally of Russian imperial interests in the Caucasus. As such, their loyalty was duly recognized and rewarded in the emancipation settlement. The spirit of the nobles' victimhood had been a constant presence in debates concerning the future of the Georgian gentry after implementation of the reform. The nobles warned the government that the plans to liberate the serfs and give them land would spell financial ruin, and would likely decimate the Georgian nobility as a class. The Russian authorities, eager to appease the nobles' exclamations of anxiety, heeded their premonitions. As a result, the terms of the peasants' emancipation in Georgia proved to be more profitable for the landowning elites there *than anywhere else* in the Russian Empire. My analysis complements the scholarship of historians like Ronald Suny, who pointed out that the nobles of Russia "might look with envy" on the number of subsidies and the scope of compensation that the imperial treasury granted to the Georgian nobles.⁶² Donald Rayfield, a historian of Georgia, went even further by asserting the "the reform was painless for the nobility."⁶³

The emancipation legislation was unambiguously skewed toward the financial interest of the Georgian landowning gentry. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the law entitled the landowners to retain half of the total land that was in possession of the landlords before the onset of the reform in 1864. Many legal loopholes also allowed the nobles to secure more

⁶² Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 111.

⁶³ Rayfield, *The Edge of Empires*, 301.

lucrative, fertile plots of land on their estates. Further, as part of the emancipation settlement, every serf-owning noble was eligible to receive a one-time government grant. This grant was designed to compensate the Georgian gentry for the loss of services (*povinnosti*) that the nobles enjoyed prior to the emancipation of their serfs. The rules concerning the subsidy's order of distribution to the Georgian nobles were approved by the Caucasus Viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov, and went into effect on 26 March 1865.⁶⁴ According to the rules, each serf-owning noble in the Tiflis Gubernia was entitled to receive 25 silver rubles for each male serf in his or her possession. The nobles who owned less than 21 "souls" of the serfs were eligible to receive a supplemental (*dobavachnyi*) sum of money as deemed appropriate by the Caucasus Viceroy, with the caveat that the total amount of compensation could not exceed 50 silver rubles for each male serf.⁶⁵ Moreover, the law took into account other factors that could negatively influence the welfare of the Georgian nobles, such as large families and/or the small size of a landlord's estate (*melkopomestnyi*). Therefore, the nobles who owned more than 21 male serfs could petition the Caucasus Viceroy to receive additional compensation from the government for the loss of their peasants by submitting evidence of a dire financial need or other kinds of adversity.⁶⁶

If emancipation of the serfs proved to be relatively "painless" for the Georgian gentry, the former serfs were forced to contend with a much more precarious future. To be more precise, the terms of the emancipation settlement proved nothing short of "an economic and social

⁶⁴ SEA, f. 218, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 44-46 ob.

⁶⁵ Ibid., l. 44.

⁶⁶ Ibid., l. 44 ob.

disaster” for the Georgian peasants.⁶⁷ Some category of peasants that included the landless serfs (*bobyli*), the household serfs, and *khizany* were legally excluded from any eligibility to receive land. For the peasants who could expect to obtain a landholding, the heavy burden of the legally mandated temporary labor obligations, the diminished size of an average peasant land allotment, and onerous land redemption payments together conspired to perpetuate the intractable poverty of the Georgian peasantry. This poverty, in turn, stunted the peasants’ social mobility.

The terms of the serfs’ emancipation resulted in a notable decrease of the size of an average peasant’s landholding. The steady population growth in the Tiflis Governorate had stimulated land hunger from as early as the 1850s. The geography and climate of the region created a natural scarcity of arable lands. As a result, if at the beginning of the nineteenth century the average peasant landholding ranged from “ten to twenty *desiatins*,” by the time the Georgian serfs were freed in 1864, the average holding had sunk to between five and six *desiatins*.⁶⁸ Furthermore, before the enactment of the reform, the serfs generally cultivated all of the arable lands on a landlord’s estate. The reform gave the landlords outright control of fifty percent of the land on an estate and set the limits on the maximum land allotments for peasants. The lands that exceeded the maximum allotment limit were automatically transferred to the ownership of the landlord, further diminishing the peasants’ access to already scarce land. Moreover, while former serfs living on large estates could at least count on obtaining the maximum land allotment stipulated by the law, the land distribution on small estates (*melkopomestnye*) was particularly unfair and painful for the peasants. These peasants

⁶⁷ Suny, 111.

⁶⁸ Lang, 99.

lost access to a significant amount of land that they used to support their families and pay taxes. In all, it is estimated that 13% of peasants received no land allotments as a result of the reform.⁶⁹ Peasants also lost access to forests, which became the property of landlords who by law required peasants to pay fees for the right to collect firewood and cut trees for timber. Access to grazing fields and pastures was another source of constant strife between the peasants and the landlords. The *Polozhenie* failed to provide clear instructions on how the peasants and the landlords were to divide pastures and grazing lands, instead giving preeminence to the local custom that had governed access to these lands before the reform. The law prescribed the division of the pastures based on notarized agreements of goodwill between landlords and peasants with the assistance of a peace arbitrator. The landlords, however, were not legally obligated to accept the peasants' offers of the land division. Thus, the disputes over land tenure rights of communal pastures continued to flare up into the early twentieth century.⁷⁰

If the diminished size of the peasant landholdings was perhaps a predictable, albeit not less painful, outcome of the emancipation reform, the failure of the reform to sever the links of social and economic dependency between the former serfs and their masters became the reform's single biggest frustration. Evidently, the design of the reform intended to protect the financial welfare of the landlords to the largest extent possible. In that sense, the peasants' continued and legally enforced dependence on the landlords was an act of deliberate legislative planning rather than an unintended consequence of otherwise noble intentions. The emancipation scheme as outlined in the Local Provisions was complicated and consisted of

⁶⁹ Avaliani, 421.

⁷⁰ Avaliani, 423.

several phases. The attainment of personal freedom for the serfs followed the so-called “waiting period” of two years, during which the peasants and their former masters had to draw-up and notarize a statutory charter (*ustavnaia gramota*) establishing the terms of the peasants’ obligations to their landlords and setting the size of the peasant land allotments. During this waiting period, former serfs were legally required to fulfill the same labor and monetary obligations to their masters that had been required before the reform. Once a statutory charter was completed and put into effect, the peasants entered into the next phase of the reform and acquired the status of “temporarily obligated” peasants (*vremennobiazannye krest’iane*). This law required the temporarily obligated peasants to remain on and cultivate their land allotments for a period of nine years, thus guaranteeing the landlords a stable source of income for at least a decade. The temporarily obligated peasants had the option of buying their land allotments, which technically remained the property of their landlords, by drawing up a land purchase deed (*vykupnaia sdelka*). However, the purchase of land could not proceed without the explicit and legally notarized consent of the landlord.

The law governing the process of the peasant land redemption in the Tiflis Governorate came into effect on August 14, 1868.⁷¹ It was a complex document that contained 166 articles. The rules for the redemption operation were approved by the Caucasus Viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov, and applied within the administrative jurisdiction of the Tiflis and Kutaisi Governorates. Exceptions were made for Mingrelia⁷² and three *uezds* in the Kutaisi

⁷¹ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 43, part 2, № 46195.

⁷² The Principality of Mingrelia, or Samegrelo (სამეგრელო), came under Russian protectorate in 1803 but enjoyed autonomy in its internal affairs. The autonomous status of

Governorate: Zugdidi, Senakhi, and Lechkhumi. The peculiarities of serfdom, landownership, and geography in these territories required separate land redemption provisions.

According to the land redemption scheme, the government paid the landlords the full cost of the redemption loan (*vykupnaia ssuda*). The loan covered the cost of the peasant land allotments as well as the household plot but explicitly excluded gardens (*maglari*) and vineyards (*dablari*), which the peasants could buy from the landlords through a separate purchase agreement. Also ineligible for redemption were the communal pastures and grazing lands.⁷³ The law permitted the peasants to purchase the land either as an individual household or as a commune. Finally, drafting the land purchase deed between the peasants and landlords required the oversight of peace arbitrators and was required to be written either in Russian or a “local” language with a certified Russian translation.

The law set the rates for land redemption at 15 silver rubles for each plot of land equal in size to one day of plowing in non-irrigated areas⁷⁴ and at 30 silver rubles for each plot of land equal in size to one day of plowing for irrigated areas. The amount of the entire redemption loan could not exceed 350 silver rubles per each peasant household.⁷⁵ The redemption loan

the principality was abolished in 1867 and the territory was absorbed into Russian Empire as a regular administrative unit under direct control of Russian government.

⁷³ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 43, part 2, № 46195, 165. The government delayed sale of the communal pastures and grazing lands and planned to draft separate rules meant to regulate the use of the communal pastures among peasants and the landlords.

⁷⁴ The law provided for exemption for the non-irrigated lands that were known for exceptional fertility. For these lands, the peasants could expect to pay up to 30 silver rubles for each plot of land equal in size to one day of plowing. See, PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 43, part 2, № 46195, 170.

⁷⁵ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 43, part 2, № 46195, 170. For remote and less fertile mountainous areas of Gori and Dusheti *uezd*, the maximum amount of the redemption loan

was financed at 6 percent of annual interest with the scheduled payments spread over 49 years. Thus, a peasant household whose land allotment and household plot were valued at 350 silver rubles, would have paid 1,029 silver rubles (nearly three times the cost of the original loan) at the end of the loan payment term. After a peasant household finalized the terms of the land purchase deed, they acquired the status of a peasant proprietor.

The government's hopes for a gradual transition of the temporarily obligated peasants into landowning peasant proprietors did not come to pass. The law's own provisions undermined its intent. Namely, according to the law, the landlords were not required to agree to enter into a land purchase agreement with their temporarily obligated peasants. In fact, the landlords had little incentive to do so. By keeping the peasants in an ambiguous limbo of temporary obligation, the landlords retained nominal rights to the ownership of the land on their estates and continued to receive regular payments of rent from the peasants. As a result, if in European Russia only about 14 percent of the former serfs were still temporarily obligated in 1879, in Georgia that number stood at a staggering 70 percent.⁷⁶ The passage of time did not remedy the problem. In 1904, there were "2,702 landlords who still controlled 17,467 households of the temporarily obligated peasants" in Georgia.⁷⁷ The situation was untenable. After the Revolution of 1905, the unresolved problem of the peasants "temporary obligation" (which acquired the signs of a permanent institution) attracted the attention of the Russian Duma. The outcome of the legislative debates in the Duma was the adoption in 1912 of legislation that

was set at 250 silver rubles for the peasants paying the *obrok* in cash and in kind and at 180 silver rubles for the peasants who paid their *obrok* only in kind.

⁷⁶ Suny, 114.

⁷⁷ Avaliani, 427.

abrogated the peasants' status as temporarily obligated to their landlords and required both the peasants and the landlords to conclude a land purchase deed (*vykupnaia sdelka*).⁷⁸ This long overdue legislative initiative, which was meant to dismantle the last shameful vestiges of serfdom in Georgia, was suspended indefinitely at the onset of World War I in 1914.

From the early stages of the Peasant Reform, the emancipation of the serfs in the Caucasus was portrayed as a gift bestowed on the peasants by the grace and benevolence of the Georgian nobles and the Russian monarchy. The language of the Emancipation Manifesto itself explicitly called on the peasants to recognize the nobility's great sacrifice and display gratitude. Recognition of personal freedom as a natural and inalienable right of all human beings did not play any prominent role in the imperial discourse of the Russian administration, much less in the statements of the Georgian gentry. In the eyes of the Georgian nobility, serfdom remained an inviolable prerogative despite its evident anachronism and economic inefficiency. Surrendering this prerogative was presented as a painful concession for which the peasants should have been grateful as well as willing to endure restrictions on their mobility and financial independence. Hence, the outcome of the Peasant Reform in the Tiflis Governorate unequivocally proved the Russian imperial government's commitment to protecting the welfare of the Georgian nobility, despite the most adverse consequences for the welfare of the Georgian peasantry.

⁷⁸ RGIA, f. 565, op. 6, d. 21489, ll. 27-30 ob.

CHAPTER 3

The Quiet Abolition:

the 1867 “Peasant Reform” in Dagestan (Dagestanskaia Oblast’)



Figure 4. Map of Dagestan (Dagestanskaia oblast') in 1866. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 37.

Introduction

Reflecting on the history of Dagestan at the turn of the nineteenth century, a historian of Dagestan, Evgenii Kozubskii, offered an insightful evaluation of the striking limits of Russian

authority in the region. Kozubskii concluded that at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the territories that comprised the administrative borders of Dagestanskaia oblast' the imperial government exercised effective political control only in the strategically important port-city of Derbent.¹ Then, in 1839 direct Russian control was extended to the Samurskii okrug in the south of Dagestan.² The government ruled over the rest of Dagestan through a network of indigenous vassal ruling elites who declared loyalty to Russian state and relied on its army to control the native communities. The tenuous nature of Russian rule in Dagestan is hardly surprising.

Large parts of Dagestan were engulfed in intermittent wars during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. First, the Russian Empire fought two wars against Qajar ran from 1804–1813 and 1826–1828. Then, the emergence of the Caucasus Imamate in 1829 marked the beginning of the protracted and bloody Murid War (1829–1859). Caught between a rock and a hard place, the ruling elites of Dagestan had to pick between accepting the suzerainty of the Russian Empire or submitting to the theocratic aspirations of the Imamate. As battles were won or lost, the political loyalties of the indigenous rulers shifted quickly. Consequently, numerous principalities and khanates of Dagestan accepted titular suzerainty of the Russian state. Upon accession to the empire, the khanates were largely left to their own devices. Their rulers enjoyed absolute political autonomy in its internal affairs with purely “nominal” oversight from the tsarist authorities.³ Such absentee imperialism proved a mutually beneficial

¹ Evgeniĭ Kozubskii, *Pamiatnaia Knizhka Dagestanskoĭ oblasti* (Temir-Khan-Shura: Russkaia Tipografiia, 1895), 1-2.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*,

arrangement for both the ruling elites of Dagestan and Russian generals. The Dagestani khans and *beks* secured a royal pledge that their aristocratic privileges and feudal prerogatives would remain inviolable for as long as they accepted the Russian dominion. The Russians, in turn, obtained crucial guarantees of peace, order, and loyalty to the Tsar. It was not an ideal solution. Nevertheless, it allowed the state to advance its imperial objectives with far less resistance from the indigenous communities. Thus, until the end of the Murid War in 1859, the Russian authority in Dagestan was remarkably diluted.

The palpable tenuousness of Russian sovereignty in Dagestan shielded the indigenous institutions of slavery and social dependency from outside interference. The Russian pledges to protect the political and social status quo in Dagestan's khanates stabilized and reinforced existing hierarchies of power in the region. More than that, the backing of the Russian bayonets allowed indigenous rulers to strengthen their control over Dagestan's population and extract even more feudal dues from the common folk.⁴ The Russian authorities recognized in the feudal authority of the Dagestani khans and *beks* a familiar social anchor that could firmly plant the elemental foundations of imperial rule in the region. Therefore, the imperial administration took it upon itself to protect and foster this class of indigenous aristocrats – the incipient bedrock of the Russian monarchy in the North Caucasus. In doing so, the state tacitly accepted the legitimacy of indigenous slavery in Dagestan, as long as it did not involve Christian subjects. And even when it did involve Christian subjects, the tsarist authorities reacted with notable reluctance. The symbiosis of class, privilege, and imperial politics ensured that slavery and other forms of unfree labor in Dagestan survived largely intact well into the late 1860s, when the Russian authorities embarked on a momentous campaign to

⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

abolish the institution of slavery in Dagestan. This abolitionist campaign, as I will demonstrate in this section, failed to emancipate thousands of Dagestani peasants from the yoke of feudal dependency and instead protected the privileged status of the indigenous aristocracy.

The Caucasus Viceroy, Prince Baratinskiĭ, decreed the creation of Dagestanskaia oblast' in 1860 in the wake of the Murid War.⁵ This new administrative district in the northeastern Caucasus was established by reorganizing the administrative boundaries of the former administrative territories of Prikaspiĭskiĭ kraĭ, Derbentskaia Guberniaĭ, and Derbentskiĭ uезд. The oblast' was governed in accordance with the special precepts of the Military-Civil Administration, which divided Dagestan into four military districts: Northern, Southern, Middle, and Upper Dagestan. The conventions of the Military-Civil Administration prevailed in Dagestan until 1917. The administrative subdivision of Dagestanskaia oblast' reflected the spectacular socio-political diversity of the region. It included *okrugs* – a common unit of administrative division that had been prevalent in the Russian Empire, *naibstvo* – a territorial-administrative unit established in the North Caucasus Imamate, and *utsmiĭstvo* and khanates – autonomous feudal principalities, which accepted Russian suzerainty at different points in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The oblast' experienced additional territorial-administrative changes in the 1860s, which marked the government's resolve to abrogate the traditional political autonomy of the feudal khanates of Dagestan and further integrate the

⁵ AKAK, vol. 12, № 377 (Tiflis, 1904), 434-437. See also, Mark Kosven, *Ocherki Istorii Dagestana*, vol. 1 (Makhachkala, 1957), 238-239. Shingarova, "Izmeneniia v administrativnom upravlenii nakanune obrazovaniia Dagestanskoĭ oblasti," in *Vestnik Dagestanskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 2 (2014): 15-20.

region into the social and legal landscape of the Russian Empire. Thus, between 1864 and 1867, the tsarist government abolished the Kiurin Khanate, Avar Khanate, Mekhtulin Khanate, Prsulakskoe Naibstvo, and the Shamkhalate of Tarki.⁶ Finally, starting from 1866, the fortress Temir-Khan-Shura⁷ became the administrative capital of Dagestanskaia oblast'.⁸

In 1865, on the eve of the abolitionist reforms, the population of Dagestanskaia oblast' stood at approximately 449,534 people.⁹ The social composition of Dagestanskaia oblast' was as diverse as it was complex. The complete account of the complicated web of social relations in various districts of Dagestan in the nineteenth century merits a separate monograph. In plain terms, at the top of the social hierarchy of Dagestani society stood the indigenous ruling elites who held such titles as khan, *shamkhal*, *utsmiï*, prince, or *bek*. These ruling elites formed the largest landowning class in Dagestan. The accumulation of large landholdings in the hands of the indigenous nobility happened gradually during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the shortsighted supervision of the Russian imperial government. The common folk protested the usurpation of the land, but to no avail.

Of particular importance to the history of slavery and feudal servitude in Dagestan was the estate of the *beks*. This class of landed aristocrats emerged over a period that spanned

⁶ It is important to remember that the dissolution of the khanates' autonomy did not mean complete dispossession of the ruling dynasties. On the contrary, the Russian government made sure to compensate the khans and their courtiers with large estates, lifetime state pensions, cash grants, military ranks, aristocratic titles, etc. For details see Mark Kosven, *Ocherki Istorii Dagestana*, vol. 1 (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1957), 242.

⁷ Present-day Buñaksk, the Republic of Dagestan.

⁸ By 1867 the administrative borders of Dagestanskaia oblast' had stabilized and consisted of nine okrugs: Avarskii, Andiiskii, Gunibskii, Darginiskii, Kazikumskii, Kaïtago-Tabasaranskii, Kiurinskii, Samurskii, and Temir-Khan-Shurinskii. The okrugs, in turn, were further divided into 42 *naibstvo*.

⁹ N.V. "Sostav naseleniia Dagestanskoï oblasti," in SSKG, vol. 8 (Tiflis, 1875), 10.

several decades in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was a common practice for the khans of Dagestan to distribute landholdings or entire villages into the conditional custodianship of their family members and political allies. The men who effectively ruled these villages held the title of a *bek*. These *beks* were entitled to a variety of feudal dues as a form of recompense for administrative services, the maintenance of public order and security, and the administration of justice, all of which they were expected to provide to the residents of villages under their control. Although *beks* owned neither the land nor the people inhabiting these villages, they had the right to pass on their title and feudal privileges to a male heir. This system perpetuated the ruling status of a *bek*'s family and established the foundation of patrimonial inheritance. With time, Dagestani *beks* asserted a greater degree of control over the common folk and the dependent estates, including the slaves. This process occurred in several stages.¹⁰ First, *beks* curtailed the peasants' mobility by requiring peasants to sell their houses, barns, mills, etc., only to residents of the same village. This restriction imposed significant limitations on the peasants' ability to sell their property and raise capital to establish a new homestead elsewhere in the region. Next, *beks* gradually imposed numerous restrictions on the peasants' movement. For example, *beks* required peasants to obtain permission to settle in another village. Such permission was given only after peasants surrendered all immovable property to the *bek*. The prospect of giving up one's possessions without any compensation and moving into new lands with little resources to start a new homestead was no doubt unnerving for many peasants. The peasants' attachment to the land encouraged *beks* to impose multiple and often arbitrary feudal duties, including the right to

¹⁰ Gidul'ianova, "Soslovno-pozemel'snyĭ vopros i raiatskaia zavisimost' v Dagestane," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* № 2 (1901): 77.

posthumously confiscate the peasants' entire property in the absence of male heirs and take the female members as household servants, essentially enslaving them.¹¹ Some Dagestani *beks* instituted a particularly onerous rule that required peasants to present a *bek* with a cash or in-kind payment to secure permission to enter marriage. The Russian authorities rarely challenged *beks*' authority over peasants and slaves alike as long as *beks* remained loyal to the state. Furthermore, a decree issued on the orders of Emperor Nicholas I on 6 December 1846, explicitly recognized the Dagestani *beks* and other "Muslims of the highest estates" in the Caucasus as having complete authority over villages granted to them either by the government or khans at the time of their accession to the empire.¹² Thus, the Russian government in Saint Petersburg and Tiflis officially invested the Dagestani *beks* with patrimonial dominion over their villages and created a new class of land owners in the region. As a result, thousands of peasants in Dagestan, many of whom had enjoyed unencumbered personal freedom, acquired subservient personal status and lost their land at the stroke of the imperial pen.

The personally-free peasants, known as *uzden*', constituted the largest social estate in Dagestan in numerical terms. The rural peasant communities would often unite into self-governing units that came to be known as *dzhamaats*. This word derived its origins from the Arabic word *jama'at* (جماعة) meaning "association" or "group." Each *dzhamaat* consisted of

¹¹ Gidul'ianova, "Soslovno-pozemel'snyĭ vopros i raiatskaia zavisimost' v Dagestane," 78.

¹² *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*. Vtoroe sobranie. 1825 – 1881 (St. Petersburg, 1847), (hereafter PSZ), vol. 21, № 20672.

several familial clans – *tukhumi*.¹³ Every adult male, excluding guests and slaves, enjoyed equal rights and participated in the collective decision-making process that affected the life of a *dzhamaat* community.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy stood the customary or *adat*-recognized dependent estates: the *raiaty* (*раяты*) and *chagary* (*чагары*) – enslaved or enserfed people whose personal status and obligations were regulated by the customary laws of Dagestan. Next, the non-customary or *adat*-less slaves: *kuly* (*кулы*) and *karavashi* (*каравашу*) – the enslaved men and women whose treatment depended entirely on the mercy of their owners.¹⁴

The *raiaty* constituted an estate of personally-free peasants whose subaltern social status required them to perform a variety of feudal obligations and labor duties for the benefit of the landed elites.¹⁵ Some *raiaty* owned land. Others lived and worked on the land that belonged to the families of Dagestani *khans* and *beks*. The *raiaty* were restricted in their mobility: they could not leave their dwellings and settle elsewhere in the region without permission of the landowner. If a landowner allowed a *raiat* family to leave their village, the *raiaty* were required to surrender all of their immovable property to the landowner. The terms of the *raiaty* servitude varied greatly from one Dagestani village to another. Finally, the institution of *raiatstvo* had an element of ethno-religious particularity as the entire communities of the Tats

¹³ Vladimir Bobrovnikov and Irina Babich, *Severnyĭ Kavkaz v Sostave Rossiĭskoi Imperii* (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2007), 338-339. Ėnver Kisriev, *Islam i Vlast' v Dagestane* (Moskva: OGI, 2004), 20-21.

¹⁴ For an overview of various forms of personal feudal dependency in the nineteenth-century Caucasus, see *Istoriia Dagestana*, vol. 2, ed. Gadzhiali Daniialov (Moskva: Nauka, 1968), 57-61.

¹⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 39-39 ob.

(people of Iranian descent) in the southern Dagestan and the Juhuro (Mountain Jews) had the status of *raiaty* and were regarded as subservient to the Dagestani khans and *beks*.

The estate of *chagary* stood slightly above the *kuly* and *karavashy*.¹⁶ The estate was comprised of enslaved men, women, and children whose owners relinquished them from household service to be settled in compact communities on the lands belonging to their masters.¹⁷ The *chagary* tilled the slaveowners' land, grew crops, tended livestock, collected firewood, and performed other services for the benefit of their owners. Despite not having any personal rights, the *chagary* did enjoy a certain degree of personal autonomy because they lived in dwellings at a physical distance from their owners. Of course, such autonomy had its limits as the Dagestani slaveowners could sell their *chagary* at any given moment.¹⁸

The *kuly* and *karavash* comprised the ranks of the *adat*-less slaves.¹⁹ The titles *kul* and *karavashka* signaled gendered status of enslavement, with *kul* indicating a male slave and *karavashka* indicating a female slave. The total number of enslaved *kul* and *karavash* in Dagestan before abolition was approximately 3,987 people.²⁰ However, most Russian historians of the North Caucasus agree that this number is a workable approximation rather

¹⁶ For a comprehensive account of *chagary* as a social estate in the nineteenth-century Dagestan, see Bagomed Aliev, "Chagary kak odno iz sosloviĭ Dagestanskogo zavisimogo krest'ianstva (XVII – pervaiia polovina XIX veka)," *Vestnik Instituta IAE* no. 3 (2009): 15-24.

¹⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 38.

¹⁸ For a thorough archival reference on the customary law regarding the purchase and sale of the *chagars* in Dagestan, see SEA, f. 1087, op. 1, d. 272, ll. 1-18.

¹⁹ TsGA RD, f. 126, op. 2, d. 74 (g), l. 1.

²⁰ TsGA RD, f. 126, op. 2, d. 71, l. 7. Khidir Ramazanov, a historian of the North Caucasus of Dagestani descent, put the number of the *kuls* and *karavashi* in Dagestan on the eve of abolition at 4,830 people (this number included the enslaved from the Kumyksiĭ okrug), see Khidir Ramazanov, *Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Dagestane*, vol. 2 (Makhachkala, 1957), 99.

than a precise estimate of the enslaved population in the region. The largest concentration of enslaved and otherwise personally-dependent communities on the eve of abolition was located in Northern Dagestan, where the *adat*-less slaves, *kul* and *karavash*, constituted eighty percent of all dependent estates in Dagestanskaia oblast'.²¹

Finally, the Shi'a and Sunni 'ulama' constituted another distinct social estate in Dagestan. The 'ulama' possessed a palpable degree of spiritual and, to some extent, political authority in the eyes of the Dagestani populace. The 'ulama' performed religious rites, adjudicated disputes that involved the questions of marriage, child custody, and inheritance, and oversaw waqf properties.

The first Head (*nachal'nik*) of Dagestanskaia oblast' was Prince Levan Melikov. He held this post until 1880 and played a central role in the planning and implementation of the land reform and abolition of slavery in Dagestan in the late 1860s. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Prince Melikov expressed serious concerns about the plight of the enslaved communities in Dagestan in his letter to the then-Caucasus Viceroy, Prince Bariatinskiĭ, as early as 1861.²² At the initiative of Prince Melikov, Dagestan became the first region in the northeastern Caucasus where the Russian imperial government experimented with curbing the domestic slave trade. They did this by forbidding the break-up of family units when selling slaves and banning the sale of enslaved children without the explicit permission of the children's parents. In March 1865, the Caucasus Viceroy issued directives restricting the domestic slave trade, making the sale of enslaved people outside of the administrative borders

²¹ Ėsadze, *Istoricheskaia Zapiska ob Upravlenii Kavkazom*, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1907), 471.

²² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 2-7. See also, Semën Ėsadze, *Istoricheskaia Zapiska ob Upravlenii Kavkazom*, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1907), 470.

of Dagestanskaia oblast' illegal.²³ In addition, the government required that all transactions involving the sale or purchase of enslaved men, women, and children be registered in the Russian courts. These toothless anti-slavery measures were the only comprehensive policies that the government implemented in Dagestan until the abolition of 1866.

The creation of the Committee for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus in June 1866 served as a legislative fulcrum for the abolition of slavery in Dagestan.²⁴ Writing to the Chair of the Committee, General-Adjutant Kartsev, on 24 October 1866, Prince Melikov informed the authorities in Tiflis that, in accordance with the orders from the Emperor and the Caucasus Viceroy, he decreed that an ad hoc estate-land commission (*soslovno-pozemel'naia komissii*) be established. The commission was charged with the tasks of investigating the land tenure rights and various forms of personal and administrative dependency of the indigenous communities in Dagestan, as well as proposing feasible legislative solutions for the abolition of all forms of servitude in the region.²⁵ Prince Melikov assured Kartsev that the commission's findings would be delivered in Tiflis at the earliest opportunity.²⁶

Abolition in Dagestan: Institutions and Outcomes

Rumors of the impending abolition of slavery in Dagestan began to circulate in the early 1860s and reached their peak in 1864, following the emancipation of enserfed people in Georgia. These rumors appear to have discouraged the slave trade in Dagestan. Slaveowners

²³ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 98, ll. 3-3 ob.

²⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 16 ob.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

became reluctant to purchase new enslaved people out of fear of losing both their money and their access to slave labor. The slaveowners were, of course, concerned that abolition might spell financial ruin. Nevertheless, they displayed no hint of organized resistance to the government's plans to abolish slavery. On the contrary, the rumors of the impending abolition reportedly prompted some slaveowners to manumit their slaves on their own terms before the Russians ordered compulsory emancipation.²⁷

Furthermore, unlike the developments in the northwestern Caucasus and the neighboring Chechnya and Ossetia, in Dagestan the government's plans to emancipate the enslaved people did not instigate calls for *hijra*. The policies of the local administration were an important contributing factor to the comparatively small number of Dagestani *muhajirs*. The government granted permission to leave Dagestan for the Ottoman Empire with parsimony. It also exiled agitators who called for a mass exodus to Turkey and generally discouraged the population of Dagestan from considering abandoning their native lands.²⁸ The comparatively small number of Dagestani *muhajirs* meant that fewer enslaved households were forced to follow their owners into the Ottoman Empire.

²⁷ "Osvobozhdenie bezpravnykh rabov v Dagestane," in SSKG, vol 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 49, 51. According to research conducted in the Russian imperial archives by Semën Ėsadze, in 1867, of the 138 slaves that the government had registered across settlements in the Southern, Middle, and the Western Dagestan, 83 had been manumitted without the burden of redemption payments. See, Ėsadze, *Istoricheskaia Zapiska ob Upravlenii Kavkazom*, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1907), 472.

²⁸ "Kratkiĭ Otchet Nachal'nika Dagestanskoĭ oblasti so Vremeni ee Obrazovaniia po 1 Noiabria 1869 goda," in *Emigratsiia Dagestantsev v Osmanskuiu Imperiiu (Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov)*, ed. Amirkhan Magomeddadaev (Makhachkala, 2000), 64-69. Dzhasmina Akhmedova, "Migratsiia Chasti Narodov Dagestana v Osmanskuiu Imperiiu vo vtoroi polovine XIX- nachale XX v.," *Vestnik Tambovskogo Universiteta* 21, no. 10 (2016): 82-88. Abdulaeva, *Vnutripoliticheskaia Situatsiia v Dagestane v 70-90 gg. XIX veka i Migratsionnye Protsessy* (Makhachkala, 2006), 110-111, 117.

The abolition of slavery in Dagestan had several unique characteristics that set it apart from all the regions in the North Caucasus. First, the Dagestani *adats*, rather than Russian-created rules, governed the process of the emancipation of the enslaved people in Dagestanskaia oblast'. Second, the emancipation occurred without any resistance from slaveowners. The government selected 1 August 1867 as the beginning of the abolitionist campaign in Dagestan.²⁹ On that day, imperial authorities invited the Dagestani aristocracy and representatives from “the common folk” to attend a formal ceremony in the administrative capital of Dagestan – Temir-Khan-Shura. There, Prince Melikov read the manifesto of the Tsar-Emperor announcing the abolition of slavery in the region. According to official records, the slaveowners took the news of abolition in stride.³⁰ Reportedly, thirty-five slaveowners who attended the gathering publicly declared their intention to manumit 104 of their slaves unconditionally.³¹

²⁹ “Osvobozhdenie bezpravnykh rabov v Dagestane,” in SSKG, vol 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 50.

³⁰ Ibid., 49. Russia’s victory in the Murid War (1829-1859) in the northeastern Caucasus and the decades of bloodshed and destruction likely crushed the popular will to resist Russian imperial policies in Dagestan. Hence, an uprising against the government’s plans to emancipate slaves would have likely been regarded as a futile endeavor. In addition, the government’s traditional concerns for the wellbeing of the indigenous elites gave the slave-owning aristocracy and landowners good reason to expect generous compensation for the loss of their enslaved people.

³¹ Ibid., 51. Several important factors had contributed to the slaveowners’ reported acquiescence. First, archival sources indicate that the slaveowners had long been aware of the government’s plans to abolish slavery in Dagestan. Therefore, many slaveowners took proactive steps to sell their slaves or offer the enslaved people conditional manumission, which allowed them to pay for their freedom through installments earned from wage labor or in-kind payments. Second, unlike other regions of the North Caucasus, where unconditional manumission of the enslaved people happened infrequently, it appears that the practice of mandatory manumission of slaves after several years of service as prescribed by shari‘a was common in Dagestan. Of course, this does not mean that the influence of Dagestani *adats* (customary laws) was less prevalent in Dagestan than elsewhere in the North Caucasus. On the contrary, the *adat* in Dagestan remained a critical component of the indigenous judicial

The imperial government in Dagestan refrained from drafting any policies that guided the process of emancipation of the enslaved people in the region. Instead, the authorities invited the slaveowners to enter “amicable agreements” with their slaves on their own using the Dagestani customary laws as a template for drafting the terms of emancipation.³² This decision made abolition in Dagestan unique. In all other regions of the North Caucasus, the Russian administration introduced a comprehensive set of rules that established the terms of emancipation of the enslaved people. Although the drafting of the Russian rules often happened with the direct participation of the slaveowners, the tsarist officials retained veto power over these provisions. This did not happen in Dagestan. The slaveowners had the freedom to deploy the conventions of Dagestani customary law and dictate the terms of emancipation for their slaves without oversight from the government. Prince Melikov gave the slaveowners three months to finalize the emancipation arrangements.³³ Melikov warned that any slaveowners who failed to reach such an agreement after three months would have to abide by the will of the Caucasus Viceroy and accept unspecified Russian terms of emancipation. The government’s decision to embrace the indigenous customary law was particularly advantageous for the slaveowners, who accepted the Russian proposal with alacrity.

system. Nevertheless, historically, Dagestan enjoyed the status of the center of Islamic learning in the North Caucasus. Therefore, the precepts of Islamic law, including regulation of slavery, had high currency in Dagestan. See, Ènver Kisriev, *Islam i Vlast’ v Dagestane* (Moskva: OGI, 2004), 20-22.

³² “Osvobozhdenie bezpravnykh rabov v Dagestane,” in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 51.

³³ Ibid.

The emancipation of the enslaved communities proceeded apace in Dagestanskaia oblast' in the fall of 1867. First to be emancipated were the estate of *chagary*. The *chagar* community had a particularly large presence in the Mekhtulin Khanate and the Shamkhalate of Tarki. The men, women, and children belonging to this estate received unconditional personal freedom following the government's decision to dissolve the two khanates in 1867. When the khans were stripped of their governing prerogatives and titles, the *chagary* were automatically relinquished from the obligation to perform duties ascribed to their social estate. The government also permitted the *chagary* to leave the land of their owners and join other rural communities on equal terms with Dagestani *uzden'* (personally-free peasants).³⁴ In short, approximately 1,120 *chagary* of both genders received personal freedom in Dagestanskaia oblast' in 1867.³⁵ Although the *chagary* received personal freedom without the burden of redemption payments, very few among them received an allotment of land from the government.³⁶ Moreover, the *chagary* were unlikely to leave the lands of their former owners because doing so would require surrendering whatever little immovable property they had managed to acquire over the years. Therefore, the majority of the former *chagary* stayed put and remained subordinate to the will of their former masters. A petition written on behalf of the community of the former *chagary* in the village of Gelli in 1871 illustrates the pitiful plight

³⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3170, l. 4.

³⁵ Èl'mira Dalgat, "Transformatsiia sotsial'nykh otnosheniï v Dagestane v usloviakh modernizatsii Rossii v 60-70 g. XIX veka," *Vestnik Instituta IAE*, no. 2 (2014): 60-65. Alekseï Narochnitskiï, *Istoriia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza, konets XVIII v. – 1917 god* (Moskva: Nauka, 1988), 275.

³⁶ Gadzhiali Daniialov, *Istoriia Dagestana*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Nauka, 1968), 138.

of the emancipated peasantry in Dagestan.³⁷ The peasants sought the government's protection against "abuses and oppression" of the village's *bek*—their former owner. The government rejected the peasants' appeal, stating that until the authorities finalized the land reform in the region, the peasants remained liable for payment of all dues and performance of labor obligations to the *bek*.

The next order of the abolitionist business was emancipation of the *kuly* and *karavashy*. The government reports indicated that in the first month of the abolitionist campaign, 340 enslaved men, women, and children had been unconditionally manumitted by their owners.³⁸ The less fortunate enslaved people entered "amicable" emancipation agreements with their owners. These agreements stipulated the terms of the slaves' gradual liberation using the norms of Dagestani customary law. The official figures indicate that, on average, enslaved males were obligated to pay between one hundred and 180 silver rubles as redemption payment. Enslaved females had to pay up to one hundred silver rubles as redemption sum. Finally, enslaved children of both genders were required to pay between fifty and one hundred silver rubles in redemption payments. The cost of the emancipation for children was estimated based on the children's age. The enslaved *kuly* and *karavashy* could fulfill the terms of their final and irrevocable emancipation either by making payments in agreed-upon installments earned from wage labor or remaining in the service of their masters for a period of four to six years while performing unpaid labor. To aid the most destitute among the formerly enslaved people to obtain their freedom and establish a homestead of their own, the government

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Osvobozhdenie bezpravnykh rabov v Dagestane," in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 52.

earmarked a modest sum of two thousand and four hundred silver rubles.³⁹ In addition, the government relinquished the formerly enslaved people from the responsibility to pay taxes for a period of eight years.⁴⁰ In the early months of 1868, the government announced that all *kuly* and *karavashy* registered in Dagestan had received personal freedom and arranged the terms of their emancipation with their respective owners. This announcement formally concluded the abolition of slavery in Dagestan. However, in reality the *kholopskiĭ vopros* was far from resolved.

Conclusion

The 1867 abolition in Dagestan ignored the plight of nearly seventy thousand *raiaty* and some dependent *uzdens'* whose subaltern personal status remained unchanged.⁴¹ Ever willing to mollify the financial anxieties of the Dagestani ruling elites, Russian authorities made the fateful decision to postpone addressing the subservient status of the *raiaty* by refusing to implement a comprehensive land reform in the region. The exceptions to this rule were the territories of the former Prisulakskoe Naibstvo, Mekhtulin Khanate, and Shamkhalate of Tarki where the government facilitated the partial, albeit systematic, emancipation of nearly twenty-five thousand *uzdens'*, *chagary*, and *raiaty*, relinquishing them from payment of feudal dues to the khans and distributing land among peasants and the former slaves.⁴² However, even in

³⁹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3170, l. 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Khidir Ramazanov, "K voprosu o bor'be raiat i zavisimykh uzdeneĭ za likvidatsiiu krepostnicheskikh otnosheniĭ," *Uchĕnye Zapiski*, vol. 5 (Makhachkala, 1958), 161-179.

⁴² Gadzhiali Daniialov, *Istoriia Dagestana*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Nauka, 1968), 127, 134. Mark Kosven, *Ocherki Istorii Dagestana*, vol. 1 (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1957), 241-242.

these regions the emancipation of peasants was only a partial one. The *raiaty* belonging to the *beks* in the Shamkhalate of Tarki, for example, remained just as subservient to their owners as they were before 1866. The only region of Dagestanskaia oblast' that witnessed a complete overhaul of the land tenure rights was the territory of the former Prisulakskoe Naibstvo, where the land reform and abolition of slavery occurred in tandem.⁴³ Of the thirty thousand *desiatin* of available arable land in the Naibstvo, emancipated peasants received "14,330," which was equivalent to a land allotment of 17 *desiatin* per peasant household on average.⁴⁴ The question of land tenure rights in other regions of Dagestanskaia oblast' was deferred indefinitely pending the collection of more data and surveying of lands by numerous estate-land committees. The inevitable legal ambiguities that emerged in the wake of the government's reluctance to survey, demarcate, and determine the peasants' land tenure rights further emboldened the Dagestani *beks* to claim ownership over all arable lands, which had formerly been under their administrative jurisdiction. The government's passivity signaled *de facto* recognition of the aristocrats' entitlement to the labor of their peasants and the land on which the peasants lives and worked.

Furthermore, rather than severely curbing the feudal entitlements of the *beks* in relation to the labor obligations and dues of the *raiaty*, the government formally codified the *raiaty*'s feudal duties in the form of the official "Instructions."⁴⁵ Russian authorities drafted these Instructions using exclusively oral testimonies of the Dagestani landowners. The codification

⁴³ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Vladilen Gadzhiev, *Razvitie feodal'nykh otnosheniĭ u narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1988), 230.

afforded the Dagestani aristocracy with new legal leverage to reinforce its authority over the dependent peasants and deploy the punitive arm of the Russian government to compel the *raiaty*'s subordination. Moreover, in addition to performing feudal obligations for the benefit of *beks*, the *raiaty* were also liable for paying government taxes. In short, the government's failure to emancipate the *raiaty* from the feudal authority of *beks* effectively reversed the abolitionist progress in the northeastern Caucasus and annulled the spirit of the Great Reforms in Dagestan.

The *raiaty* and the dependent *uzdeni* protested their subservient social status by petitioning the imperial government, refusing to perform feudal services or fulfill payment of dues stipulated by the law, and even organizing collective uprisings against the feudal authority of *beks*. In turn, *beks* did not shy away from using crude force and local militias to punish the peasants' insubordination and confiscate the peasants' private property in lieu of the feudal dues.⁴⁶ The unrelenting peasant unrest prompted the Russian Duma to launch an inquiry into what the legislators described as "abnormal land relations" among the population of Dagestan in 1910.⁴⁷ The Duma deputies labeled the institution of *raiatstvo* as "archaic," "oppressive," and a "relic of the past." Unequivocally condemning the abusiveness of the *beks*, thirty-seven deputies of the Duma signed a petition demanding that the government in Tiflis and Saint-Petersburg take appropriate action to address the abuses of *beks* in Dagestani villages and abrogate the institution of *raiatstvo*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ RGIA, f. 1276, op. 19, d. 500, l. 3. Also, RGIA, f. 23, op. 9 d. 288.

⁴⁷ RGIA, f. 1276, op. 19, d. 500, ll. 1-26 ob.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 3-4.

The Duma's inquiries forced the government to acknowledge the festering wound of the unresolved "peasant question" in Dagestan. In 1910, Dagestan remained the only region in the Russian Empire where a significant proportion of the population continued to live in a state of personal feudal dependency to the landed aristocracy. Then Caucasus Viceroy, General Vorontsov-Dashkov, declared the situation "unacceptable."⁴⁹ Castigating preceding administrations in the Caucasus, the Viceroy declared that "it was unthinkable to call on people to participate in the life of the state, endow them with political rights, and simultaneously forsake them in the state of unfreedom."⁵⁰ The government-issued report indicated that communities of *raiaty* continued to exist in six of Dagestan's nine districts. The institution of *raiatstvo* was particularly prevalent in the southern regions of Dagestan, regions that "traditionally enjoyed no interference from the imperial government in their internal affairs."⁵¹ All in all, the government report indicated that ninety-eight villages with a total population of approximately 70,000 people remained in a state of personal feudal dependency in Dagestanskaia oblast' in 1910.⁵² Although the Viceroy acknowledged the unjust and difficult plight of the *raiaty*, he refused to offer any respite from the burden of feudal oppression. The Viceroy argued that an immediate suspension of the *raiaty*'s dependence to *beks* without compensation to the latter class, would undermine the government's authority in

⁴⁹ RGIA, f. 1276, op. 19, d. 500, l. 12.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., l. 7.

⁵² Ibid., l. 7 ob. In 1913 the communities of the *raiaty* were primarily concentrated in 95 settlements in Temir-Khan-Shura, Kaïtag-Tabasarn, Kurin, Samursk, and Avarsk okrugs of Dagestan.

the eyes of the indigenous nobility. Thus, as government officials and legislators in Saint Petersburg and Tiflis debated the future of the emancipation reform in Dagestan, the institution of *raiatstvo* was permitted to continue its dismal existence.⁵³

The long-overdue emancipation of *raiaty* and other dependent peasants in Dagestan finally occurred on 7 July 1913 when Tsar Nicholas II approved the “Law on abolition of dependency of the residents of Dagestanskaia oblast’ and the neighboring Zakatal’skiĭ okrug.” This emancipation reform relinquished nearly 90,000 *raiaty* and *uzden’* peasants from feudal dependence to the *beks*.⁵⁴ However, the emancipation was not unconditional. The law entitled *beks* to receive monetary compensation for the loss of their peasants in an amount that equaled ten times the estimated annual income of every *bek*, which was derived from the dues and labor provided by the *raiaty*.⁵⁵ The estimated cost of the *raiaty*’s emancipation amounted to 585,680 silver rubles.⁵⁶ While the government agreed to dip into state coffers to distribute the compensation to the *beks* in the form of a one-time cash grant, the former *raiaty* were required to pay this money back to the state in installments over a period of twenty years.⁵⁷ The 1913 emancipation reform once again highlighted the determination of the imperial government to protect the social prerogatives and financial interests of the indigenous elites in Dagestan. Unsurprisingly, the reform was deeply unpopular among the peasants, who resented the fact

⁵³ RGIA, f. 1276, op. 19, d. 500, l. 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid, ll. 1-14.

⁵⁵ Vladilen Gadzhiev, *Razvitie feodal’nykh otnosheniĭ u narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1988), 232.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

that they had to buy out their freedom nearly five decades after slavery and feudal servitude were supposedly abolished in the North Caucasus. However, the onset of World War I in 1914 and the tumult of the Russian revolutions in 1917 obviated the government's designs for an orderly overhaul of the anachronistic feudal conventions in Dagestan. Ripples of the Bolsheviks' coup reached the North Caucasus in the early 1920s, erasing the marks of aristocratic privilege and doing away with the last vestiges of feudal servitude in the region.

CHAPTER 4

Kholopskiĭ Vopros and Abolition

in Kumykia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Ossetia and Kabarda' (Terskaia Oblast')



Figure 5. Map of Terek Province (Terskaia oblast') in 1862. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 26.

Introduction

Terskaia oblast' (Terek province) was established as a territorial-administrative unit of the Caucasus Viceroyalty in 1860.¹ In 1862, the oblast' was reorganized further and divided into eight districts (okrugi): Kabardinskiĭ, Kumyksiĭ, Osetinskiĭ, Ingushskiĭ, Nagornyĭ, Ichkerinskiĭ, Chechenskiĭ, and Argunskiĭ. The first Head (*nachal'nik*) of the oblast' was Prince Dmitriĭ Sviatopolk-Mirskiĭ, who was succeeded by Count Lieutenant-General Mikhail Loris-Melikov in 1863. Loris-Melikov remained in this post until 1875 and played a pivotal role in the planning and execution of the abolitionist policies in Terskaia oblast'.

According to census data compiled by the Russian administration, the total population of Terskaia oblast' in 1860 was 317,678 people.² If we add to that the estimated 83,533 people who lived on the lands of the Terek Cossack Host (*terskoe kazach'e voĭsko*), the total number of people living in the region in 1860 stood at 401,211 people.³ When the Russian administration embarked on its campaign to emancipate slaves in Terskaia oblast' in 1866, the population of the region had declined significantly as a result of the exodus of the *Muhajirs* from parts of Chechnya, Ossetia, and Kabarda. Today, historians continue to debate the precise number of people who left their native villages. An episode of the resettlement tragedy that is much less researched is the plight of the enslaved men, women, and children who followed their masters into the lands of the Ottoman Empire. While we will probably never know the exact number of enslaved people who were taken by their owners from the Caucasus to be resettled in the Ottoman Empire, imperial archives provide some estimates of

¹ PSZ, *Vtoroe Sobranie*, vol. 37, № 38326, 497.

² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 107, ll. 143-143 ob.

³ *Ibid.*, l. 143 ob.

the number of enslaved people that remained in Terskaia oblast' on the eve of the abolition in 1866-1867. According to the data collected by the estate-land commission in 1866, the total number of enslaved people in Terskaia oblast' stood at approximately 26,000 "souls."⁴ The highest number of enslaved people—21,348—was registered in Kabarda.⁵ All in all, the tsarist government disbursed 152,000 silver rubles to finance the abolition of slavery in Terskaia oblast'.⁶

The demise of Shamil's Imamate in 1859 as well as the the symbolic end of the Caucasus War in 1864 allowed the imperial government to begin contemplating a series of administrative, economic, and social reforms that could create institutional anchors for the gradual integration of Northeastern Caucasian indigenous communities into the domain of the Russian Empire. However, the tsarist government faced a challenging task. The indigenous population of Terskaia oblast' was suspicious of any reforms that promised to undermine the existing social conventions of their respective communities. Pernicious, albeit largely unfounded, rumors that the Russians would impose a military draft and foist Orthodox Christianity on the predominantly Muslim communities of the region further stoked the flames of mistrust. Such persistent social volatility compelled the government to consider far-reaching reforms with extraordinary caution. This tactic was spelled out in a letter written by Loris-Melikov to the Caucasus Viceroy in December 1866, or a month into the emancipation reform of the oblast'. After outlining a brief history of Russian governance in the region from

⁴ E. S-va., "Krepostnye v Kabarde i ikh Osvobozhdenie," in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

the end of the Caucasus War, Loris-Melikov insists that to earn people's trust, the imperial government deliberately "did not touch a single foundation of life or customs of the indigenous population" for years.⁷ As such, the institution of slavery and the slave trade in Terskaia oblast' had continued to coexist with the fledgling institutions of Russian imperial governance in the region as late as 1866.

The decision to abolish slavery and the slave trade in Terskaia oblast' came on the heels of the peasant reforms in central Russia in 1861, and more importantly, on the heels of the abolition of serfdom in the Tiflis Governorate in 1864. Evidently, the abolition of serfdom prompted certain enslaved communities in Terskaia oblast' to defy the authority of their masters.⁸ Reports of the slaves' insubordination caused great concern within the Russian administration. In some okrugs, mediating the grievances of the enslaved against their owners became the primary occupation of the local authorities.⁹ Nevertheless, the government did not waver under the pressure of growing unrest and did not hesitate to use punitive measures to compel the slaves' obedience.

Perhaps the most important groundwork for the abolition of slavery in Terskaia oblast' laid by the the work of the commission for the examination of the personal status and land-tenure rights of the indigenous communities. The commission was formally established in 1863 and was chaired by a statesman of Kabardinian origins who was experienced in the affairs of the region: Dmitriï Kodzokov. Members of the commission maintained regular communication with the heads of each okrug in the oblast' and were charged with gathering

⁷ RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 40, ll. 1.

⁸ RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 39, l. 2 ob.

⁹ Ibid.

information regarding the indigenous laws and customs that informed the land-tenure system and social composition of the communities living in Terskaia oblast'. Specifically, the central authorities in Tiflis sought information on the following eight points of inquiry:

1. The specific types of personal dependency that existed among tribes in the Terskaia oblast'.
2. The land-tenure rights of every social estate in the region.
3. The quantity and types of natural and monetary obligations that different social estates were obliged to pay to their superiors according to the local customs.
4. The average cost of purchasing or leasing out land.
5. The amount of a redemption payment that a member of a dependent estate was obliged to pay to obtain his or her freedom, as well as the cost of purchasing enslaved and enserfed people or serf.
6. The customs that could serve as a legal basis for obtaining freedom for enslaved and enserfed people.
7. The number of the dependent estates in each precinct.
8. The property rights among enslaved and enserfed people..¹⁰

Answers to these questions were intended to help the imperial government tailor its emancipation policies to the unique socio-economic landscape of each district in Terskaia oblast'.

The first milestone on the road toward abolition in Terskaia oblast' occurred in August of 1864.¹¹ Following the Viceroy's orders, Loris-Melikov issued a decree that ordered the

¹⁰ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 1251, ll. 7-8.

¹¹ Evgenia S. Tyutyunina, "O Voprose Rabstva u Terskikh Kazakov," *Slavery: Theory and Practice* 3, no. 1 (2018): 42.

emancipation of all slaves in the Cossack communities of the Terek Cossack Army. Crucially, the Viceroy's orders cited the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto as the legal justification for the alignment of the Cossack communities' social organization with imperial law. The total number of slaves living in the Cossack settlements was small. Nevertheless, the sudden announcement took many of the slave-owning Cossacks by surprise, and the government provided neither instructions nor compensation to the slave-owners. The absence of clear procedural guidance encouraged some slaves to make their own conclusions regarding the emancipation decree. These slaves picked up whatever property they had in their possession and left their former owners at the first available opportunity. The sudden loss of labor and property sowed bitterness among the Cossacks.¹² Furthermore, the question of land allotment and the resettlement of slaves had no clear answers. Confusion abounded. Disputes over the division of property between former slaves and their owners multiplied. In short, the emancipation of the Cossacks' slaves became a governmentally- instigated debacle. What was worse, the legislative disarray and acrimony that accompanied the emancipation of slaves in the Cossack settlements served as a troubling illustration of what the emancipation reform could look like in the entirety of Terskaia oblast'.

To resolve the disputes, Loris-Melikov sanctioned the creation of a special interim commission chaired by Dmitrii Kodzokov. After studying the circumstances of the slaves' emancipation, Kodzokov concluded that the best course of action would be to compensate the Cossacks who lost their slaves using the funds of the Terek Cossack Army. Disputes over the slaves' property, according to Kodzokov, would be settled in accordance with *adat*—customary law. However, the Caucasus Viceroy deemed these recommendations overly

¹² TsGA RSO-A, f. 256, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 3-12.

cumbersome and expensive to implement. Instead, the Viceroy ordered that disagreements over the division of property and compensation of the slave-owning Cossacks would be mediated and settled internally by commanding officers in the Terek Cossack Army.

Although the number of emancipated slaves in the Cossack settlements was relatively small, the imperial government was rightfully concerned that the occasion could inspire false expectations of imminent emancipation among all slaves in Terskaia oblast'. Hence, in order to preempt the possibility of unrest among slaves and serfs in the non-Cossack communities, the government instructed Dmitrii Kodzokov to assemble representatives from all of the oblast's estates in the fortress of Nal'chik. Kodzokov was instructed to announce that the emancipation of slaves in the Cossack settlements carried no change in the subaltern status of slaves elsewhere in the region.¹³ Hence, slaves and serfs were ordered to continue obeying the authority of their masters. Yet, despite the official pronouncements, some slaves defied their masters' ability to control their bodies and labor.¹⁴ While these acts of resistance were sporadic and small in scale, they portended a bad omen.

The next legislative signal of the government's intention to liberate slaves in Terskaia oblast' occurred on 13 March 1865. On this day, the Caucasus Viceroy issued a directive (*predpisaniia*), which imposed geographic limits on the slave trade in the oblast'.¹⁵

¹³ TsGA KBR, f. 2, op. 1, d. 719, ll. 3-3 ob. Also see, TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 1252, ll. 1-2.

¹⁴ In one such report, Uzden' (a personally free man) by the name Mamkhegov complained to Russian authorities that his three kholops – Gully, Dzu, and Damali, refused to perform any work and when Mamkhegov accosted his slaves, they “insulted him and his son Aslanmurze and inflicted injuries”. See, TsGA KBR, f. 24, op. 1, d. 290, ll. 1-2. For another example of slaves' defiance see TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 195.

¹⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 98, ll. 3 – 3 ob.

Specifically, the directive instructed Loris-Melikov to decisively prohibit the “sale, gifting, and other forms of repudiation of slaves” by their owners outside of the administrative borders of Terskaia oblast’.¹⁶ In addition, the Viceroy’s directive required all future sales of slaves to be notarized in Russian courts (*okruzhnye sudy*). Slaves purchased without such notarization were ordered to be manumitted on the spot, without any compensation to the owner.¹⁷ The decree had important implications for the slaves’ mobility as chattel. Because Russian abolitionist measures had been implemented in different parts of the Caucasus at varying times, the slaveowners in Terskaia oblast’ could previously have attempted to take their slaves beyond Kabarda and sell them at a bigger profit elsewhere in the Caucasus (in fact, some slave-owners did exactly that). The Viceroy’s directive effectively contained the slave trade within the administrative boundaries of the oblast’.

Finally, on 11 July 1866, sixteen months after the Russian authorities implemented geographic restrictions on the slave trade, the Caucasus Mountainous Administration instructed Loris-Melikov to institute an immediate ban on all sales and movements of slaves within the administrative boundaries of the oblast’. Thus, Loris-Melikov issued executive order №100 banning the slave trade in Terskaia oblast’ on 31 July 1866. The executive order tacitly accepted slave-ownership, but explicitly prohibited the slave trade for the first time in the region’s history. By late summer of 1866, the stage was set for the emancipation operation to commence.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 3.

¹⁷ The decree, however, permitted the slaveowners whose slaves were confiscated on account of the failure to register the slave purchase with a Russian court, could seek compensation for the cost of the slave from the original seller. See, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 98, l. 3 ob.

The abolition of slavery and other forms of feudal servitude in Terskaia oblast' was accompanied by land reform in the region that was equally momentous in its consequences. The land reform in Terskaia oblast' was an important milestone in the government's efforts to introduce new forms of social and administrative organization in the rural areas of the North Caucasus. At the same time, it ushered in the gradual advent of modernity and capitalism in the region. The goal of creating a unitary administrative and legal regime in Terskaia oblast' had manifested itself on the pages of the "Statute on Rural Communities, their Public Administration, and State and Public Obligations of the Mountainous Population of Terskaia oblast'."¹⁸ The head of Terskaia oblast', Loris Melikov, approved the Statute on 30 September 1870. Following the model of rural administration in Russia's heartland, the Statute established a peasant commune as the chief administrative unit of the rural communities within the entire district. In addition, the Statute invested the commune—or rather the gathering (*skhod*) of all adult male heads of a village's households¹⁹—with executive authority over a village's internal affairs, implementing the principle of collective responsibility (*krugovaia poruka*) into communal life. The document also established village courts and a village administration. It was the male *skhod* who elected members of the village administration as well as a village elder (*starshina*), who enjoyed a certain degree of executive authority and a high social status in the village. The principle of collective decision-making played a pivotal role in deciding whether to admit or reject new members into the commune

¹⁸ Polozhenie o sel'skikh (aul'nykh) obshchestvakh, ikh obshchestvennom upravlenii i povinnosti Gosudarstvennykh i obshchestvennykh v gorskom naselenii Terskoï oblasti." (Vladikavkaz, 1871), 1 – 22. Also, see *Arkhivnoe Upravlenie Pravitel'stva Chechenskoï Respubliki*, (hereafter, AUPCR), f. 238, op. 1, d. 68, ll. 1 – 20.

¹⁹ Women were conspicuously excluded from the collective decision-making process.

(many of which were often landless, formerly enslaved families) and provide them with a parcel of land from a communal pool of available land. The successes and failures of the land reform in each okrug of Terskaia oblast' will be examined alongside the government's abolitionist endeavors.

The central focus of the abolitionist reform in Terskaia oblast' revolved around the territories of present-day Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and some districts of the Stavropol' Kraï. The relatively small number of slaves in Chechnya and Ingushetia made emancipation there a relatively quick affair. Indeed, according to archival records, slavery in Chechnya and Ingushetia was abolished in 1867 without any backlash from slave-owners. In contrast, a much larger number of slaves in Kabarda, Kumykiia, and Ossetia required a greater degree of administrative oversight, logistical planning, and negotiations with slaveowners. Archival sources indicate that slavery and serfdom was abolished in Terskaia oblast' on 2 June 1867, when Loris-Melikov declared the "complete and ubiquitous emancipation of slaves" in the region.²⁰ Of course, the reality of abolition in Terskaia oblast' was far more complicated than Loris-Melikov's proclamation suggests. In the sections that follow, I will sketch a concise account that is rich in critical details of the series of abolitionist reforms in Terskaia oblast'.

Kabardino-Balkariia (Kabardinskiï Okrug)

Kabarda presented the most serious of obstacles for the Russian abolitionist efforts in Terskaia oblast'. In 1867, the population of Kabardinskiï okrug stood at 54,224.²¹ Slavery

²⁰ RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 39, l. 16.

²¹ "Statisticheskie svedeniia o kavkazskikh gortsakh, sostoiashchikh v voenno-narodnom upravlenii," in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 6.

and various forms of unfree labor were, without exaggeration, a ubiquitous phenomenon on the eve of the emancipation reforms in Kabarda. The scale of slave-ownership in the region led the Head of Terskaia oblast', Loris-Melikov, to make an unsettling conclusion that, "for every three free persons, there were 2 souls of the dependent estate" in the region.²² In addition, a small number of slaves were attached to the Cossacks of indigenous descent who joined the Russian Terek Cossack Army (*Terskoe Kazach'e Voisko*). The socio-economic composition of slave and serf communities was as diverse as it was complex. To simplify matters, the Russian administration classified enslaved people into two main categories: ritual or customary slaves (*obriadovyĭ kholop*) and non-customary slaves (*bezobriadovyĭ kholop*). Customary slaves on the plains of Kabarda were known as *Og* (*Oz*) and *Loganapoot* (*Логананут*); non-customary slaves were commonly known as *Unaut* (*Унаут*). In the mountainous areas of Kabarda, customary slaves were known as *Karakishi* (*Каракиши*), *Iasakchi* (*Ясакчи*), and *Chagary* (*Чагары*); non-customary slaves were known as *Karavashi* (*Караваши*).²³ Whereas the status and living conditions of customary slaves were dictated by an unwritten canon of local customary law, the non-customary slaves lived under the unchecked authority of their owners. In addition, the individual ownership of slaves in Kabarda did not necessarily signal privilege or high social standing. Princes, nobles and their underlings, ordinary peasants, and even serfs owned slaves.²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Also see, E. S-va., "Krepostnye v Kabarde i ikh Osvobozhdenie," in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 19.

²⁴ RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 39, l. 1.

The predominance of slave-ownership in Kabarda fostered the bonds of anti-abolitionist solidarity among slave-owners. The threat of losing access to slave labor galvanized brief but conspicuous resistance to the imperial efforts of liberating slaves. Hundreds of slave-owning households were prepared to leave the Caucasus for Ottoman Empire rather than losing their slaves. This opposition to abolition teetered dangerously on the cusp of violent uprisings, but never transformed into fully-fledged rebellions. Instead, such visceral backlash prompted the Russians to make significant concessions, which placed the emancipation process entirely into the hands of the slave-owners. Slavery was formally abolished in Kabarda on 18 November 1866. The emancipation reform in the region offered *two paths to freedom*. Slaves had the options of either entering into a voluntary mutual agreement (*vzaimnoe soglashenie*) with a slave-owner or following government-endorsed rules for the emancipation of the dependent estates. Ultimately, the empire protected the financial interests of slave-owners and delayed the freedom of slaves. The outcome of abolitionist reforms in Kabarda would typify the tsarist government's strategy in the entire North Caucasus.

The first cautious logistical efforts to gather data on the precise number of enslaved and dependent people in Kabarda—as well as data on how slavery functioned in the region—were attempted as early as 1864. The responsibility of collecting this data was placed on the Commission for review of land-tenure and estate rights among the indigenous communities in Terskaia oblast'.²⁵ However, the local authorities failed to deliver these

²⁵ *Komissiiia po razboru lichnykh i pozemel'nykh prav tuzemtsev Terskoï oblasti*. The commission was established in 1860, before the end of the Caucasus War. The work of the Commission intended to facilitate gradual integration of the Terskaia oblast' into the socio-

figures in that year. Their efforts to gather data were hampered by the snail's pace of the commission's work due to concerns that such inquiries might agitate the slave-owners and potentially instigate a revolt. Another request for information surrounding the slave population in Kabarda reached Loris-Melikov first in January and then again in March of 1865.²⁶ The Chief of the Headquarters of the Caucasus Army, Adjutant General Aleksandr Kartsov, instructed Loris-Melikov to collect statistical data concerning slave communities living in the region and to provide a report that could shed light on the nature of the personal status and property rights of slaves.²⁷ While making repeated requests for this data, the Caucasus Viceroy insisted that the Commission had "an ideal opportunity to gather all the necessary intelligence about slaves without giving th[e] task any publicity," all while conducting its primary function of demarcating arable lands and conducting a census.²⁸ Unlike the Caucasus Viceroy, Loris-Melikov expressed doubts about the Commission's ability to collect data on slavery without revealing its true intentions. Furthermore, his focus was on the importance of first understanding the nature of land ownership for taxation purposes. Nevertheless, haphazardly drafted reports on the nature of slavery in Kabarda began to find their way to Tiflis. However, as the scope of the Russian surveys

legal landscape of the Russian Empire. In 1864, the Commission was chaired by Dmitriï Kodzokov – a man of Kabardinian descent and notable public figure who had a distinguished record of service in the Russian imperial bureaucracy. For more information on the work of the Commission in Kabarda refer to TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 1251. Also see TsGA RSO-A, f. 256, op. 1, d. 3; f. 262, op. 1, d. 1, 20, 23. To learn more about the life and accomplishments of Dmitriï Kodzokov see A.B. Mamkhegov, "Materials on the Biography of the State Councilor D.S. Kodzokov," *Caucasology* 1, (2019): 95-122.

²⁶ TsGA RSO-A, f. 256, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 9-12 ob.

²⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 7.

²⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 7 ob.

continued to expand and rumors of the government's plans to abolish slavery proliferated, many slave-owners closed ranks to protect their right to own slaves. Their resistance tactics ranged from open protests and acquiescent negotiations to communal supplications and outright demands for the right to leave the Caucasus with their enslaved people to settle in the Ottoman Empire.

In May 1866, local authorities informed Kabarda residents of the establishment of the Committee for the Liberation of Dependent Estates. This public announcement signaled the government's intention to proceed with plans to emancipate slaves and serfs. People in Kabarda could no longer talk about the abolition of slavery in hypothetical terms; instead, abolition became a disconcerting reality for slave-owners. The first signs of collective efforts "from below" to derail or postpone abolitionist reforms in Kabarda were registered in early August of 1866. Writing to Loris-Melikov, the head of the Nalchinskiĭ okrug, Colonel Alexander Nurid,²⁹ informed Loris-Melikov about a request for an audience with the general. This request was made by 52 slave-owners who served as deputies purportedly representing "the people of Kabarda."³⁰ The group of deputies had gathered in Nal'chik,

²⁹ Colonel Alexander Nurid was a man of Dagestani origins with a remarkable biography. As a young boy, he was captured by Russian soldiers in the aftermath of Russian storming of a village in Dagestan. Evidently, Alexander Nurid became an orphan and was eventually adopted into a Russian family. He was later baptized as an Orthodox Christian and given his new Christian name – Alexander. He received military education and entered service of the Russian army in the Caucasus as a private and quickly moved through the ranks of military hierarchy. In 1865, Alexander Nurid was appointed as the head of Terskaia oblast' and played an important role in the imperial efforts to abolish slavery in Kabarda. For a more detailed account of Alexander Nurid's life see Iuriĭ Karpov "Aleksandr Nurid: Gorets na Sluzhbe Imperii," *Izvestiia SOIGSI* 46, no. 7 (2012): 95-104.

³⁰ Georgiĭ Kokiev, "Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Kabarde. Dokumenty po istorii osvobozhdeniia zavisimyykh sosloviĭ v Kabarde v 1867 godu," in *Istoriĭia Kabardino-Balkarii v trudakh G.A. Kokieva*, ed. Galim Mambetov (Nal'chik, El'-Fa, 2005), 661-662.

and the decision to seek dialogue with the Russian authorities had apparently stemmed from the group resigning themselves to the inevitability of the government's abolition plans. The gathering was a preemptive tactic that sought to secure a Russian commitment to uphold the financial interests of slave-owners in the emancipation of slaves and serfs.

To express their deeply-held concerns, the deputies penned a petition (*dokladnaia zapiska*) addressed to Loris-Melikov. They contended that slave-ownership provided access to indispensable labor that guaranteed a certain "stability" (*spokoistvie*) of life in Kabarda. According to the deputies' argument, the abolition of slavery would inevitably undermine both the social harmony and the economic stability of the region. Furthermore, the petitioners dismissed the government's expectations that the introduction of market labor relations would serve as a viable substitute for the unfree labor of slaves and serfs. As an example, the deputies pointed to the labor of female slaves (*unautki*) in Kabarda. The region's social conventions linked the household service of female slaves with notions of feminine dishonor and sexual impropriety. Therefore, a free, self-respecting woman, the deputies argued, "would never agree to perform the duties traditionally assigned to a female slave for any payment whatsoever."³¹

Finally, the petitioners warned Loris-Melikov that the terms of emancipation would determine future relationships between free residents and former slaves in Kabarda for decades to come. In other words, an emancipation scheme that discounted the property rights of the slave-owners would sow bitter animosity between the freed slaves and their former masters. In contrast, a just emancipation settlement that provided reasonable compensation to the slave-owners would ensure peace and harmony in the region.

³¹ Ibid., 663.

Loris-Melikov met the delegation of slave-owners in the city of Kislovodsk on 9 August 1866. The delegates spent a total of three days in the city deliberating a framework of slave emancipation that would be acceptable to both the slave-owners and the imperial government. Loris-Melikov felt enlivened by the seemingly amiable disposition of the deputies. He regarded the petitioners' concerns with sympathy and reassured them that the government would not ignore their supplications. Before adjourning the meeting, he requested that the deputies submit their proposals in writing. Without a doubt, the slave-owners' initiative to open a dialogue with Russian authorities was an important milestone in the empire's abolitionist agenda for the north-western Caucasus. The prospect of securing the voluntary cooperation of the slave-owning class in the region that was still reeling from decades of intermittent anti-Russian violence was a very promising sign.

Encouraged by the agreeable outcome of the meeting, Loris-Melikov hurried to inform the Caucasus Viceroy about the recent developments regarding the slave question in Kabarda.³² Loris-Melikov's letter to the Viceroy summarized the details of his meeting and portrayed a general vision of possible emancipation reform in Terskaia oblast'. Loris-Melikov highlighted several propitious circumstances that could aid Russian efforts to abolish slavery in the region. Specifically, he cited the availability of arable lands on the plains of Kabarda, where former slaves and serfs could be settled.³³ In addition, he welcomed the apparent willingness of many slave-owners to release their slaves, albeit in

³² RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 39, ll. 1-9.

³³ The imperial government recognized all arable lands of Kabarda under communal ownership on 20 August 1863 with special land allotments distributed among the Kabardian nobles. See Elena Muratova, "Kodzokov i Nachalo Zemel'nykh Preobrazovaniĭ v Balkarii," *Caucasology* 1, (2019): 81.

accordance with the local customs. The *adat* dictated that slaves could obtain freedom either by the grace of their owners (who could manumit their slaves unilaterally) or by buying their freedom (*only* with the consent of a slave-owner) by giving an agreed-upon sum of money directly to their master. Since most slave-owners would not conceive of manumitting their slaves, the only practical option was to require slaves to purchase their own freedom. In this scheme, the imperial government would serve as a third-party arbitrator overseeing voluntary emancipation agreements between slaves and their owners. Loris-Melikov regarded the slave-owners' demands to respect local custom as reasonable, as long as slave-owners did not set redemption prices on an astronomical scale. Given that slaves were chronically indigent, the only form of payment that they could offer was their labor. Hence, the slaveowners suggested the implementation of a mandatory term of six to eight years of slave labor—approximately the market price of an able-bodied slave.³⁴

Finally, Loris-Melikov's letter gives an unequivocal indication of the simmering unrest in slave communities.³⁵ The news of the abolition of serfdom in Georgia travelled across the Caucasus isthmus and amplified the slaves' anticipation of freedom, which in turn emboldened their resistance to their owners. Disputes between slaves and masters became increasingly common.³⁶ Apparently, many of the slaves and serfs believed that the Russian government in Saint-Petersburg had already granted them freedom and that the local authorities were suppressing the announcement of emancipation to appease the slave-owners. Such defiance of the established order—or as Loris-Melikov's put it, “brewing

³⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 6 ob.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 8.

³⁶ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 1278, ll. 1-2, 6.

sentiments of insubordination among slaves”—was a source of growing concern for the imperial government. The slaves’ natural yearning for freedom engendered no sympathy from the tsarist officials whatsoever. On the contrary, Russian authorities were vexed. The grassroots liberation movement was a nightmare scenario, which the Russians were more than willing to stop in its tracks. To quell the sporadic unrest, local authorities generally reacted by attempting to persuade slaves and serfs that they had to continue obeying the authority of their owners. In other instances, the government arrested the ringleaders that incited the unrest. In this time of uncertainty and social tension, slaveowners looked to Russian leadership to help them reassert their unquestionable authority over their slaves and to punish the troublemakers. Specifically, the slaveowners demanded that the government arrest disobedient slaves and exile their entire families into neighboring Stavropol’ Gubernia or other Russian provinces. Loris-Melikov condemned the “ignorance” of the obstreperous slaves and accepted the slaveowners demand as an appropriate measure.³⁷

The Viceroy welcomed the news of Loris-Melikov’s meeting and commended the slave-owners’ willingness to cooperate with the government. He posed no concrete objections to the slave-owners’ insistence on following customary law and largely accepted Loris-Melikov’s vision to use government resources to supervise voluntary emancipation agreements between slaves and their masters. By all indications, the resolution of the “slave question” in Kabarda was going as smoothly as the tsarist government could hope. Nevertheless, not all slave-owners were willing to surrender to the government’s plans without a fight.

³⁷ RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 39, l. 8.

By September of 1866, the conciliatory mood among some slave-owners in Kabarda began to change. Spurious rumors that the government had decided to delay the emancipation of slaves for twenty years travelled quickly from the neighboring Kubanskaia oblast' and Tiflis. The rumors amplified public confusion,³⁸ and calls to leave the Caucasus and emigrate to Turkey became bolder and more vocal. The situation in Terskaia oblast' was becoming volatile and necessitated the government's intervention.

To restore order and foster a communal consensus, the head of Nal'chinskiĭ okrug, Colonel Nurid, hosted a large gathering of deputies representing both slaves and slave-owners in Nal'chik on 14 September 1866. This initiative was intended to dispel dangerous rumors and to reaffirm the government's resolve to undertake the emancipation reform in the region. Notably, deputies representing the slaves played an active role in negotiating the future of the "slave question." The archival documents suggest that the Nal'chik gathering was a difficult affair. Calls to leave for Turkey continued to agitate the minds of some slave-owners.³⁹ Another exodus of indigenous communities from Kabarda could spell an economic and demographic catastrophe for the entire region. Therefore, Russian authorities emphatically rejected all requests for emigration and threatened anyone contemplating escaping from the Caucasus with the confiscation of their slaves with zero

³⁸ Georgiĭ Kokiev, "Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Kabarde. Dokumenty po istorii osvobozhdeniia zavisimykh sosloviĭ v Kabarde v 1867 godu," in *Istoriia Kabardino-Balkarii v trudakh G.A. Kokieva* (Nal'chik, El'-Fa, 2005), 700-701.

³⁹ The archival sources suggest that in 1860, 361 families or approximately 6,000 people have departed from Kabarda for the Ottoman Empire, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 25 ob.-26. In 1861, additional 534 families left Kabarda, see N. Grabovskii, "Prisoedinenie k Rossii Kabardy i Bor'ba za Nezavisimost'" in SSKG, vol. 9 (Tiflis, 1876), 210. Finally, 163 families departed from Kabarda for the Ottoman Empire in 1865, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, ll. 25 ob.-26.

compensation.⁴⁰ After several days of difficult negotiations and stern warnings, the deadlock was finally successfully broken; the government accepted the slave-owners' demands to use customary law in voluntary emancipation agreements between slaves and their masters. In cases where customary law would prove unworkable, the tsarist authorities, slave-owners, and slaves agreed to jointly draft a set of rules establishing a legal standard for emancipation procedures in Kabarda. It is very important to emphasize that the writing of the rules was driven almost entirely by the slave-owners themselves.

The Rules for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Kabarda

The rules for the emancipation of the dependent estates in Kabarda were outlined in a document written for the slave-owners, by the slave-owners. The document opens with a concise preamble written in the third person. Although the process of drafting the Rules was allegedly a collaborative affair, the document effectively muted the voices of the slaves. Indeed, the preamble sets the tone for the entirety of the document, positioning the slave-owners as the protagonists of the emancipation narrative. The opening paragraphs express the slave-owners' spirit of compromise and provides historical context surrounding prior emancipation processes. For centuries, the slave-owners contended, the emancipation of slaves in Kabarda had been premised solely on a mutual agreement between slaves and their owners. Such agreements entailed the transfer of a slave's entire property to his or her owner as well as a redemption payment of up to 500 silver rubles.⁴¹ The Rules brought the maximum redemption price down to 200 silver rubles, therefore representing both a painful financial concession and a gesture of the slave-owners' goodwill.

⁴⁰ Kokiev, 703.

⁴¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 53.

The Rules were comprised of 15 articles. Taken together, the articles established legal guidelines for the gradual emancipation of all dependent estates in the region through a system of monetary or in-kind redemption payments. The so-called dependent estates were broadly divided into two categories of customary slaves (*obriadnye kholopy*) and non-customary slaves (*bezobriadnye kholopy*), or *unauty*. Most of the articles in the Rules outlined the paths to freedom for customary slaves, with one separate provision (Article 14) stipulating the emancipation procedure for *unauty*.

First, the Rules recognized all slaves and serfs in Kabarda as personally free. However, they were required to remain under the authority of their masters and to perform the same labor obligations until their redemption payments were made in full. Article 1 of the Rules established the maximum redemption payments for different categories of slaves and serfs in Kabarda. Healthy adults of both genders between the ages of 15 and 45 were required to make a redemption payment of 200 silver rubles. For the physically feeble, mentally handicapped, or those older than 45 years of age, redemption payments were to be negotiated in mediation courts based on the ability of a slave to perform labor. The parents of children younger than 15 had to pay 10 silver rubles for each year of their children's age. Hence, the redemption payment for a 10-year-old boy or girl, for example, would be set at 100 silver rubles.

Article 2 of the Rules outlined the procedure for the division of property between slaves and their owners. According to the Rules, half of the property belonging to a family of slaves had to be transferred to their owner. The Rules required that, following the emancipation settlement, slaves were to retain at least one pair of oxen and two cows as the minimum property baseline. Once the property was divided, the slaves and their owners

had to agree on the terms and amount of redemption payments. Slaves could either pay the redemption sum in full or enter into a written agreement, which allowed them to pay the sum in installments over a period of several months to several years. Until redemption payments were complete, slaves maintained a status of temporary-obligated workers, but once redemption payments were made in full, they acquired full freedom and communal rights on par with any free resident of Kabarda. This social transition was to be verified with a government-issued certificate in accordance with Article 3 of the Rules.

Furthermore, the emancipation rules relinquished the male heads of a household from the responsibility of making redemption payments on behalf of their unmarried daughters and sisters. Article 5 stipulated that, when entering marriage, women had the right to pay off their redemption debts in full using a portion of their *kalym* (the bride price). The redemption payment for enslaved girls younger than 12 years old was to be set by a mediator based on her age and with understanding that she would pay off her redemption debt at the time of her marriage.

Article 10 of the Rules charged mediation courts (*posrednicheskii sud*) with the responsibility of assessing the earning potential of an able-bodied adult slave commensurate with one year of labor. For male slaves, earning estimates could not exceed 75 silver rubles, nor fall below 35 rubles per year. For female slaves, the maximum was 40 silver rubles and the minimum was 25 silver rubles. These court-sanctioned estimates determined the number of years during which temporary-obligated workers were obligated to perform labor for their masters.

Finally, Article 14 of the Rules established provisions for the emancipation of the *unauty* (*bezobriadnye kholopy*)—the category of slaves that had no rights and that did not

possess any property. In order to obtain freedom, *unauty* were required to continue working for their masters for a period of 6 years. When it came to slave children, slave-owners declared their willingness to manumit boys in anticipation of a government subsidy of 15,000 silver rubles that “would be distributed among the owners of the youngsters.”⁴² Slave girls were to be manumitted together with their parents after a mediator estimated a girl’s value and established a corresponding redemption payment, which the girl was obligated to pay upon marriage.

The final draft of the Rules was completed in early November 1866. The document was signed and sealed with the personal stamps of twenty deputies representing the slaveowners. After a brief period of review and deliberation, the Rules received enthusiastic approval on all levels of the imperial hierarchy of executive authority. The last act in the scenario of power that characterized the Russian abolitionist campaign in Kabarda was a solemn gathering of deputies representing the slaves-owners and slaves in Nal’chik. The first group of deputies arrived at the fortress on 18 November 1866. In a carefully staged ceremony, Russian officials formally declared the abolition of slavery in Kabarda and publicly read the articles of the Rules for the Emancipation of the Eependent Estates in both Russian and Kabardinian languages. It appears that the slave-owners eagerly embraced the emancipation reform, and indeed, they had many reasons to do so. The imperial government had accepted the slave-owners’ demands for deploying Kabarda’s customary laws as the legal mechanism for the abolition of slavery in the region. Historians can point to one specific telegram authored by the deputies of the slave-owners as evidence of the slave-owners’ hearty approval of the reform. The telegram was delivered

⁴² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 60.

to the Caucasus Viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail, on 18 November, from Nal'chik.⁴³ The slave-owners informed the Viceroy that they had received the news concerning the abolition of slavery in Kabarda and expressed their “heartfelt appreciation” for the opportunity to fulfill “the sacred will of the Tsar Emperor.”⁴⁴ The slave-owners pledged to begin the emancipation processes immediately.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to learn how exactly the slave-deputies reacted to the abolition announcement or whether they unanimously approved of the Rules for emancipation. Existing imperial records suggest that after studying the document, the slave-deputies accepted the Rules as fair and “beneficial.”⁴⁵ As a sign of the slaves’ assent, the deputies took turns dipping their index fingers into ink and stamping their fingerprints by their signed names. In this way, men like Bata Kertov, Omar Tlyzhukov, Ali Kazhanov, Mohammed Mafetov and many other former slaves sealed the fate of the slave question for good. Thus, 18 November 1866 marked the beginning of the abolition of slavery in Kabarda.

Abolition in Kabarda: Institutions, Resistance, and Outcomes

The emancipation reform in Kabarda was carried out on two institutional levels of the local executive and judicial authority: the precinct (*uchastok*) and district (*okrug*) levels. These imperial institutions acted primarily as supervisors and mediators of conflicts between former slaves and their owners. The government sanctioned the creation of

⁴³ E. S.-va., “Krepostnye v Kabarde i ikh Osvobozhdenie,” in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 31-32.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 61.

temporary mediation courts (*posrednicheskii sud*) in each precinct of Kabarda on 26 November 1866.⁴⁶ These mediation courts facilitated the drafting and ratification of voluntary redemption agreements between slaves and their owners. Each court was presided over by a chair and included five elected deputies: one deputy from the district court, two deputies from the slave-owner class, and two deputies representing the dependent estates. These courts were explicitly prohibited from undertaking any coercive action but were permitted to encourage slave-owners to make financial concessions to their slaves whenever possible.

The emancipation reform opened two paths of freedom to slaves. The first path to freedom aligned itself with the local custom. According to the custom, a slave and his or her owner entered into a voluntary, mutually acceptable agreement that stipulated previously negotiated terms of emancipation, as well as the amount of the redemption sum that the slave had to pay in cash or in-kind. This path to freedom was particularly beneficial for the slave-owners. Under the guise of a centuries-old tradition, slave-owners had the legitimate right to disregard the government-sponsored emancipation guidelines and extract far higher terms of redemption payments from their slaves. Thus, by accepting the slave-owners' demands to respect the primacy of the local customary law in matters of abolition, the imperial government effectively allowed slave-owners to dictate the terms of emancipation. Indeed, archival records indicate that the majority of the emancipation agreements registered in Russian courts in Kabarda were negotiated in accordance with customary law.⁴⁷ In the event that slaves and their owners could not reach mutually-

⁴⁶ TsGA KBR, f. 2, op. 1, d. 1678, l. 2-2 ob.

⁴⁷ Kokiev, 625

acceptable terms of emancipation, the two parties had the option of following the government-endorsed emancipation rules under the purview of the state-appointed peace arbitrator (*mirovoi posrednik*). In this way, the Rules provided a second path of freedom to the enslaved people.

Each agreement between a slave-owner and a slave had to be registered with a precinct court in writing, and slave-owners were required to provide former slaves with two copies of the agreement written in Arabic. The agreement had to include the name of each emancipated slave, the state of the slaves' residence, and the name of the slaves' owner. It created an inventory of the entirety of the slaves' movable property (their houses and household utensils were exempt from the slave-owners' partitioning claims), which included cows, oxen, sheep, horses, guns, items of clothing, etc. After that, the document indicated the portion of the slaves' property that was to be divided and given to a slave-owner. Finally, the agreement listed the total amount of redemption payments that slaves were required to give to slave-owners and explicitly outlined the process and timeline of making payments.⁴⁸ The finalized agreements were signed by slave-owners, slaves, and invited witnesses in the presence of court officials.

As the pace of the emancipation reform gained momentum and hundreds of redemption agreements were ratified in mediation courts, a significant faction of slave-owners staged a protest against the government's abolitionist campaign. The rebels organized a large gathering on the banks of the river Shalushka near Nal'chik in January 1867⁴⁹, and official

⁴⁸ For a sample of an agreement that set the terms for emancipation between slaves and their owners, see TsGA KBR, f. 2, op. 1, d. 1678, l. 3.

⁴⁹ *Vsepoddanneishnii otchet Glavnokomanduiushchegi Kavkazkoiï armieï po Voennonarodnomu upravleniiu za 1863-1869 gg.* (Saint Petersburg, 1870), 106.

records indicate that the protest united approximately 400 slave-owners.⁵⁰ The rebels had a single demand: that the government either abandon the emancipation reform completely or allow the slave-owners to leave the Caucasus for the Ottoman Empire with their slaves. The slave-owners took a collective oath to remain firm in their stance. Russian authorities invited the slave-owners to discuss their grievances but warned the rebels that the decision to abolish slavery in Kabarda could not be reversed. They also rejected the slave-owners' demands to permanently leave the Caucasus. Despite aggressive colonial policies, the Russian government did not seek to cleanse the region of its indigenous population entirely. A repeat of the exodus of North Caucasian indigenous communities that had started in the early 1860s could spell an irreparable demographic catastrophe for the entire region and destroy the local economy. Therefore, by the mid-1860s, the Russians were anxious to avoid the possibility of another wave of resettlement from the Caucasus mountains. Several weeks of difficult negotiations punctuated by Russian pleas and threats of severe punishment came to naught. The stalemate was finally broken in February, when the Head of Terskaia oblast' moved "three rifle companies, 300 hundred Cossacks, and one equestrian artillery platoon" to the administrative borders of the oblast'. The slave-owners were not prepared to die for the cause of slavery, and the rebellion quickly dissipated. The most active members of the uprising were arrested and exiled into the internal provinces of the Russian Empire, and the residents of Kabarda were punished with a hefty fine of 10,000

⁵⁰ TsGA RSO-A, f. 53, op. 1, d. 1968, ll. 1-40 ob.

silver rubles.⁵¹ This uprising marked the last pang of the slave-owners' resistance to the abolition of slavery in Kabarda.

Despite their best efforts, the rebels failed to derail the pace of abolition in Kabarda. Archival evidence suggests that in the months following the government's abolition proclamation, a steady stream of slave-owners and slaves registered voluntary emancipation agreements in precinct courts (although most of these agreements were concluded without reference to the official rules for the emancipation of the dependent estates). This progress permitted the imperial authorities to quietly scrap all temporary precinct courts in Kabarda by 1 April 1867. From then on, judicial supervision over the course of the region's emancipation reform was transferred to the district peace arbitration court (*okružnoi mirovoi posrednicheskii sud*) located in Nal'chik. The work of the district court was permanently suspended on 1 September 1869, and all pending cases involving disputes between temporarily obligated former slaves and their owners were transferred to the jurisdiction of the so-called people's court (*narodnyi sud*).

From the beginning of the emancipation reform, the imperial government made it clear that it was the slaves, and not the slave-owners, that would bear the heavy financial burden of compensating the slave-owners for the loss of their slaves. Nevertheless, the government was willing to provide at least some financial relief for the most indigent of slaves and slave-owner, and the Caucasus Viceroy earmarked 40,000 silver rubles in relief funds.⁵² The government based the poverty threshold for slave-owners on the number of slaves they

⁵¹ TsGA RSO-A, f. 53, op. 1, d. 772, ll. 1-13. Perhaps, it is important to note that the main instigators of the uprising were pardoned by the Caucasus Viceroy in May 1869 and allowed to return home from the exile.

⁵² TsGA KBR, f. 2, op. 1, d. 1683, l. 1.

owned. Slave-owners who owned between 1 and 15 slaves were regarded as poor and, therefore, eligible to receive state subsidization. The measure of poverty for the slaves was far more ambiguous and arbitrary. The Russian authorities required that after emancipation, each household should have at least two oxen to till the land and two cows to feed the family. The non-customary slaves – *unauty* were singled out as an especially vulnerable category of dependent estates because by the virtue of their personal status in Kabarda, they were barred from owning any personal property. To assist *unauty* in their transition to a new life as free people, the government earmarked 15,000 silver rubles, which *unauty* could receive after the completion of 6 years of the mandatory service. In addition, other categories of impoverished slaves could apply to receive government relief.⁵³

The emancipation campaign in Kabarda officially ended on 14 March 1867. On paper, the abolition of slavery in Kabarda was a resounding success. According to government figures, 21,227 customary and non-customary slaves obtained personal freedom.⁵⁴ These statistics far exceeded the government's original estimate of the total slave population in the region. If we were to take the official statements at face value, the Russians managed to solve the “slave question” in the region within five months. However, a closer analysis of archival documents suggests that Russian abolition experienced many setbacks.

In the months and years that followed the abolition decree, the majority of former slaves remained temporarily obligated to their owners. That meant that, although former slaves obtained personal freedom and could no longer be bought and sold on their owners' whim,

⁵³ TsGA KBR, f. 24, op. 1, d. 330, ll. 1-58 ob.

⁵⁴ TsGA KBR, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 1860, ll. 20-21. Also see, Tugan Kумыков, *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie otnosheniia i otmena krepostnogo prava v Kabarde i Balkarii* (Nal'chik, 1959), 146.

they continued to perform the same unfree labor as before. Many of these former slaves struggled to make redemption payments on time and in full. Some of them rescinded their commitment to the emancipation agreements and refused to make payments all together. As a result, the government launched investigations into the former slaves' failures to make redemption payments after incessant prodding from slave-owners. According to these investigations, the majority of temporarily obligated peasants often failed to make the required redemption payments due to illness, old age, or a simple refusal to work for the benefit of their former masters. By 1870, there were 641 former slaves in Kabarda who had failed to make redemption payments for three consecutive years, and the collective debt of all temporarily obligated peasants amounted to 119,843 silver rubles.⁵⁵ To punish the most egregious instances of open defiance towards the terms of redemption agreements, the government arrested the most obstinate debtors and sentenced them to perform *corvée* labor (*kazennye raboty*). Proceeds from this type of penal labor were used to pay off the redemption debts.

The ubiquitous cases of default are hardly surprising. Greed made the slaves' path to freedom all but impossible as many of the voluntary emancipation agreements imposed unattainable terms of redemption. These redemption terms far exceeded the limits endorsed by the government and, therefore, ensured slaves' perpetual indebtedness. As an example of an emancipation agreement made in bad faith and at enormous disadvantage to the slaves, we can point to a contract signed between a slave-owner Yaqub Dykinov and his *kholop* Suleïman Teuvezhev, Suleïman's wife Kupimyko, their son Zakireia, and their

⁵⁵ TsGA KBR, f. I-2, op. 1, d. 1860, l. 22.

daughter Khazhu.⁵⁶ The agreement was written in the Arabic language and notarized by the head of the Kabardinskii okrug, Colonel Nurid, on 21 July 1866 in the presence of twelve witnesses. The voluntary agreement stipulated that Suleïman Teuvezhev was to surrender all of his property to his owner, which included forty-six rams, fifteen items of other cattle, one horse, thirty-four silver rubles, twenty-two sheepskin coats, two ropes, two ox carts, three baskets of honey, and one plow.⁵⁷ In addition, Suleïman Teuvezhev and his wife had to pay a redemption sum in the amount of 150 silver rubles, their son had to pay 200 silver rubles, and their daughter owed 100 silver rubles, which Khazhu had to pay from her *kalym*, or bride price, upon her marriage. The agreement also required the entire family to remain under the complete authority of Yaqub Dykinov until the entire redemption sum was paid in full. Thus, for Suleïman Teuvezhev and his family, the emancipation reform in Kabarda entailed the loss of the family's entire property (save the house) and a burden of debt that perpetuated their subjugated status for years and years. A similar voluntary emancipation agreement signed between a slave-owner, Temroko Atazhukin, and his slave, Esavan Sainov, required a redemption payment of 500 silver rubles.⁵⁸ Esavan was required to make his redemption payment within three years. In the event that Esavan failed to make the redemption payment in full, the agreement stipulated that he was to remain enslaved. This redemption sum was in-line with the local customary law; however, it clearly exceeded the maximum amount of 200 silver rubles prescribed by

⁵⁶ Kokiev, 764.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 765.

the Russian-sponsored rule for the emancipation of the dependent estate. Despite this blatant contradiction, local authorities notarized the agreement with the signature of the head of the Kabardinskiï okrug and the imperial seal.

The situation was even more precarious in the mountainous region of Balkariia, where the poverty of the former slaves was amplified by the acute scarcity of arable land. A total of 4,207 customary and non-customary slaves were emancipated in Balkariia.⁵⁹ As in other parts of the Caucasus, the emancipation reform in the mountains of Balkaria was accompanied by land reforms. The imperial government remained faithful to the ideals of aristocratic privilege and allotted the indigenous nobility large landholdings in recognition of their social pedigree. Given the natural scarcity of arable and grazing lands in the mountains, the emancipation reform left many former slaves and serfs with private plots of land that were inadequate in size; as many as 408 households were left completely landless.⁶⁰ The outcome of the emancipation left thousands of former serfs and slaves disillusioned and angry. To mitigate the disastrous consequences of the land reform, the tsarist authorities introduced several concessions. For instance, the government abandoned the original plan of requisitioning two-thirds of the peasants' lands for the benefit of the nobles. Instead, the peasants were required to surrender one-half of the land. The government also exempted former slaves in mountainous regions from paying state taxes for a period of eight years. Finally, the government promised to provide the landless peasants with land. However, the process of land distribution and the settlement of landless

⁵⁹ Elena Muratova, *Sotsial'no-politicheskaia istoriia Balkarii XVII – nachala XX veka* (Nal'chik: El-Fa, 2007), 326.

⁶⁰ TsGA KBR, f. F.R-1209, op. 7, d. 95, ll. 5-7.

peasants was rife with poor planning and unfulfilled expectations, which stretched into the late 1870s. The concessions notwithstanding, the government's policies—which privileged the financial interests of nobles and slave-owners—created a class of bitter, indigent, and chronically land-hungry peasants whose freedom was delayed by the onerous terms of their emancipation.

Without a doubt, the abolition of slavery and other forms of anachronistic feudal servitude in Kabarda was a momentous event in the history of the region. It marked a significant milestone in Russia's efforts to integrate the Caucasus into the modern legal and social landscape of the empire. Thousands of former slaves achieved personal freedom and could, perhaps for the first time in their lives, anticipate better days to come and imagine their children and grandchildren taking full advantage of economic independence and nominal social equality. Nevertheless, the apparent successes of the emancipation reform must be contextualized with the heavy financial weight that the reform imposed on former slaves. At every step of the legislative planning, deliberation, and implementation of abolitionist policies in Kabarda, the imperial government continued again and again to prioritize the financial interests of slave-owners. The slave-owners' lobbying, supplications, and open protests succeeded in persuading the state to accept most of their demands. Local customs—which held the slave-owners' property rights as sacred—reigned supreme in the process of emancipation, while the official government-endorsed rules were practically dictated by the slave-owners themselves. The tsarist officials' acquiescence to the demands of the slave-owning class was a characteristic feature of the Russian abolitionist campaign in Kabarda and the North Caucasus. As a result, freedom was delayed for thousands of former slaves for more than a decade. Chronic indigence,

indebtedness, and default on redemption payments among former slaves became widespread. Moreover, despite receiving the better end of the emancipation deal, some slave-owners continued to reject the very idea of abolition as illegitimate; calls and collective petitions seeking the government's permission to emigrate to Turkey with their slaves continued to resurface and agitate the minds of these men.

Kumykia (Kumyksiĭ Okrug)

Since the formal creation of Kumyksiĭ okrug in 1860, the region—which the Russian officials often described simply as Kumykia—shared administrative borders with Stavropol'skaia guberniia in the north, Dagestanskaia oblast' in the south, and Nagornyĭ and Chechenskiĭ okrugs to the west. The warm waters of the Caspian Sea traced the okrug's coastline in the east, while the sharp ridges of Dagestan's mountains guarded Kumykia's borders in the south. Gradually, these mountains gave way to a vast and exceptionally fertile plateau (the Kumyk plateau), whose soil was nourished from the tributaries of the Sulak and Terek rivers. In 1867, the population of Kumyksiĭ okrug stood at 33,044 people.⁶¹ Today, the territory of the former Kumyksiĭ okrug is incorporated into the Tsentral'nyi okrug of the Republic of Dagestan.⁶²

Kumykia had a rich history. It was once part of the Shamkhalate of Tarki (Tarkovskoe Shamkhal'stvo), a formerly powerful feudal state whose origins trace back to the 8th-century and which later splintered into smaller principalities. Traditionally, the rulers of

⁶¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 107, l. 143 ob. Another nineteenth-century source, "Statisticheskie svedeniia o kavkazskikh gortsakh, sostoiashchikh v voenno-narodnom upravlenii," puts the population of Kumyksiĭ okrug at 35,234 people, see SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 8.

⁶² The proximity of Kumykia to Dagestan and the shared history of the two regions lead many historians to trace the history of these regions as a single narrative.

the Shamkhalate carried the title of the Wali of Dagestan (the Ruler of Dagestan). By the mid-nineteenth century, the title carried little political in Dagestan or Kumykia and served primarily as a remnant of the Shamkhalate's bygone glories. The region had witnessed Arab invasions of the early Islamic empire, Mongol conquests, and a centuries-long imperial rivalry for dominance between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid and Qajar Iran. The Russian Empire joined the fray in the early eighteenth century and by 1786, the Shamkhalate's ruler at the time, Bamat, had formally accepted Russian suzerainty.⁶³ However, it was not until Russia's victories in two Russo-Persian wars of 1813 and 1828—when Iran ceded all claims to South Caucasus territories—that Russia became the de-facto sole dominant power in the region.

Kumykia had also been an important center of transimperial commerce. However, it was the commerce in human bodies that gave the region its true notoriety. Up until the early nineteenth century, the village of Endirey (*Andreevka* in Russian) in Kumyksiï okrug was host to the main slave market in the entirety of the North Caucasus.⁶⁴ In accounting his travels and observations of the Caucasus in 1812, a Russian officer—Andreï Butskovski—attributed Endirey's success as a thriving center of slave commerce in the

⁶³ Nikolaï Dubrovin, *Istoriia Voïny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*, vol. 2 (Sankt Peterburg, 1886), 243.

⁶⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 138. See also, Ivan Blaramberg, *Istoricheskoe, Topograficheskoe, Statisticheskoe, Etnograficheskoe, i Voennoe Opisanie Kavkaza, 1834* (Moskva: Nadyrshin, 2010), 354, 357. For a thorough account of Endirey's significance as a commercial center and the main outpost for the slave trade in the North Caucasus, see Andreï Butskovskiï, "Kumyki," in *Voенно-Topograficheskoe i Statisticheskoe Opisanie Kavkazskoi Gubernii*, 1812, ll. 56 ob. – 61 ob. Semën Bronevskiï, *Noveïshie Goegrificheskie i Istoricheskie Izvestiia o Kavkaze*, vol. 1 (Moskva, 1822), 313. *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 2, Jan. 8, 1869, l. 3. Ekaterina Kusheva, *Narody Severnogo Kavkaza i Ikh Sviazi s Rossieï; vtoraiia polovina XVI-30-e gody XVII veka* (Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1963), 51, 54, 69.

North Caucasus to its strategic location. He described the village as “the gate that linked the mountains to the valleys.”⁶⁵ Every year, Endirey supplied thousands of enslaved men, women, and children to slavers on the western coast of the Caspian Sea and the Crimea, which received a larger number of slaves proportionally from the Caucasus than the Caspian Sea basin. Reportedly, Turkish slavers were the primary buyers of slaves in Endirey. In order to transport the human cargo across the Caucasus to the Crimean peninsula, the arms of the enslaved were chained in pairs of two and taken on an arduous journey across the plains of Kumykiia, Kuban’, and Taman’ until they reached the shores of the Crimea.⁶⁶ Women, generally, travelled on horses while the enslaved males walked on foot. In Crimea, the slaves were sold once again and transported across the Black Sea to Istanbul and other Ottoman port cities. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783 made the existing slave-trade routes dangerous due to the growing presence of Russian troops and Cossack settlements in the Kuban’ and the Crimea proper. As a result, the routes shifted to the gorges and valleys of the North Caucasus that were more difficult to traverse and control. Now, the slaves were taken from Endirey and transported in caravans across Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Circassia to the eastern shore of the Black Sea, which housed several important hubs of transimperial slave (e.g. Anapa, Kodosh, Sokhumi, Ishkauri, Poti, and Batumi). Evidently, the Russian capture of Endirey in 1818 led to the closure of slave-trading markets in the village but left the institution of slavery undisturbed.⁶⁷ Instead,

⁶⁵ Butskovskii, *Voенно-Topograficheskoe i Statisticheskoe Opisanie Kavkazskoi Gubernii, 1812*, 58 ob.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁶⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 138.

the fledgling imperial administration attempted to regulate the institution by mediating conflicts between the enslaved and their masters. Thus, the enslaved in Kumykia obtained a new channel for seeking redress. However, rather than adjudicating the slaves' grievances in accordance with the laws of the empire, the Russian administration referred such supplications to the authority of local Shari'a courts.

Another attempt to regulate but not dismantle slavery in Kumykia occurred in 1846 when the Commander of the Caucasus Line and the Black Sea announced the prohibition of the sale of slaves outside of Kumykia's administrative borders.⁶⁸ In 1861, the government introduced an additional set of regulations aimed at ameliorating the slaves' woeful plight without dismantling the institution itself. According to these regulations, the enslaved families could be purchased or sold only as a single unit. Further, enslaved women who married free men could not be sold and therefore separated from their husbands without the consent of the husband.⁶⁹ Finally, children born in such marriages could not be sold to another owner without the parents' explicit consent. Whether or not these restrictions were enforced in any meaningful way is unknown.

One important feature of the Kumyk society in the nineteenth century was its complex social organization and its multitiered hierarchy of feudal relations.⁷⁰ Russian military historian of the Caucasus and the Caucasus War, Nikolaï Dubrovin (1837-1904), identified

⁶⁸ *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 2, Jan. 8, 1869, l. 3.

⁶⁹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 138 ob.

⁷⁰ Vladilen Gadzhiev, *Rol' Rossii v Istorii Dagestana* (Moskva: Nauka, 1965), 19-20.

as many as ten distinct estates in the Kumyk society on the eve of abolition.⁷¹ Seven of these estates incorporated persons who enjoyed personal freedom but differed in their social standing and feudal obligations in relation to the region's ruling elites. These estates had the following titles: the Kumyk princes or *shamkhals*, *chanki*⁷², *sala-uzden*⁷³, common *uzden*⁷⁴, *dogerek-uzden*⁷⁵, and *azat*⁷⁶ (manumitted slave) who constituted the majority of the free population in Kumykia.

⁷¹ Nikolaï Dubrovin, *Istoriia Voïny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*, vol. 1 (Sankt Peterburg, 1871), 630. See also, Sakinat Gadzhieva, *Kumyki: Istoriko-Etnograficheskoe Issledovanie* (Moskva, 1961), 106-118.

⁷² *Chanki* – children born from “unequal marriages” between a Kumyk prince and from a female *uzden*’ or a slave. See Dubrovin, *Istoriia Voïny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*, vol. 1, 630.

⁷³ In Kumykia, *sala-uzden*’ (also known as *ullu-uzden*’) was a title assigned to a lower-ranking feudal lord who. For a thorough historic account of the estate of *sala-uzden*’ in Kumykia, see Bagomed Aliev, “Sala-Uzdeni: Proiskhozhdenie, Ekonomicheskoe i Sotsial’no-Pravovoe Polozhenie,” *Vestnik Instituta IAE*, № 1 (2010): 3-15.

⁷⁴ *Uzden*’ is a title which was commonly used in the indigenous communities of the North Caucasus, including the Circassians, Balkars, Kumyks, Dagestanis, Kabardinians, and Ossetians. Although the title of the *Uzden*’ had slightly various social designations in different regions of the North Caucasus, at the most fundamental level, the title signified personal freedom and an elevated (sometimes aristocratic) social status. A newspaper article about the Kumyks, which was published in 1848, defined *uzden*’ as “a free person... in practical terms, the title of an *uzden*’ described a nobleman who owned land and who by birth was free from slave lineage.” See “Rasskaz Kumyka o Kumyках,” *Kavkaz*, 1848, № 41, ll. 167-168.

⁷⁵ *Uzden*’ who settled in the Kumykia from an outside region.

⁷⁶ According to Dubrovin, in Kumykia, the title of the *Azat* was reserved specifically for formerly enslaved (*вольноотпущенные*) men who were manumitted by their owners or who managed to buy their own freedom. The *Azat* men retained their social status of the former slave until the fourth generation, at which point an *Azat* family acquired the status of a common *uzden*’.

In addition, Kumykskii okrug had three estates that signified various forms of personal and/or economic dependency, including slaves who lacked any rights whatsoever.⁷⁷ The first dependent estate, the *chagars* (чагары), were a community of economically-dependent peasants who lived and worked on land that belonged to members of the indigenous land-owning aristocracy.⁷⁸ *Chagars* were required to pay in-kind rent, perform custom-sanctioned labor for the benefit of the landowner, and were not allowed not leave their land without the permission of their landlord. The archival sources highlight a lack of clear consensus among the people in Kumykia on the exact origin of this estate. Another estate of the dependent peasants in Kumykia were the *terkements* (теркеменцы).⁷⁹ According to the government surveys of Kumykia's population, the *terkements'* social statuses and feudal duties resembled those of the *chagars*. However, if the ranks of the *chagar* estate were comprised of former slaves or fugitive peasants who sought patronship and the permission of a Kumyk landlord to settle on his lands, the *terkements*, the Kumyks believed, were foreigners. According to one theory, they were the last survivors of Shah Nader's army that had invaded Dagestan in the 1730s, but had failed to conquer the region.⁸⁰ Allegedly, some of the stranded Iranian soldiers had settled along the Sulak river

⁷⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 131.

⁷⁸ Ibid., ll. 131-135. Also see, Aliev, "Chagary kak odno iz sosloviĭ Dagestanskogo zavisimogo krest'ianstva (XVII-pervaia polovina XIX v.) *Vestnik Instituta IAE* № 3 (2009): 13-15.

⁷⁹ Ibid., ll. 135 ob. – 136 ob. See also, Dubrovin, *Istoriia Voĭny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*, vol. 1, 630.

⁸⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 135 ob. According to another popular Kumyk narrative, the estate of the *terkemens* emerged as a result of a big migration of Iranians into the region due to a great famine that occurred in Iran at the time unknown, see Prince Khamzaev, "Koe-Chto o Kymykakh," *Kavkaz*, 1865, № 68, ll. 341-342. For a historiographic exploration of the

in Kumykii on land belonging to the Kumyk nobles and were eventually hrecognized as a distinct social class. Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy of the dependent estates in Kumykii were the *kuls* (кулы).⁸¹ These enslaved men, women, and children were usually purchased or captured during raiding attacks in Iran and the North and South Caucasus, especially Georgia. It is important to note that the title of *kul* also designated a status of enslavement in the Ottoman Empire.⁸² The title most likely entered the Kumyk vocabulary as a result of centuries-long interactions with Turkish slavers who regularly conducted their business at Endirey's slave markets. However, whereas *kul* slaves in the Ottoman Empire could, theoretically, achieve a high position of power within the Ottoman military-administrative system, the *kuls* in Kumykii had absolutely no hope of social elevation or change of status outside of manumission. According to the Kumyk *adat* (customary law), the *kuls* lived and died at the caprice of their owners.⁸³

The Prelude to Abolition in Kumyksiï Okrug

Slavery was an old, socially accepted, and widespread institution in Kumykii. But a series of profound changes that spread from the empire's metropole in the early 1860s began to crack

origins of the *terkemens* in Dagestan and Kumykii see Sakinat Gadzhieva, *Dagestanskii Terekementsy, XIX- nachalo XX v.: Istoriko-Etnograficheskoe Issledovanie* (Moskva: Nauka, 1990), 9-11.

⁸¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, ll. 136 ob. – 142. Also, SEA, f. 416, op. 3, d. 1053, ll. 5-6.

⁸² See, Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (University of Washington Press, 1998), 4, 5, 20-28, 36. *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 13, 20, 30.

⁸³ Fedor Leontovich, *Adaty Kavkazskikh Gortsev: Materialy po Obychnomy Pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza*, vol. 2 (Odessa, 1883), 193. Also see SEA, f. 1087, op. 1, d. 272, l. 17.

the very foundation of the ossified social hierarchies in the North Caucasus. As in other districts of Terskaia oblast', the news of Alexander II's 1861 Emancipation Manifesto eventually reached the Caucasus and stirred some of the dependent estates of Kumykia into action.⁸⁴ While archival records do not reveal any documentation that could definitively confirm how active the *kuls'* were in calling for an end to slavery in the region, other documents paint a clear picture of a galvanized peasant communities.⁸⁵ The *aul* gatherings (*cxoð*)—made up of male heads of a household—elected deputies and drafted petitions that requested unrestricted access to agricultural lands, pastures, and forests, and demanded the immediate abolition of feudal obligations, among other things.

The peasants' demands stemmed from a long-festering dispute over the question of land tenure and feudal obligations, one which which poisoned the relations between the landed aristocracy and the common folk. Indeed, beginning from the early eighteenth century, the indigenous aristocracy had embarked on a process to extend feudal claims over land ownership in the region.⁸⁶ Over a period spanning more than a century, the communal land tenure that had once dominated Kumykia and Dagestan systems gradually gave way to feudal system of land tenure. In fact, by the middle of the nineteenth century, virtually all land on the Kumyk plateau was consolidated into the hands of just ten aristocratic families.⁸⁷ Government

⁸⁴ Gadzhieva, *Kumyki: Istoriko-Etnograficheskoe Issledovanie*, 150-151.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Nikolaï Tul'chinskii, "Pozemel'naia Sobstvennost' i Obshchestvennoe Zemlepol'zovanie na Kumykskoï Ploskosti," *Terskiï Sbornik* ed. Vertepov, vol. 6 (1903): 55.

⁸⁷ Elmira Dalgat, "O Kharaktere Zemel'noï Sobstvennosti v Dagestane v XVIII – nachale XX veka," *Vestnik Instituta IAE*, №3 (2017): 37.

estimates suggested that of the 405,789 *desiatin* of arable land in Kumyksiĭ okrug, the princely families and some *uzden'* held 386,422 *desiatin* in their possession.⁸⁸ A further 19,367 *desiatin* belonged to the state.⁸⁹ The unbridled, if gradual, seizure of agricultural lands by the indigenous aristocracy imposed burdensome and often arbitrary feudal obligations on generations of peasants who tilled the land. Thus, personally free peasants transformed into tenants with limited mobility and a broad range of feudal duties. Perhaps the best characterization of the enmity created by this transition appeared in an article for the newspaper *Terskie Vedomosti* in 1869. The article assessed the history of land tenure in Kumyksiia and criticized the local authorities' inability to determine the true ownership of land in Kumyksiĭ okrug, something which had become obvious by the eve of the abolitionist reforms. It concluded with accusations that this administrative inability, as well as the existing flaming social strife, originated from glaring contradictions between the "widespread system of communal land tenure in the North Caucasus and the ambiguous directives of the central government and local officials." According to the article's author, these contradictions interrupted the established land tenure order and carelessly assigned landownership rights to the socially privileged indigenous aristocracy.⁹⁰ In this way, the shift from a communal land tenure system to a feudal one had deeply embittered the peasants, who sought any opportunity to throw off the yoke of unjust feudal prerogatives.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Central State Archive of the Republic of Dagestan (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Dagestan, Makhachkala, hereafter TsGA RD), f. 105, op. 1, d. 10, l. 33.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "Kratkiĭ istoricheskiĭ obzor pozemel'nogo voprosa v Kumykskom okruge Terskoĭ oblasti," *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 4 (1869), 2.

⁹¹ Ibid.

The Russian imperial government was unambiguously complicit in the peasants' dispossession.⁹² In its quest to purchase the political loyalty of the indigenous elites, the imperial administration eagerly issued (or otherwise confirmed) the Kumyk aristocrats with certificates and title deeds recognizing them as the sole legitimate owners of the region's land.⁹³ These investiture-type documents entitled the aristocrats to collect taxes and exercise administrative and judicial authority over the people living on their lands with complete autonomy from the Russian government. In essence, the tsarist administration recreated the seignorial regime of Russian *pomest'ie* in Kumykia and Dagestan, even creating a new class of landowners that was previously nonexistent. With the Russian institution of serfdom in mind, the imperial government saw it propitious to attach the peasants to the land as much as possible and in doing so, to place them under the authority of the politically-loyal indigenous aristocracy. This method of empire-building was instrumental in dismantling traditional forms of communal land tenure and bolstering the political and economic power of the landed aristocracy. Indeed, the government was happy to use its administrative and military resources to discipline the common folk and to reinforce the feudal hierarchy of power when it was necessary. As a result, when the peasants petitioned the government to lessen or altogether abrogate their feudal obligations to landlords, imperial officials deflected their pleas by reminding them that the Tsar's manifesto applied only to Russian serfs. In this way, the

⁹² Pavel Gidulianov, "Soslovno-Pozemel'nyĭ Vopros i Raiatskaia Zavisimost' v Dagestane," *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, №2 (1901): 51-56. Tul'chinskiĭ, "Pozemel'naia Sobstvennost' i Obshchestvennoe Zemlepol'zovanie na Kumykskoĭ Ploskosti," *Terskiĭ Sbornik* vol. 6 (1903): 55. Also see, *AKAK*, vol. 3, №729 (Tiflis, 1869), 385-386.

⁹³ Dalgat, "O Kharaktere Zemel'noĭ Sobstvennosti v Dagestane v XVIII – nachale XX veka," 37. See also, Vladilen Gadzhiev, et al., *Razvitie Feodal'nykh Otnosheniĭ u Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza* (Makhachkala, 1988), 241.

government sternly instructed the peasants to obey their landlords' authority, all while promising to deliver the Tsar's justice and attend to the peasants' grievances in due time.

However, three historical developments in the region established the necessary conditions for the implementation of a series of fundamental reforms that ultimately led to the abolishment of slavery in Kumykia: the end of the Murid War in the northeastern Caucasus in 1859, the abolition of serfdom in Tiflisskaia Gubernia in 1864, and the legislative impulse of the Great Reforms sanctioned by the Tsar himself in the heartland of Russia. The earliest systematic efforts to investigate and understand the system of land tenure in Kumyksiĭ okrug were marked by the creation of a committee for the investigation of the personal and land tenure rights of the indigenous population of the region in 1860.⁹⁴ The committee's work, however, yielded no meaningful legislative recommendations to the Tiflis government. Nevertheless, the committee continued to operate until 1863, when it was absorbed as a separate Kumyksiĭ department (*omdel*) of the Commission with the same name, though the Commission's investigative scope now included the entirety of Terskaia oblast'.⁹⁵ One of the department's primary tasks was to clarify and ascertain the landownership rights in Kumyksiĭ okrug. To accomplish this objective, members of the Commission invited the putative landowners to submit official documentation verifying their landownership claims. At the same time, the commission interviewed peasant deputies to better understand the history of land tenure in the region. The results of these investigations produced conflicting testimonies.

⁹⁴ TsGA RD, f. 105, op. 1, d. 9, l. 681. See also, "Kratkiĭ istoricheskiĭ obzor pozemel'nogo voprosa v Kumykskom okruge Terskoĭ oblasti," *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 4 (1869), 2. Anzhela Khalifaeva, "Agrarnaia Reforma v Dagestane vo Vtoroĭ Polovine XIX veka," *Izvestiia Vuzov. Severo-Kavkazskii Region*, № 4 (2004): 82-83.

⁹⁵ TsGA RD, f. 105, op. 1, d. 9, l. 682.

On one hand, the peasants argued that communal ownership, distribution of land, and the peasants' right to cultivate the land unencumbered by the feudal prerogatives of princely families had a long historic precedent in Kumykia. On the other hand, there were dozens of families who claimed well-established aristocratic lineages. Their privileged social statuses and the right to govern people living in their domains, they argued, had been unequivocally recognized by Russian suzerains from as early as the eighteenth century. To support these claims, they submitted a motley collection of documents, which had allegedly been issued by successive administrations and commanders-in-chief of the Caucasus Line at different stages of Russia's imperial expansion in the region. The evidence gathered by the Commission made it clear that the contradictory claims of the common folk and the aristocratic elites could not be reconciled. The Commission's legislative recommendations to the governments in Tiflis and Saint Petersburg, however, posed extremely high stakes. If the Commission were to recognize the aristocracy's landownership claims as legitimate, then the course of the land reform in Kumykia would have to reckon with a population of over 30,000 people whose landownership rights would be annulled. Any future land redistribution scheme would almost certainly require enormous compensation to the indigenous nobility for the appropriation of their lands. The palpable resentment the peasants felt against the nobles added an additional layer of complexity to the Commission's deliberations. The peasants' anger notwithstanding, the government could not forsake the class of indigenous elites, whose wavering loyalty it had long regarded as the primary pillar of political stability in the Caucasus. Thus, the answer to the land question in Kumykia had to appease the interests of all parties.

The government Commission negotiated the first of several compromises with the Kumyk aristocracy in 1864.⁹⁶ According to the terms of the agreement, the putative landlords were to surrender 40 percent of the total landholdings in their possessions.⁹⁷ While the compromise was a significant breakthrough, it fell short of the government's expectations. Additional concessions were secured in February 1865. Several months of difficult negotiations culminated in a meeting that took place in the fortress of Khasav'iurt, where landowners, peasant deputies, and the tsarist officials drafted and approved a new set of principles to guide the resolution of the land question in Kumykia.⁹⁸ According to the Khasav'iurt agreement, the landowners would surrender claims to 50 percent of all landholdings in Kumyksiï okrug. According to the document, the surrendered land would be divided into equal parcels among peasant communities in the region, and a system of communal land tenure was to be instituted in the villages. The other half of the land would remain in the landlords' inalienable possession in perpetuity with the Russian government serving the landlords' property rights. Following a period of surveying, measuring, and sequestering the land, landowners could dispense of their landholdings in whatever manner they saw fit. The agreement—which acquired the wordy but straightforward title of “The foundations for solving the question concerning provision of land to the peasants of Kumyksiï okrug”⁹⁹—was ratified by the Caucasus

⁹⁶ “Kratkiï istoricheskiï obzor pozemel'nogo voprosa v Kumykskom okruge Terskoï oblasti,” *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 4 (1869), 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ TsGA RD, f. 105, op. 1, d. 12, l. 151-155. See also, Khalifaeva, “Agrarnaia Reforma v Dagestan vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX veka,” 82.

⁹⁹ In Russian: *Osnovaniia dlia resheniia voprosa o nadelenii zemleï krest'ian Kumykskogo okruga.*

Committee in Saint Petersburg and approved by the Tsar on 12 November 1867.¹⁰⁰ The outcomes of the Khasav'iurt agreement were perfectly aligned with the calculated legislative vector that aimed to prioritize the financial interests and bolster the political authority of the indigenous elites in the North Caucasus. Namely, the agreement endowed 166 feudal households with 186,311 *desiatin* of land.¹⁰¹ In contrast, 7,122 peasant households were allotted a slightly larger portion of the land—203,123 *desiatin*.¹⁰²

Another critical outcome of the land reform in Kumykia was the de facto abolition of the feudal dependency of the *chagars* and *terkementsy* estates. The terms of the land reform allowed the *chagars* and *terkementsy* to be eligible to receive a plot of land on equal terms with the personally free peasants. Since the *chagars* and *terkementsy* would no longer live and work on the lands belonging to the feudal landlords, they were automatically relinquished from the responsibility of fulfilling their onerous feudal obligations. In this way, the Russian administration was able to deliver the emancipation of the *chagars* and *terkementsy* by means of a comprehensive land reform without engendering resistance from either the landowners or the dependent estates. However, the fate of the *kuls* required separate legislative solutions and additional rounds of negotiations with the slaveowners.

Abolition of Slavery in the Kumyksiĭ Okrug: Institutions, Resistance, and Outcomes

In the midst of legislative deliberations and logistical arrangements surrounding the reorganization of land tenure rights in Kumykia, the Russian administration also investigated the best means to abolish slavery in the region. If the abolitionist project in Kabarda served as

¹⁰⁰ TsGA RD, f. 147, op. 1, d. 3, l. 119.

¹⁰¹ RGIA, f. 1149, op. 10, d. 112, l. 25.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

any indication, the government was not intent on issuing sweeping reforms without addressing the financial anxieties of the slaveowners who faced the prospect of losing the ownership of their slaves. As a result, the government allowed the slaveowners to play an integral part in outlining the future contours of abolition in Kumykia. Indeed, for all practical purposes, the roadmap to freedom for the enslaved in the region was charted primarily by the slaveowners, who accomplished their task with gentle oversight from imperial officials and occasional consultation with slaves. In essence, the tsarist administration recognized the enslaved *kuls* as the legitimate property of their owners, and therefore, was unwilling to liberate the slaves without providing reasonable compensation to their owners. The issue of compensation was of great importance to the government because it did not want to risk losing the political loyalty of the slave-owning class. However, given the scale of the institution of slavery in the North Caucasus, purchasing the freedom of the enslaved communities using money from the monarchy's coffers would have been an exceptionally costly undertaking. While the government did provide some financial relief to the most destitute of the slaves, it did not want to assume the full financial burden of abolition. Instead, the enslaved were required to buy their freedom using their own labor. Such dispositions of the state were obviously antithetical to the universal principles of abolitionism. Yet, from the perspective of the imperial state, requiring the *kuls* to recompense the slaveowners with the cost of labor was the optimal solution for the slave question in Kumyksiï okrug; a solution which could provide slave owners with fair compensation for the loss of their property, give the enslaved a path toward freedom, and, perhaps most importantly, sustain the social and political stability of the region.

The institution of slavery had a centuries-long history in Kumykia.¹⁰³ The Kumyk *adat* (customary law) permitted the ownership of slaves to people of all social backgrounds, including the dependent estates of the *chagars* and *terkemens*. Therefore, slaves were a common sight in the households that could afford purchasing them. The precise number of enslaved people in Kumykia before Russian conquest is impossible to obtain. The closest estimation of the numerical scale of slavery in the region can be extracted from government sources, which indicate that on the eve of abolition in Kumyksiĭ okrug, the *kul* population stood at 932 people, or a little less than three percent of the region's entire population.¹⁰⁴

Rumors of the impending abolition of slavery began to circulate throughout the North Caucasus and Kumykia through informal hearsay networks as early as 1861. In 1864, the abolition of slavery among the Terek Cossacks and the emancipation of the serfs in Tifliskaia Gubernia gave these rumors a credible foundation. Finally, as the abolition of slavery in Kabarda gained legislative momentum in 1866, the slaveowners in Kumyksiĭ okrug saw the writing on the wall. The looming prospect of abolition had alarmed the slaveowners, but did not generate a large-scale protest comparable to the unrest that occurred in Kabarda. For its part, the government took pains to assuage the slaveowners' anxieties by promising a just settlement to the so-called peasant question. Such reassurances succeeded in convincing the slaveowners to accept abolition as inevitable, and encouraged them to participate in the drafting of the policies that would regulate the process of emancipation. If we are to trust the official records, by the beginning of 1867, the slaveowners in Kumykia "expressed

¹⁰³ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 131.

¹⁰⁴ "Osvobozhdenie krest'ian v tuzemnom naselenii Terskoĭ oblasti," *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 9 (1869), 4.

willingness to emancipate their slaves.”¹⁰⁵ The desire to cooperate with the imperial authorities, however, came with an important caveat. The Kumyk slaveowners insisted that the abolition of slavery in the region had to act in accordance with canons of the *adat* (customary law). The government obliged the slaveowners’ request.

The slaveowners set forth their demands in a letter, which was delivered to the Head of the okrug, Frants Voiakovskii, on 9 November 1866.¹⁰⁶ First, the slaveowners requested a grace period of one year to work out and formalize the precise terms of the *kuls*’ emancipation. During this time, the slaves’ legal status and obligations would remain unchanged. From there, the emancipation itself would follow one of two scenarios. In the first scenario, a *kul* could obtain freedom by making a one-time redemption payment equal to the market value of the *kul*’s body. This redemption sum ranged from 100 to 400 silver rubles, depending on a *kul*’s age. *Kuls* would be required to pay the redemption sum in full within four to six years.¹⁰⁷ Failure to pay the redemption sum on time would presumably restore a *kul*’s status of enslavement. The second scenario allowed a *kul* to obtain freedom by means of unpaid mandatory labor for a specified number of years. The temporal term of such mandatory labor required the calculation of the monetary value of a *kul*’s annual labor output.¹⁰⁸

The Kumyk slaveowners also supplied a payment chart that set the cost of redemption in relation to a *kul*’s age.¹⁰⁹ According to the slaveowners’ estimates, *kuls* of all genders aged

¹⁰⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 96 ob. Also see, SEA, f. 416, op. 3, d. 1223, ll. 1-3.

¹⁰⁶ TsGA RD, f. 105, op. 1, 44 (a), ll. 3-3 ob.

¹⁰⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 96 ob.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Osvobozhdenie krest’ian v tuzemnom naselenii Terskoï oblasti,” *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 2 (1869), 3.

between one and ten years old had to pay a redemption sum of 100 silver rubles. *Kuls* between the ages of ten and fifteen years old had to pay 150 silver rubles to obtain freedom. *Kuls* between the ages of fifteen and fifty years old would be required to pay 400 silver rubles in redemption payments, and finally, *kuls* between the ages of fifty and seventy years old would have to make a redemption payment in the amount of 100 silver rubles. These suggested redemption payment amounts were the highest ever recorded in the North Caucasus.¹¹⁰

The Russian administration accepted the principle of using the Kumyk customary norms in order to facilitate the abolition of slavery in the region. But the government could not accept the extremely high redemption payments that the slaveowners hoped to receive in return for giving their slaves freedom. Although the slaveowners' estimates may have reflected the market value of slaves in Kumyksiĭ okrug at the time of their emancipation, accepting these figures would have certainly stopped the abolition project in Kumykiia in its tracks and prolonged the de-facto slavery in the region for decades to come. Since *kuls* in Kumykiia were legally barred from owning any property, they were completely dependent on the charity of their masters for food and clothing. It was clear that no one among the enslaved had any assets (not to mention silver) on hand that could be used to pay off the redemption debt. This reality left the enslaved with only one option to obtain freedom—unpaid mandatory labor lasting several years. However, to meet the slaveowners' annual threshold of labor-to-cash ratios and fulfill the redemption payment requirements, many of the *kuls* would have to perform the same unpaid slave labor for more than a decade. This scenario was untenable even for the tsarist officials, who sincerely tried to do right by the slaveowners and shield them from the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

financial losses incurred by abolition. The imperial administration needed to find yet another compromise to advance the abolitionist project in Kумыkiia.

Several weeks of intensive deliberations succeeded in convincing the slaveowners to revise the amount of the redemption payments that the *kuls* would be required to pay their owners.¹¹¹ The revised payment scale considerably reduced the *kuls*' financial burden while still providing the slaveowners with hefty compensation. To be clear, the revised amounts of the mandatory redemption payments were still very high. However, the amendments made the prospect of complete, albeit slow, emancipation in Kумыkiia at least feasible. According to the changes introduced by the imperial administration, *kuls* aged between twelve and twenty years old would be required to pay 10 silver rubles for each successive year of their age. Thus, a kul at twelve years of age would be required to pay 10 silver rubles to his or master, a fifteen-year-old *kul* would pay 30 silver rubles, and a twenty-year-old *kul* would pay 80 silver rubles as their redemption payment. *Kuls* between the ages of twenty and fifty years old would pay 200 silver rubles. All *kuls* aged fifty and older, as well as the physically disabled, maimed, or otherwise handicapped *kuls* would be emancipated immediately, without paying a redemption sum. Since the majority of the *kuls* did not own any property whatsoever and could not make a one-time redemption payment, they opted to fulfill the terms of emancipation by means of mandatory labor. The Russian administration set precise parameters around the monetary value of the *kuls*' labor. According to these estimates, one year of a *kul*'s labor was equal to a minimum of 30, but no more than 50 silver rubles. Hence, a healthy male or female *kul* could

¹¹¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 97 ob.

conceivably fulfill the terms of their emancipation within a span of four to six years of unpaid mandatory labor.¹¹²

Once the government and the slaveowners in Kumyksiĭ okrug reached a consensus surrounding the redemption payments, the legislative wheels of abolition were set in motion. The Russian administration decided to adopt a portion of the rules for the emancipation of the dependent estates in Kabarda as the principle legal statute governing the process of abolition in Kumykiiia. Considering the fact that the imperial administration had drafted a separate set of emancipation regulations for virtually every region of Terskaia oblast' with a sizeable slave population, the decision to replicate the emancipation procedure of Kabarda in Kumykiiia was unique. The government explained its decision by arguing that the legal status and living conditions of the *unauts* in Kabarda closely resembled those of the *kuls* in Kumykiiia.¹¹³

The abolition of slavery, or the Peasant Reform as it was known in Russian bureaucratic parlance, commenced in Kumykiiia on 15 January 1867. Based on the model of abolition in Kabarda, the government invited the slaveowners and slaves to draft “voluntary agreements” stipulating the terms of emancipation for every *kul* in the possession of each slaveowner. These agreements had to be finalized within twelve months. Such “voluntary agreements” acquired the status of legally enforceable contracts following their review and notarization in specially-created mediation court (*mirovoi posrednicheskii sud*). The authorities established this court in the administrative capital of Kumyksiĭ okrug, the fortress of Khasav'iurt. In addition to notarizing the voluntary agreements between the *kuls* and slaveowners, the court was also charged with the responsibility of mediating disagreements that could arise between

¹¹² Ibid., 98 – 98 ob.

¹¹³ Ibid., 97 ob.

the parties negotiating the terms of emancipation. The court was chaired by the deputy of the Head of Kumyksiï okrug and included several presiding officers comprised of representatives from the slaveowners and the dependent estates.¹¹⁴ The court officially ceased its operations after five months of work on 15 June 1867, which marked the formal abolition of slavery in Kumykiia.

On the surface, the story of abolition in Kumyksiï okrug was a resounding success. In the aftermath of the reform, 932 *kuls* formally obtained personal freedom. In addition, the land reform dismantled the system of onerous feudal obligations that had plagued the lives of approximately 2,400 *chagars* and *terkemens*.¹¹⁵ It also provided every *chagar* and *terkemen* household with a plot of land. On average, every eligible peasant household in Kumykiia received 28 *desiatin* of land.¹¹⁶ What is more, in contrast to the emancipated serfs in the Russian heartland, the *chagars* and *terkemens* received their land allotments without having to buy them from the landlords. The absence of land redemption payments allowed the *chagars* and *terkemens* to focus their energies and resources exclusively on supporting their families. Thus, at first glance, the Russian abolitionist policies seemed to have succeeded in dismantling the institution of slavery and the system of feudal servitude in the region. A more

¹¹⁴ The court's membership included its chair, Major Grigorovich, assistant Prince Adzhiev, deputies representing the interests of the slaveowners: lieutenant Il'ias Aliev and retired stabskapitän Prince Kaplanov. The interests of the slaves in the court were represented by Ikav Gadzhi Dukaev and Mullah Akai Veliev.

¹¹⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 99 ob.

¹¹⁶ Dalgat, "O Kharaktere Zemel'noï Sobstvennosti v Dagestane v XVIII – nachale XX veka," 39.

thorough analysis of abolition and the land reform, however, suggests that in 1867, the process of abolition in Kumyksiï okrug was far from over.

Although the government granted immediate personal freedom to a small number of former slaves (primarily to those who were either too young or too old to work), the majority of *kuls* remained under the dependency of their masters for several years. First, whatever meager moveable possessions that the slaves owned were divided equally between them and their owners.¹¹⁷ Then, the former slaves acquired an ambiguous legal status of temporarily obligated servants. They were no longer enslaved and yet, they were not completely free. This status put the former slaves' anticipation for a better future into uncertain abeyance. It also served as a painful reminder of the injustices of the past and the present. In order to discard the identity of servitude once and for all, the formerly enslaved men and women had to purchase their own freedom. To do that, the former *kuls* were required to perform the same kind of slave labor that they had performed for the benefit of their masters prior to abolition. The law estimated the value of the *kuls*' labor in relation to the cost of their bodies to be equivalent to four or six years of work, depending on the age and physical abilities of a former *kul*. The formerly enslaved did have an option to fulfill the terms of their emancipation contract by finding employment outside of their former owners' household. However, this option required the notarized consent of their former owner. It also meant that those who managed to find outside employment set aside the lion's share of their income towards redemption payments. In this way, the status of "temporary obligation" prolonged the former

¹¹⁷ Sakinat Gadzhieva, *Kumyki: istoricheskoe proshloe, kul'tura, byt* (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2000), 320.

kuls' servile condition, delayed their financial independence, and cast a long shadow of precariousness over their lives in the post-abolition Caucasus.

Many former slaves struggled to fulfill the financial terms of their emancipation agreements. The case of a formerly enslaved woman, Nasipli Dzhamagulova, illustrates the difficulty of securing freedom in the years following the formal abolition of slavery in Kumykia.¹¹⁸ In 1872, Nasipli submitted a petition to the Russian authorities in the fortress of Khasav'iurt seeking an exemption from making redemption payments to her former owner, widow Azhav Klycheva, on account of poor health. In her petition, Nasipli explained that she was released from slavery on 24 April 1867. Nasipli's emancipation contract required her to pay her former owner 170 silver rubles within six years. However, a debilitating ailment that affected Nasipli's bones made it impossible for her to move, much less perform manual labor. Her condition was confirmed with a formal note from a doctor.¹¹⁹ Bedridden and dependent on the charity of her brother, Nasipli defaulted on her debt. Her former owner, however, would not relent on trying to collect the redemption payments. The impasse necessitated the government's mediation, and the imperial administration verified Nasipli's poor health. However, given that Nasipli developed her illness after she was emancipated from slavery, the authorities concluded that she remained liable for paying the redemption sum of 170 silver rubles in full. Until Nasipli fulfilled the terms of her emancipation contract, she would remain under the status of obligatory servitude.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 3, d. 56, ll. 1-5 ob.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 5.

¹²⁰ Some respite finally arrived for Nasipli in 1873 when the Head of Terskaia oblast' released her from making redemption payments until she had fully recovered from her illness. See TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 4, d. 46, l. 10.

Furthermore, the seemingly successful outcome of the land reform in Kumyksiï okrug had its limits. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, the land reform in Kumykiia, and other parts of the North Caucasus was part and parcel of the imperial project to marshal the forces of nascent modernity in the Caucasus with the goal of reinforcing political stability and harnessing the full productive potential of the region and its people. However, the government's understanding of modernity was informed by the imperial logic of social and class privilege and associated with this privilege political loyalty. The tsarist administration had scored an important victory by cajoling the feudal elites to renounce their claims of ownership to half of all arable lands in Kumykiia. However, the process of land allotment revealed that even seemingly transparent attempts to divide the land fairly were ultimately subverted in favor of aristocratic prerogatives, which were fully endorsed by the tsarist administration. As a result, on average, the land allotments given to the landowners were forty times larger than the land allotments of the common folk.¹²¹ Furthermore, the landowners normally surrendered the most inaccessible, undeveloped, or least fertile agricultural land. The tendency to reserve and sequester the best lands for the landowning aristocracy also restricted the peasants' access to pastures, forests, and irrigation canals,¹²² and the poor quality of land resulted in poor harvests. To ensure adequate supplies of food and to secure access to grazing lands, many peasants resorted to renting additional plots of land from the aristocratic landowners. Finally, the process of land surveying, zoning, and designating precise borders

¹²¹ Khalifaeva, "Agrarnaia Reforma v Dagestan vo Vtoroï Polovine XIX veka," 83.

¹²² M. Mansurov, "Vovlechenie Zaslakskoiï Kumykii v Obscherossiïskuiu Ekonomicheskuiu Sistemu," in *Proniknovenie i Razvitie Kapitalisticheskikh Otnoshenii v Dagestane*, ed. Vladilen Gadzhiev (Makhachkala, 1984), 39.

of each rural community lasted five decades and was not complete until the tumult of the 1917 Bolshevik coup.¹²³ Thus, in the aftermath of the land reform, the boundaries of each *aul* in Kumykia were temporary, uncertain, and often caused conflicts over the right to cultivate disputed plots of land.¹²⁴

The question of landownership among the former slaves was equally fraught with unforeseen issues. The government's rules of emancipation allowed the formerly enslaved men and women to receive land allotments on equal terms with the personally free peasants. This eligibility commenced after four to six years, or right after the former slaves completed the terms of their temporary obligation, thereby purchasing their own freedom. The trouble of obtaining land had little to do with the stigma of slave genealogy, as one might assume. Rather, the culprit was the government instituted system of communal land tenure. According to this system, the admission of new members to a village community required the consent of the village's *skhod* (the gathering of all male households heads in a village). Similarly, a peasant could not leave his or her village and sell property without the consent of other male members of the villager commune. What's more, the decision to admit new members entailed the redistribution of communal lands, which decreased the total amount of available arable land per village household. Therefore, a village that was already experiencing land scarcity had no incentive to admit new members. Archives indicate that of 7,728 *desiatin* of land, which was

¹²³ Ibid., 40.

¹²⁴ Khalifaeva, "Agrarnaia Reforma v Dagestan vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX veka," 83. Not all residents of Kumyksiĭ okrug qualified to receive a land allotment. The land reform explicitly excluded everyone who had settled in the region at the end of the Murid War in 1859 from the government sponsored land distribution scheme. Thus, 299 households of Chechen, Akkints, Salatav settlers, as well as 142 households of Juhuro (Mountain Jews) and 16 Armenian households were dispossessed of their lands and eventually resettled in other parts of the North Caucasus. See, SEA, f. 12, op. 3, d. 150, l. 8.

parceled out among 276 households of former slaves, only 1,927 *desiatin* belonged to peasant communes.¹²⁵ The combination of persistent land scarcity, colonization policies, and the imperial co-opting politics of the indigenous elites guaranteed that upon emancipation, the former *kuls* struggled to build a life unencumbered by the oppressive weight of the legacy of slavery.

North Ossetia (Osetinskiĭ Okrug)

In 1867, the Osetinskiĭ okrug had the second highest number of registered slaves in Terskaia oblast'.¹²⁶ Therefore, the success or failure of abolition in Ossetia could influence the course of the Russian abolitionist enterprise in other regions of the North Caucasus. In short, the stakes of abolition in Ossetia were high. The Russian Empire formally incorporated the north Ossetian lands into its imperial domains in the late eighteenth century as a result of Russian victories in the 1768-1774 Russo-Turkish war and the signing of the Kuchuk Kainarji Peace Treaty in 1774.¹²⁷ In the 1860s, the administrative borders of Osetinskiĭ okrug roughly corresponded to the demarcation lines that constitute the territory of present-day North Ossetia

¹²⁵ TsGA RD, f. 147, op. 1, d. 3, l. 2.

¹²⁶ B. Berozov, *Zemel'naia Reforma i Otmena Krepostnogo Prava v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidze, 1979), 46.

¹²⁷ Mark Blied, *Osetinskoe Posol'stvo v Peterburge 1749-1752: Prisoedinenie Osetii k Rossii* (Vladikavkaz, 2010), 182-201. The region, which is known today as the South Ossetia, did not come under direct Russian control until the first half of the nineteenth century. The process of integrating South Ossetia into the system of Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus was a difficult one. Several princely Georgian families claimed seignorial rights over the lands in the region and demanded that the Russian administration legally recognize the Ossetian peasants as their serfs. The peasants in the South Ossetia bitterly rejected these claims and refused to submit to the Georgian seignorial authority, staging several armed uprisings that required punitive interventions from the Russian army. See Mark Blied, *Iuzhnaia Osetiia v Kolliziiakh Rossiĭsko-Gruzinskikh Otnoshenĭi* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo «Evropa», 2006), 56-103.

– Alaniia.¹²⁸ The topography of the okrug naturally split the region into two zones: the fertile plains and the mountainous slopes of the North Caucasus ridge. The plains offered opportunities for the development of sedentary communities engaged in agriculture, beekeeping, and animal husbandry, among other things. In contrast, the foothills and rugged mountains offered little in the way of natural resources but provided shelter and natural defenses against raiding and kidnapping.

On the eve of the abolitionist reforms, Osetinskii okrug was organized into four districts (*obshchestva*): Digoriia, Tagauriia, Kurtatiia, and Alagiriia. In 1867, the population of the okrug stood at 46,802 people.¹²⁹ Despite the geographic proximity, common ethnic identity, and shared language among the districts, each Ossetian community developed its own terminology to signal class and a privileged social status. The fault lines of class and privilege became especially salient in the regions of Digoriia and Tagauriia. This terminological diversity, which was typical for the Caucasus region, vexed the Russian administration. In Tagauriia, the privileged class of indigenous nobility were called *Aldars* (*Алдары*). In

¹²⁸ In the mid-nineteenth century, the territory of the present-day South Ossetia was split between the administrative jurisdiction of the Tiflisskaia and Kutaiskskaia Gubernii. The Peasant Reform in the South Ossetian lands was implemented at the same time as in the guberniia that they were part of. The archives did not preserve any records of institutionalized slavery in the South Ossetia. Thus, the Peasant Reform in the region primarily focused on abolishing serfdom and various other types of feudal dependencies that existed between the Ossetian peasants and Georgian nobles. For a discussion on the Peasant Reform in the South Ossetia, see Mark Bliev, *Iuzhnaia Osetiia v Kolliziiakh Rossiisko-Gruzinskikh Otnosheniĭ*, 260-270. Zakhariĭ Vaneev, *Krest'ianskiĭ Vopros i Kresti'ianskoe Dvizhenie v Iugo-Osetii v XIX veke*.

¹²⁹ “Statisticheskie svedeniia o kavkazskikh gortsakh, sostoiashchikh v voenno-narodnom upravlenii,” in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 6.

Digoriia, the noble families were primarily known as *Badeliata* (*Баделята*).¹³⁰ Another title that signaled high social standing and personal freedom across all Ossetian communities was *Uzden'* (*Узденъ*).

One step below on the social ladder stood personally-free peasants who, living on lands that belonged to the purported Ossetian nobles, were required to perform a variety of feudal and personal obligations. In Tagauria, this class of personally-free peasants was known as *farsalag* (*фарсалаг*). In Digoriia, personally-free peasants were called *adamikhat* (*адамикхат*). In addition, in Alagiriia, personally-free peasants were known as *khekhesy* (*хехесы*). According to the local customary law, the performance of the feudal duties was premised on the peasants' consent to accept the feudal authority of *Aldars*, *Badeliat*, or Kabardinian princes. That meant that the peasants reserved the right to leave their lord at the time when they considered necessary. Russian administration considered these personally-free peasants as having economic, rather than personal, dependence to their lords.

The personally-free peasants constituted the largest social estate in Ossetia. The notion of personal freedom, however, must be understood in the context of the Ossetian social landscape. The landlord could not sell or purchase personally-free peasants and as mentioned earlier, the peasants could (at least in theory) exercise their right to leave the landlord's lands at any moment. However, according to the customary law, a peasant's decision to leave required their surrender of all movable and immovable property, which made the possibility of the peasants' departure economically devastating and therefore unlikely. Thus, for all

¹³⁰ Names like *Tsargasata* (*Царгасата*) and *Gaguata* (*Гаргата*) were also used in some parts of Digoriia to identify members of noble families.

practical purposes, the Ossetian landlords treated the personally-free peasants as serfs who owed them (and the landlords' descendants) labor and in-kind payments in perpetuity.

At the bottom of the Ossetian social hierarchy were slaves. The slaves were classified into two categories: customary slaves (*обрядовый холоп*) and non-customary slaves (*безобрядовый холоп, безправный холоп*). In Digoriia, the class of customary slaves was known as *kumaiagi* (*кумаяги*). In Tagauria these slaves were known as *kavdasary* (*кавдасары*). This category of slaves emerged from children born to slave concubines. The social status, rights, and obligations of these slaves varied across different Ossetian communities in accordance with the local customary law. *Kusagi* (*кусаги*) or *gurziaki* (*гурзияки*) filled the ranks of the non-customary slaves. These slaves did not have any rights whatsoever.¹³¹ The enslaved *kusagi* were usually victims of raids, kidnappings, and the slave trade in the Caucasus.¹³²

Slavery and serfdom were formally abolished in Ossetia in 1867. The emancipation operation commenced on 18 February of that year at the behest of the Head of the Terskaia oblast', Loris-Melikov. The reform was carried out in gradual steps under the close supervision of Loris-Melikov and the Head of the Osetinskiĭ okrug, Colonel Alexander Eglau.

¹³¹ Georgii Kokiev, *Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidze, 1940), 206.

¹³² For a detailed account of the social organization of the northern Ossetian communities on the eve of the emancipation reforms, including descriptions of slavery, please see, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 30 ob. – 31. Also, see F.I. Leontovich, "Materialy po Obychnomu Pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza" in *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Novorossiĭskogo Universiteta*, ed. Aleksandr Kochubinskiĭ, vol. 38 (Odessa, 1883), 9-19, 40-44. Maksim Kovalevskiĭ, *Sovremennyi Obychai i Drevniĭ Zakon. Obychnoe Pravo Osetin v Istoriko-Sravnitel'nom Osveshchenii* (Moskva: 1886), 295-300. *Sbornik materialov dlia opisaniia mestnostei i plemen Kavkaza*, vol. 3 (Tiflis, 1883), 298-314. Maksim Kovalevskiĭ, *Zakon i Obychai na Kavkaze*, vol. 1 (Moskva, 1890), 245-252. V. Pfafa, "Narodnoe Pravo Osetin" in *Sbornik svedeniĭ o Kavkaze*, vol. 1, ed. Nikolaĭ Zeĭdlits, (Tiflis, 1871), 205-209. Georgii Kokiev, *Ocherki po Istorii Osetii*, vol. 1 (Vladikavkaz, 2011), 70-77.

The tsarist government followed the same tactic that it had implemented in the neighboring Kabarda, that of providing the slaves with two paths to freedom. The slaves had the option of either signing a voluntary mutual agreement (*vzaimnoe soglashenie*) with their slave-owners or following the government-endorsed rules for the emancipation of the dependent estates. As in Kabarda, the Russian administration encouraged slave-owners to actively participate in the process of drafting the Statute (*Polozhenie*) that outlined the rules for the emancipation of slaves and serfs in the region. Nevertheless, despite the slave-owners' direct involvement in the legislative deliberations that shaped the legal contours of abolition to their own advantage, many slave-owners vocally protested the very idea of freeing their slaves. Some of them publicly declared their intention to leave their homeland in protest and resettle in the Ottoman Empire rather than give up their slaves.¹³³ Yet the vocal renunciations of abolition and threats of *en masse* emigration never transformed into a well-organized exodus, much less an armed uprising against Russian authority. The abolitionist campaign continued its course until December 1867, when 1,419 slaves at last achieved personal freedom.¹³⁴ The outcome of abolition in Ossetia, however, was dubious. The terms of the emancipation required former slaves to purchase their own freedom by means of mandatory slave labor for a period of six

¹³³ Waves of voluntary emigration of Ossetian communities to the Ottoman Empire occurred sporadically between 1859 and 1861. For more details see B. Berozov, *Zemel'naia Reforma i Otmena Krepostnogo Prava v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidze, 1979), 56. To read the testimony of an Ossetian Mujahir telling the story of his emigration to the Ottoman Empire from Ossetia in 1860, see Inal Kanukov, "Gortsy-pereselentsy" in SSKG, vol. 9 (Tiflis, 1876), 84.

¹³⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3327, l. 44. To see the final tally of all slaves in each district in Ossetia, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 30 ob. – 31. Historian B.P. Berezov estimated the total number of emancipated slaves in Ossetia to be 1,449, see B.P. Berezov, *Zemel'naia Reforma i Otmena Krepostnogo Prava v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidze, 1979), 50.

years. To make matters worse, unlike personally-free peasants, former slaves were not entitled to receive a plot of land upon completion of the mandatory service. These and other aspects of abolition in Ossetia destined former slaves to a life of economic precarity and social insecurity.

The Prelude to Abolition in the Osetinskiĭ Okrug

Even before the Russian administration conceived of abolitionist reforms, Ossetian communities were afflicted by long-festering social strife which pitted personally-free peasants against a vaguely defined class of indigenous nobility. A very candid illustration of this strife on the eve of emancipation appeared on the pages of the Tiflis-based newspaper *Kavkaz* in 1865. Stretching across several issues of the newspaper, the article metaphorically compared the tensions between peasants and noble families to a blazing bonfire: “The fire was ignited, but there was no time to put it out.”¹³⁵ Its author, K. Krasnitskiĭ, expressed his opinions with the voice of authority, which he derived from his two-year-long tenure as chair of the specially created commission for the examination of estate and land-tenure rights among the Ossetians. The seemingly irreconcilable discord among the peasants, enslaved people, and purported class of nobility, according to the author, plagued Russian efforts to govern the region for decades.

Indeed, the imperial government struggled to make sense of the convoluted system of social hierarchies in Ossetia. Repeated attempts to study and define the social stratification of the region and reorganize the land-tenure system were undertaken, abandoned, and resumed in 1846, 1848, 1852, 1857, 1859, 1862, and finally 1863.¹³⁶ Intermittent violence in the North

¹³⁵ K. Krasnitskiĭ, *Kavkaz*, 1865, № 32.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Caucasus and mutually exclusive testimonies of different social groups impeded Russian efforts to build a stable and clearly discernable social order in the Osetinskiĭ okrug. Russian practices of co-optation by means of bestowing indigenous elites with the rights and legal protections of Russian nobility, incentivized some family clans of distinction to claim seignorial sovereignty over the personally-free peasants, often without merit or documents to prove such claims. The peasants protested and dismissed such claims; they petitioned the government, arguing that they had always enjoyed uncontested personal freedom.¹³⁷ Any obligations that peasants owed to members of select families, the argument went, were premised not on seignorial duty, but rather on the peasants' consent to live on the landlords' land and pay rent. Such consent could be conceivably revoked at any time. Complicating the matters further was the fact that some Ossetian communities pledged fealty to Kabardinian princes in return for protection against raiding. In short, even before the emancipation reform was unveiled in Ossetia in 1867, communal strife was already a persistent feature of the Ossetian social landscape.

In addition to the challenges of reconciling the competing interests of the peasantry with the largely unsubstantiated claims of seignorial prerogatives of the self-fashioned Ossetian aristocracy, the Russian administration also had to contend with institutions of slavery that were both unique to and deeply entrenched in the region. The customary law in Ossetia permitted polygamy for men. This type of marriage was known as *nomylus* (номьлус).¹³⁸

¹³⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3294, ll. 1-45.

¹³⁸ For a detailed contemporary description of *Nomylus* marriages see Vladimir Pfaf "Narodnoe parvo Osetin," in *Sbornik Svedeniĭ o Kavkaze*, ed. N. Zeĭdlits, (Tiflis, 1871), 207-208. Fedor Leontovich, "Aday Osetin," in *Aday Kavkazskikh Gortsev: Materialy po Obychnomu Pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza*, vol. II (Odessa, 1882), 68-69. Maksim Kovalevskii, *Sovremennyĭ Obychaĭ i Drevniĭ Zakon: Obychnoe Pravo Osetin v Istoriko*

According to the custom, personally-free men with requisite financial means could purchase several *nomylus* wives (*именные жёны; наложницы*). Women sold into *nomylus* marriages were either slaves or came from impoverished peasant families. The legal status of *nomylus* wives was vague but comparable to that of a concubine; they enjoyed neither the dignified social recognition nor the legally defined protections that were ascribed to conventionally married women in the Ossetian communities. Upon purchase of a female slave from her owner or payment of the bride price (*irad* or *kalym*) to the parents of a young woman and consummation of marriage, the *nomylus* wife assumed the responsibility of the household servant. She lived on the property of her husband but in a building (usually a barn or stables) separate from the husband's legal wife. In addition to the performance of household duties, the *nomylus* wife was expected to make herself sexually available to her husband at the time and location of his choosing. Children born to *nomylus* wives were known as *kavdasars*. The Russian administration commonly described them as the customary slaves (*обрядные холопы*). The Ossetian customary law offered vague guidance, which differed from one community to another, on the precise status of *kavdasar* slaves. Ultimately, the social status and the degree of subjugation of *kavdasars* depended largely on the unpredictable nature of familial dynamics and the personal disposition of their owners-cum-fathers. This explains the great diversity of experiences endured by these customary slaves. Some *kavdasars* were accepted as fully integrated members of a family. Others remained permanently on the margins of a family unit. Generally, *kavdasars* were treated as servants who performed a variety of household chores. The customary law discouraged the sale or other forms of

Sravnitel'nom Osveshchenii, vol. I (Moscow, 1886), 35. Kokiev, *Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Severnoï Osetii* (Ordzhonikidzhe, 1940), 209.

alienation of *kavdasars*. Nevertheless, their owners reserved the right to sell or transfer them as chattel, for example as a form of punishment.¹³⁹ Upon the death of their owners, *kavdasars* were required to continue their service to the legitimate children of their common father and were not legally entitled to receive inheritance. However, according to the surveys conducted by Russian officials, it was not rare for some *kavdasars* to receive personal freedom and a modest plot of land upon the death of their owner.

The imperial archives suggest that Ossetians of Christian and Muslim creed engaged in the practice of *nomylus* marriage either as sellers or buyers of women.¹⁴⁰ The custom became a source of constant frustration for the Christian Orthodox priests and missionaries in Ossetia who strongly condemned *nomylus* marriages as offensive to the Christian canon but had no practical recourse or sufficient spiritual authority to stop these marriages from happening. Russian secular authorities were equally concerned about the sale of young women as concubines, especially to the residents of the neighboring Kabarda, where these women filled the ranks of female *unaut* slaves.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, aside from occasional verbal censure, the Russian administration in Ossetia took no proactive measures against the custom and largely turned a blind eye to these marriages. This unwritten policy of reluctant tolerance of custom-sanctioned polygamy finally ended in 1867 with the abolition of slavery, dismantling of the institution of *nomylus* marriages and subsequent emancipation of *kavdasars* in Ossetia.

The Statute for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Ossetia

¹³⁹ Nikolaï Dubrovin, *Istoria Voïny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*, vol. I (Sankt-Peterburg, 1871), 329, 333.

¹⁴⁰ SEA, f. 16, op. 1, d. 8062, ll. 1 – 13.

¹⁴¹ Georgiï Kokiev, *Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Severnoï Osetii* (Ordzhonikidzhe, 1940), 208.

Scarcity of land and natural resources had circumscribed the possibilities for wealth accumulation in Ossetia, thus making the institution of slavery an attractive commercial venue for trade, investment, and labor. It is hardly surprising then that when Russian authorities in Ossetia announced their plans to abolish slavery in the region, many slave-owners expressed serious concerns about the government's intentions. Although, the slave-owners' protests remained peaceful, tsarist officials were keen to mollify the slave-owners' financial anxieties and avert the possibility of organized resistance. In order to secure the slave-owners' cooperation, the Russian administration invited slave-owners to be part of the solution. In practical terms this meant that slave-owners played a central role in drafting the guidelines for the emancipation of slaves in Ossetia. While it is important to acknowledge that the slaves' voices were not entirely ignored in the legislative deliberations, the final draft of the policy unequivocally upheld the proprietary prerogatives of slave-owners.

In the months leading up to the abolition of slavery in Ossetia, the Russian administration solicited the slave-owners' input on how best to emancipate slaves in the region. The slave-owners were invited to draft and submit their version of rules that could guide the process of emancipation. Despite almost universal opposition to abolition, some slave-owners relented to the administrative pressure of the government and accepted the invitation to draft the rules. The imperial authorities received three proposal drafts.¹⁴² The proposals differed in the total redemption sum that slaves would be required to pay their masters. For instance, slave-owners in Digoriia suggested that male slaves between the ages of 15 and 45 be required to pay a redemption sum of 250 silver rubles; women in the same age range would be required to pay

¹⁴² B. Berozov, *Zemel'naia Reforma i Otmena Krepostnogo Prava v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidze, 1979), 47.

200 silver rubles. In another proposal, slave-owners in Tagauriia suggested a more modest redemption sum of 180 silver rubles for slaves of both genders between the ages of 15 and 50. In the end, in the spirit of compromise, the tsarist authorities incorporated parts of all three proposals in the final draft of the document.

The final document, titled the Statute (*Положение*) for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Ossetia,¹⁴³ was divided into two sections and contained a total of 20 articles.¹⁴⁴ The first section of the emancipation Statute outlined the process of emancipation for non-customary slaves, or *kusagi*. The statute declared unambiguously that the emancipation of all non-customary slaves would occur by means of payment of a stipulated redemption sum to a slave-owner at the slaves' own expense.¹⁴⁵ Exceptions were made for male slaves over 50 years old and female slaves over 45 years old who obtained personal freedom immediately without making a redemption payment.¹⁴⁶ The redemption payment for male and female slaves between the ages of 15 and 50 was set at 180 silver rubles.¹⁴⁷ The redemption payment for male and female slaves between the ages of 1 and 15 years old was set at 8 silver rubles for each year of their respective age.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ *Polozhenie ob Osvobozhdenii Zavisimykh Sosloviĭ v Osetii*.

¹⁴⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 89 ob. – 96.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 89 ob.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 89 ob. – 90.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 90.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The emancipation Statute offered the slaves three options for making the redemption payment. The first option permitted slaves to make a one-time payment of the entire redemption sum. The second option allowed slaves to negotiate an installment plan (this option required the slave-owner's consent and entailed notarization and enforcement of the terms of the agreement by the government). Finally, slaves could fulfill the redemption payment requirement through "mandatory labor" (*обязательные работы*) to the benefit of their owners. Slaves who chose this option continued to perform the same unregulated slave labor for their owner for a period of up to 6 years.¹⁴⁹ The Statute also provided special provisions for slave women who entered into marriage before completing the six-year term of mandatory labor. To obtain freedom, these women were required to pay the remainder of their outstanding redemption debt from the *kalym* (*калым* – the bride price), which was traditionally given to the bride's parents.

The Statute also contained a special provision that addressed the emancipation of female *unaut* slaves (concubines) and their children who were originally purchased in Kabarda. The fact that this provision was included into the Statute as a separate article is a clear indication of the slave-trading links that existed between Ossetia and Kabarda.¹⁵⁰ The provision is also important because it indicates that even after Kabardinian *unauts* were sold and taken to Ossetia, their enslavement status and title remained unchanged. The precise number of *unaut* slaves in the Osetinskiĭ okrug is unclear. Article 8 of the Statute vaguely estimated the number

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 90.

¹⁵⁰ Georgiĭ Kokiev, *Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidzhe, 1940), 208 – 209.

of the *unaut* slaves in Ossetia as “insignificant.”¹⁵¹ Finally, the document stipulated that emancipation of the *unauts* in Ossetia “must be carried out on the same terms as was done in Kabarda.”¹⁵²

The second part of the Statute outlined the terms of emancipation of customary slaves – *kavdasars* and *kumiiags*. First, the law gave immediate freedom to all customarily enslaved males aged 50 years and older. These men obtained their freedom without the heavy burden of paying redemption money to their owner. Younger enslaved men were not so fortunate. The Statute divided the customary enslaved men into two categories. The first category included the slaves who lived with their still-living owner-cum-father and their *nomylus* (concubine) mothers. *Kavdasars* and *kumiiags* could obtain personal freedom after paying their master a redemption sum of 75 silver rubles.¹⁵³ The second category of customary enslavement involved enslaved males whose owner-cum-father had passed away at the time of the emancipation but who continued to serve family members of the same household. The Statute required these enslaved males to pay the family a redemption sum of 34 silver rubles and 50 copper kopeks.¹⁵⁴ It also stated that these redemption payments could be made in the form of a one-time payment, mutually agreed upon installments, or by means of mandatory labor. When choosing the option of mandatory labor, the law required that the enslaved men perform exactly the same slave labor for their masters without exceptions. For customary

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l. 91.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, l. 93 ob.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

slaves of the first category, the required labor could not exceed three years of slave service, while for the second category of customary slaves, it could not exceed one and a half years.¹⁵⁵ This stipulation meant that the *kavdasars* and *kumiiags* continued to live in conditions of slavery for the entire term of the mandatory labor. This provision prolonged the institution of slavery in Ossetia for years after the Russian administration formally abolished slavery in the region.

Next, the Statute outlined different paths to freedom for customarily enslaved women (*kavdasarki* and *kumiiachki*). The enslaved women were divided into two categories based on their marital status. Married enslaved women, including the *nomylus* (concubines), could obtain freedom after they paid their master the redemption money commensurate to the *kalym* (bride price), which their owners paid for them. The law dictated that the assessment of the redemption payment must include a deduction of 10 silver rubles from the total redemption sum for each year that the enslaved women had spent in the household of their masters. If this amount exceeded the total redemption amount, the law granted these women freedom. The married women whose calculated years of enslavement did not match the cost of the redemption payment, had to compensate their owners to obtain personal freedom. The law provided the same payment options for women as it did for men: the women could pay the redemption sum through a one-time payment, mutually agreed upon instalments, or the performance of the same slave labor for a period of up to three years.¹⁵⁶ Further, the Statute outlined the path to freedom for the second category of customarily enslaved women: those

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., l. 94.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., l. 94 ob.

who were unmarried. According to the law, enslaved women and girls above the age of ten could obtain personal freedom at the same time as their parents or upon entering a marriage, with the requirement of paying half of the *kalym* to their owner.¹⁵⁷

The Statute also addressed the plight of customarily enslaved juveniles (*малолетние*). The law declared enslaved male juveniles between the ages of 1 and 15 to be personally free without the burden of paying the redemption money to their owners. Similarly, the law made concessions for enslaved female juveniles between the ages of 1 and 10. They too obtained personal freedom without needing to pay the redemption money to their owners. All enslaved juvenile orphans, according to the emancipation regulations, were required to remain in the households of their owners until they reached the age of adulthood (18 years) or upon entering marriage, whichever came first. When turning eighteen, enslaved orphaned men obtained their freedom without the payment of redemption money. For enslaved orphaned women who turned eighteen years old, however, the law required a redemption payment of half of their *kalym* to their owner upon marriage.¹⁵⁸

Finally, the Statute provided provisions for customarily enslaved seniors and adults with physical and mental disabilities. The law stipulated that enslaved “decrepit, maimed and otherwise crippled” adult men and women were required to remain in the households of their owners “forever.”¹⁵⁹ It is important to note that the law did not relinquish the enslaved mentally and physically disabled *kavdasars* and *kumiiags* from the duties of slave labor to their owners. By sacrificing the freedom of the old and the disabled, the Russian

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., l. 95.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., l. 95 ob.

administration eschewed the responsibility of providing care and housing to the most vulnerable members of the enslaved community.

After determining the amount and terms of the redemption payments that all categories of the enslaved owed their owners in exchange for personal freedom, perhaps the next most important clause of the Statute was the legal guidelines regulating how the redemption payments had to be made. The law divested the Russian administration from the responsibility of negotiating the exact terms of the redemption payments for each enslaved man, woman, or child in Ossetia. Rather, the Statute prescribed the drafting of “mutual agreements” (*взаимное соглашение*) which were negotiated between the enslaved and their owners and then certified by the local administration. Thus, the tsarist government assumed the role of the supervisor of the abolition rather than its active agent, preferring that slaveowners and their slaves work out the specifics of the redemption payments amongst themselves while remaining within the parameters stipulated by the law. Of course, it bears repeating that the law itself was drafted with significant input from the slaveowners. If disputes between the enslaved and their owners were to emerge, the Statute sanctioned the creation of mediation courts (one for each district in the Osetinskiĭ okrug) where both parties could bring their grievances and find a mutually acceptable compromise on the final amount and terms of the redemption payments. The mediation courts consisted of six members: two deputies from the estate of the slaveowners, two deputies from the estate of the enslaved, and two deputies from the district’s people’s court. In order to process such disputes efficiently, the Russian administration instructed the mediation courts to seek solutions, “whenever possible,” that would allow the enslaved to avoid “remaining in the dependency of their owners.”¹⁶⁰ The Statute specifically singled out

¹⁶⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 95 ob.

the enslaved unmarried women as needing the assistance of the mediation courts to identify individuals willing to employ them and vouch that the women's earnings would be used to purchase their freedom from their owners.

Abolition in Ossetia: Institutions, Resistance, and Outcomes

Beginning from 1863, the difficult task of deciphering Ossetia's vexing web of social relations and seignorial and land tenure rights fell into the hands of the estate-land commission, whose work facilitated the abolition of slavery and the land-tenure reform in Kabarda.¹⁶¹ Headed by Dmitriï Kodzokov, the commission used the research and findings of the previous commissions to coordinate land surveys, the collection of demographic data, and the compilation of reports, which landed on the desks of the Head of the Terskaia oblast', the Caucasus Viceroy, and the Tiflis-based central Committee for Liberation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus. The commission's reports played a pivotal role in the process of legislative deliberation and the formulation of policies that ultimately abolished slavery in Ossetia and ushered in the land reform in the region.

Like the reforms in other parts of the Caucasus, the abolition of slavery and emancipation of the dependent estates in Ossetia was accompanied by a land-tenure reform.¹⁶² It is important to note that the 'land question' had been a source of numerous grievances and mutually exclusive claims of ownership from people of all social strata in Ossetia.¹⁶³ The peasants

¹⁶¹ B. Berozov, *Zemel'naia Reforma i Otmena Krepostnogo Prava v Severnoi Osetii* (Ordzhonikidze, 1979), 32.

¹⁶² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3120.

¹⁶³ TsGA RSO-A, f. 291, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 67 – 68. Also, see B. Berozov, 27-29.

wanted legally protected ownership of the land that they tilled. The nobles demanded recognition of their seignorial entitlements. The imperial administration, in turn, needed a stable tax base and loyalty to the autocratic regime. In implementing the land-tenure reform, the government replicated the institutional model of administrative organization that local governments in rural areas of central Russia had in place and, as a result, established a peasant village (*aul*)¹⁶⁴ as the main administrative unit of communal organization in Ossetia.¹⁶⁵ The first stage of the land-tenure reform, which occurred in different parts of Ossetia between 1853 and 1866, touched the lives of the personally-free peasants.¹⁶⁶

The land-tenure reform declared all arable lands in the Osetinskiĭ okrug to be communal property in 1864.¹⁶⁷ The government divided all designated lands into equal parcels and distributed them among eligible households of the peasantry. Only personally-free peasants (*farsalag*, *adamikhat*, *khekhes*) were eligible to receive land from the state-sponsored land distribution scheme. The amount of land that each peasant household received varied in every district in Ossetia and was generally contingent on the availability of arable land and the population density in any given district. On average, each peasant household received 40 *desiatinas* of land. Distribution of land also entailed the physical movement of peasants into reorganized or newly established villages (*aul*) in order to break the traditional authority of the Ossetian nobility over the peasant population. In addition, small rural communities were

¹⁶⁴ *Aul* (Turkic) – a traditional rural settlement among the communities of the North Caucasus.

¹⁶⁵ B. Berozov, 43-44.

¹⁶⁶ Andreĭ Dzodziev, “Zemel’naia Reforma i Osvobozhdenie Zavisimykh Sosloviĭ v Severnoĭ Osetii,” *Manuskript* 24, no. 10 (2012): 77-82.

¹⁶⁷ B. Berozov, 35.

consolidated into larger settlements, with Muslims and Christians segregated into separate villages to allow for the unencumbered practice of religion and to avoid the possibility of apostasy, especially among Christian Orthodox converts.¹⁶⁸ Many peasants welcomed the land reform because it promised to legally affix the land as the peasants' inalienable property and separate the peasantry (both symbolically and physically) from the oppressive feudal authority of the local nobility. The nobles, on the other hand, felt angry and betrayed by the prospect of losing the traditional influence they had wielded over the peasants' livelihoods.¹⁶⁹

The government rejected the nobility's attempts to recognize peasants living on their lands as legally enserfed but acknowledged the custom-based personal obligations that some of the peasants had traditionally performed for these nobles. The Russian administration recognized that in abolishing the peasants' customary personal obligations and refusing to accept the nobles' claims of seignorial sovereignty over the peasants who lived and worked on their lands, the nobles would incur significant financial losses, which would in turn degrade their social status. Fearing the nobility's resentment and potential disloyalty, the government was keen to provide compensation in the form of generous land grants. As a result, the *aldards* and *badeliats* received land allotments that ranged between 3,000 *desiatinas* to 40 *desiatinas*.¹⁷⁰ However, arable land had always been in short supply in Ossetia. Miscalculations and errors of the land surveys left some families without the land that the government had promised them. To remedy the problem, the government offered the nobles

¹⁶⁸ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 810, ll. 10-12.

¹⁶⁹ SEA, f. 416, op. 3, d. 1319, l. 88.

¹⁷⁰ Dzodziev, "Zemel'naia Reforma i Osvobozhdenie Zavisimykh Sosloviï v Severnoi Ossetii," 79.

a compromise: resettlement into the neighboring Kubanskaia oblast' or Stavropol'skaia guberniia, where they could receive substantially bigger tracts of land under the caveat that they renounce any claims to land-ownership in Ossetia. The possibility of leaving the ancestral lands of native Ossetia was unsettling for many of these families. As such, many rejected the government's offer.¹⁷¹

The land reform, which accompanied the abolition of slavery in the Osetinskiĭ okrug, followed a firmly established logic of aristocratic privilege that guided all abolitionist policies of the imperial government in the Caucasus. Members of the indigenous nobility and Ossetians who distinguished themselves in service of the state received substantially larger land grants than the average peasant. The enslaved communities, however, were conspicuously excluded from the land distribution scheme.¹⁷² Lacking access to arguably one of the most important assets that a person could own in 1860s Ossetia, the emancipated men and women faced a very uncertain future.

In the early 1860s, the slaveowners in Ossetia and other regions of the North Caucasus greeted rumors of the impending abolition of slavery in their homeland with resentment, anxiety, and petitions to the Russian administration to be exempted from any such plans on account of their already precarious financial status or faithful service to the Tsar. The enslaved, argued the slaveowners, were content to work as household servants, and since they were "small in numbers and completely provided for" by their owners, the government had no legal or moral grounds to emancipate them.¹⁷³ Eventually, slaveowners in Ossetia split into

¹⁷¹ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 818, ll. 7-7 ob. Also see, B. Berozov, 57.

¹⁷² TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 268, l. 14 ob.

¹⁷³ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 268, l. 16. Also see, *Kavkaz* no. 179 (1892).

two camps. The first group accepted the abolition of slavery as impossible to avert. After being cajoled by the Russian administration, these slaveowners submitted, albeit reluctantly, to the government's abolitionist plans. The second group was smaller in number but adamant in its stance against the Russian policies. These slaveowners refused to compromise and vocally protested against Russian abolitionist designs. However, lacking the resources and manpower to challenge the imperial state through violence, they resorted to threats of leaving Ossetia for the Ottoman Empire and taking their slaves with them.

The chief antecedent of the slaveowners' discontent was rooted in the outcomes of the land-tenure reforms in the Osetinskiĭ okrug that had taken place several years prior to abolition of slavery. As I explained earlier, the reform declared all arable lands in the region to be communal property, denied the nobles seignorial sovereignty over peasants, and failed to compensate some nobles with a land grant commensurate to their self-defined social standing or years of service. The abolition of slavery was yet another example of an attack against the rights and customs inscribed by the centuries-long tradition. By 1865, despondency and anger galvanized some of the nobles to organize a large-scale exodus from the North Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire. One of the prominent leaders of this movement was the Head of the Chechenskiĭ okrug (Chechnya), an Ossetian man and decorated General who spent twenty-nine years in the service of the Russian army, Mussa Kundukhov.¹⁷⁴ Over the course of the land reform in Ossetia, Kundukhov's own lands became an object of scrutiny for the government, which attempted to sequester them for the benefit of the peasantry. Outraged by the estate-land committee's proposal to take possession of 2,800 *desiatin* of arable land and

¹⁷⁴ Galina Dzagurova, *Osetiny v Voĭnakh Rossii* (Vladikavkaz: SOGU K.L. Khetagurova, 2012), 98-99. Berozov, 58.

400 *desiatin* of forest which Kundukhov regarded as his rightful property, the General petitioned the Caucasus Viceroy and demanded that he “order whomsoever to not reduce [Kundukhov’s] landownership rights on par with other landowners” in Ossetia.¹⁷⁵ Although Kundukhov eventually succeeded in protecting his lands, it is easy to imagine that this incident was an important factor in his decision to become a vocal proponent of resettlement to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷⁶ The Russian administration in the Caucasus was weary and suspicious of Kundukhov’s efforts to mobilize thousands of families from Ossetia and Chechnya into leaving the Caucasus. Privately, some government officials tried to persuade Kundukhov to abandon the plan. Yet, at the end of the day, the government did not attempt to undermine his calls for resettlement, instead welcoming, to a certain extent, the possible departure of the subjects that it considered to be most disagreeable to rule.¹⁷⁷ In June 1864, Kundukhov travelled to Istanbul and, after several months of meetings and negotiations, secured the official permission of the Ottoman government to bring up to 5,000 settlers from the Caucasus

¹⁷⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3120, l. 5. Also, see TsGA RSO-A, f. 11, op. 7, d. 5177, ll. 118-119.

¹⁷⁶ In his own memoirs, Mussa Kundukhov does not specifically address the issue of abolition as the central cause for his decision to organize the resettlement campaign. However, one can find a long list of Kundukhov’s grievances against the Russian government that primarily revolved around injustices against the indigenous population of the North Caucasus and the issues of religious identity and Orthodox missionary work in Ossetia. For a brief reference to Kundukhov’s distinguished service in the Russian army and subsequent decision to leave the Caucasus to continue his military career in the Ottoman Empire, see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 4. Also see, Alikhan Kantemir, “Musa Pasha Kundukhov,” in *Kavkaz (Le Caucase)* 28, no. 4 (1936), 13-19. Grigorii Dzagurov, *Pereselenie Gortsev v Turtsiiu: Materialy po Istorii Gorskikh Narodov* (Rostov-Don, 1925), 62-70. Finally, of particular importance is Mussa Kundukhov’s autobiography, *Memuary* (Vagrius, 2006).

¹⁷⁷ Dzagurov, *Pereselenie Gortsev v Turtsiiu*, 83.

into the Empire.¹⁷⁸ By March 1865, Mussa Kundukhov led a long column of primarily Chechen and Ossetia men, women, and children numbering approximately 5,000 people into the Ottoman Empire. Accompanied by his two brothers, Afako and Kazbulat, and his two sons, Aslanbek and (the future Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Turkish Republic) Bekirbeï, Kundukhov and his followers traveled across the Dar'ial Gorge along the Georgian Military Road toward the Turkish city of Kars.¹⁷⁹ The 1865 exodus was perhaps the most salient, though certainly not the last, example of organized resistance to Russian abolitionist reforms in the Ossetinskiï okrug. Many, however, joined the long columns of emigrants unwillingly.¹⁸⁰

The enslaved, the common folk, and even some members of privileged families followed their owners, patrons, or parents out of a sense of patriarchal duty or fear of reprimand rather than a sincere desire to leave their homeland forever. Inal Kanukov's firsthand account of his family's tragic journey from his native Ossetia to Istanbul in 1860 clearly captures his keen reluctance to leave the homeland as well as the hopelessness of altering his own fate.¹⁸¹ Inal describes himself as an Ossetian Muslim. According to Inal's own admission, his family name, Kanukov, was "privileged and well-known in Ossetia."¹⁸² At the time of Inal's unwilling departure from Ossetia, he was a teenager. Early on in his account of his community's emigration, Inal poses a rhetorical question that was meant to illustrate just how

¹⁷⁸ Dzagurova, *Osetiny v Voïnakh Rossii*, 99.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁸⁰ Dzagurov, 60. Berozov, 63-64.

¹⁸¹ Inal Kanukov, "Gortsy Pereselentsy," in SSKG, vol. 9 (Tiflis, 1876), 84-112.

¹⁸² Kanukov, "Gortsy Pereselentsy," 85.

poorly informed and misled about the final destination his fellow travelers had been: “Do they even know where are they going? No, they do not. The only thing that they know is that somewhere in this world there is a country named Istanbul and in this country live the same Muslims, just like them; and so they are heading there so recklessly, deceived by false rumors that their life will be better there than in their homeland.”¹⁸³ In his memoirs, Inal places the onus of responsibility for galvanizing his and many other families to leave Ossetia for Istanbul on his uncle. Inal did not want to leave Ossetia, asking rhetorically “who amongst [the family] wanted to travel to completely foreign Istanbul voluntarily? If my father were to count votes, perhaps none of us would agree to go.”¹⁸⁴ Inal’s father, however, would not tolerate dissent and did not seem interested in the opinions of his wife or children. The family’s house was sold “for nothing” on the eve of the departure. The decision to leave could not be undone.

Inal’s account of the journey to the Ottoman Empire is extremely valuable for several reasons. Among them is Inal’s descriptions of the family’s slaves who obediently followed the column of the emigrants all the way to Istanbul. Inal describes how his family’s slaves helped to load their possessions on carriages hours before the departure and found Inal’s brother, who tried to hide in stacks of hay as an act of protest against the decision to leave their ancestral village.¹⁸⁵ Along the journey that Inal narrates in his account, he describes how slaves brought firewood, prepared meals, made a bed for Inal’s mother, carried his sister on their shoulders, and worked hard to make the difficult journey bearable for everyone in the

¹⁸³ Inal Kanukov, “Gortsy Pereselentsy,” 85.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

caravan.¹⁸⁶ When Inal and his family finally reached the Turkish border and settled in the city of Kars, the bitter reality of their future in the foreign land darkened the mood of many in the family. After inspecting the “foul” lands that had been allotted to the Ossetian settlers by the Ottoman government, Inal’s father experienced a change of heart.¹⁸⁷ The bitter disappointment stemming from false promises of prosperity and the hostile attitudes of the locals toward the Ossetian emigrants convinced Inal’s father to return to his native Ossetia. In the end, nearly “90 other households” followed them back across the Turkish border via Aleksandropol’, Tiflis, and finally Vladikavkaz. Ironically, when Inal and his family returned to their native Ossetia, they had to find shelter in the house of their former slaves.¹⁸⁸

Inal’s story is extraordinarily rich in details but certainly not unique. Thousands of families made the difficult decision to leave Ossetia, taking their slaves with them. Slaves, of course, had no say in the matter of leaving the Caucasus. The most vulnerable among the peasants were either coerced or beguiled by their patrons’ promises of prosperity in the land of Muslim brethren, completely unaware of the hardships that awaited them at the end of their journey.

Slavery and all forms of custom-based servitude were formally abolished in the Osetinskii okrug on 18 November 1867, the date which marked the publication of the Statute (*Положение*) for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Ossetia.¹⁸⁹ To facilitate the abolition of slavery in the region, the imperial government established four mediation courts (*posrednicheskie sudy*), one for each district in the okrug. According to the provisions outlined

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 96-98.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 101.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸⁹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3327, ll. 1 – 45.

in the Statute, the slaveowners and the enslaved were required to reach a “voluntary mutual agreement” to determine the terms of a slave’s emancipation. The mediation courts served as a supervisory body charged with the duty of mediating conflicts and disagreements between the slaveowners and the enslaved and certifying the terms of the emancipation agreements.

The abolition witnessed a total of 1,419 customary and non-customary enslaved men, women, and children obtaining personal freedom. However, their freedom was delayed. The majority of formerly enslaved people acquired the legally stipulated status of the “temporarily obligated.” The ambiguity of this status opened the doors to manipulation and betrayed the promises of freedom that they had been given. The status remained in force until the former slaves fulfilled the terms of their emancipation agreements to the satisfaction of their former owner.¹⁹⁰ These people, who were technically free but still legally obligated to provide service, continued to perform the same slave labor and endure the abuses of their masters for the duration of the agreements, which could remain in force for up to six years. Hence, in the first several years after slavery was abolished in Ossetia, the lives of the majority of the formerly enslaved people remained unchanged in practical terms.¹⁹¹

The government did offer some financial relief to the parents of enslaved children. According to the government’s estimates, in 1867 there were 145 enslaved juveniles in Ossetia.¹⁹² Following the precedent set in Kabarda, the Committee for Liberation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus ordered the emancipation of all

¹⁹⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 30 ob. – 31.

¹⁹¹ Georgii Kokiev, *Krest’ianskaia Reforma v Severnoĭ Osetii* (Ordzhonikidzhe, 1940), 211.

¹⁹² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 91 ob.

enslaved juveniles without the burden of redemption payments. The Caucasus Viceroy was sympathetic to the slaveowners' deprivations and the disappearance of certain "comforts of life" caused by the loss of access to slave labor. Thus, the Committee offered the slaveowners compensation for the loss of ownership over the enslaved children.¹⁹³ To that end, the government earmarked funds in the amount of 12,000 silver rubles.¹⁹⁴ In addition, the Committee also instructed local authorities to use any remaining money as a subsidy to be distributed among the slave-owners most impoverished by the abolition.¹⁹⁵ This government relief measure was just one of several initiatives aimed at recompensing the slaveowners, which included various temporary exemptions from the payment of taxes and dues, subsidized placement of the nobles' children in military cadet corps and colleges, and priority placements in the government's civil service, to mention a few.¹⁹⁶ Finally, the Russian administration also ruled that the children of the enslaved *kavdasars* and *kumiiags* without "adult guardians," as well as the slaves who were "decrepit, maimed, and otherwise crippled," remain in the households of their owners "forever," as long as this arrangement suited both parties.¹⁹⁷

Once the formerly enslaved but still temporarily obligated men and women completed the terms of their mandatory service and reclaimed personal freedom in the true sense of the word, they faced a very uncertain future. In the eyes of the law, the formerly enslaved people received the same rights and legal status as all peasants in Ossetia. This included the right to

¹⁹³ Ibid., 89 ob. – 90.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 90. See also, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3327, l. 31 ob.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Berozov, 65-77.

¹⁹⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 92 ob.

own land. However, heeding local customs which disqualified slaves from owning personal property, the Russian administration excluded them from eligibility to receive land upon emancipation. The problem of landlessness was further exacerbated by the fact that most formerly enslaved individuals had no property or meaningful capital to help them transition into the class of independent farmers. The government's hope that formerly enslaved people would be able to integrate into the local peasant community came to naught because every *aul* in the Osetinskii okrug received a finite amount of land that was distributed in equal parcels between each peasant household. The land, as I mentioned earlier, was recognized as communal property. Therefore, the hypothetical arrival of new members into a rural community would have entailed a reduction in the amount of land owned by peasants already living in the community. Since the admission of a new resident into a village required the collective consent of the male heads of a household, the peasants had no economic or personal interest in welcoming outsiders into the village. Equally as important was the fact that the land reform primarily addressed the land-tenure rights of the peasantry on the fertile plains of Ossetia while completely ignoring the land-scarce mountainous areas where a semi-feudal social order persisted until the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Landless and destitute, the communities of emancipated men and women found themselves locked in a cycle of poverty, hardships, and in some cases continuous exploitation by their former masters. The situation was made worse in the mountainous parts of Ossetia, where the government rescinded the requirement to resettle temporary obligated peasants from the communities of their masters upon completion of the terms of mandatory service.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Berozov, 74-75.

These emancipated peasants remained on the lands of their former masters and in conditions that Russian officials described as “complete economic dependence.”¹⁹⁹ In the remote mountainous regions of Ossetia, where the government’s presence was weak or non-existent, abolition dismantled slavery as a legally sanctioned institution, but the dynamics of social power between the formerly enslaved and their former masters remained unchanged. Although these landowners could no longer sell the bodies of their social subordinates, they could continue to use their labor in return for basic sustenance and shelter. Some emancipated men managed to leave their former owners and fulfill the terms of their emancipation agreements by finding work in the lead and silver mines of Ossetia’s Alagirsk district. However, this arrangement entailed the surrender of several years’ worth of earnings. The government recognized the difficult plight of the former slaves. In an effort to alleviate their suffering and support their transition, the Russian administration earmarked 8,000 silver rubles as financial relief to the most destitute families among the formerly enslaved.²⁰⁰ In addition, the Caucasus Viceroy announced fiscal measures which exempted the emancipated individuals from paying taxes for a duration of eight years.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, despite the government’s offer to distribute subsidies and small grants, penury and landlessness continued to plague the lives of the emancipated men and women.

Chechnya and Ingushetia

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 75.

²⁰⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 90 ob.

²⁰¹ Ibid. Also see, Boris Skitskiĭ, *Ocherki po Istorii Osetinskogo Naroda s Drevneĭshikh Vremen do 1867 Goda* (Ordzhonikidze, 1947), 181.

The news that Tsar Alexander II had abolished serfdom travelled across the vast territory of the empire soon after the publication of the Emancipation Manifesto on 19 February 1861. In the North Caucasus, this news spread slowly through an informal culture of rumors. As the news travelled, it sowed anxiety in the minds of the slaveowners and anticipation of freedom in the hearts of the enslaved. Evidently, in Chechnya and Ingushetia as in other regions of the North Caucasus, many enslaved men and women interpreted the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto to mean that the local laws and customs that legitimized their bondage were no longer valid. Some of these slaves felt emboldened to openly defy the authority of their masters, accusing them of hiding the truth of the monarch's will. Others opted for a less confrontational strategy of resistance by petitioning the local authorities to intercede on their behalf in order to secure personal freedom. In both cases, the enslaved cited the manifesto as the legal grounds for challenging their legal status as slaves. In one such petition written on 23 December 1863, an enslaved woman of Iranian descent, Susar Baïrat, beseeched the Head of the Terskaia oblat', Loris-Melikov, to give her "independence" in accordance with the imperial law.²⁰² Susar's petition explained that as a slave of a Russian officer of Chechen origins, lieutenant-colonel Artsu, she learned that "slavery does not exist in the Russian realm," and since at the time of writing her petition she lived "not in Persia, but in the Caucasus, in the fortress Groznyĭ, [she] ought to obey the Russian government."²⁰³ Therefore, Susar contended, "if the manifesto applies to us *inovertsev*,²⁰⁴ should I not become

²⁰² TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 108, ll. 1-1 ob.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ *Inovertsy* (noun, plural) – a legal term referring to the followers of tolerated non-Christian religious confessions in the Russian Empire.

independent?”²⁰⁵ Such petitions caused a great deal of annoyance and unease among the Russian officials in the Caucasus. The government routinely dismissed the slaves’ petitions with the explanation that although the Emancipation Manifesto did free Russian serfs, it did not apply to the Caucasus, and the Tsar would address the plight of the enslaved in due time. Until that day, the enslaved were admonished to obey the authority of their owners unquestionably. And so, Susar Baïrat had to wait until April 1867, when the first stages of the Peasant Reform had been introduced in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Russian imperial encounters with the indigenous communities of Chechnya and Ingushetia occurred as early as the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁰⁶ However, for all practical purposes, the two regions remained outside of direct imperial control until the capture of Imam Shamil’ in 1859, which marked the end of the Murid War and opened the path for the gradual integration of the northeastern Caucasus into the socio-political landscape of the Russian Empire. In 1867, the administrative borders of present-day Chechnya and Ingushetia were divided unevenly between the Nagornyĭ okrug, Ichkerinskiĭ okrug, Chechenkiĭ okrug, Argunskiĭ okrug, and Ingushskiĭ okrug. The total population across the five okrugs in 1868 stood at 150,309 people.²⁰⁷ Although slavery and the slave trade had a centuries-long presence in Chechnya and Ingushetia, in the 1860s, the institutions of slavery was least developed in these regions. Indeed, the combined enslaved population in Chechnya

²⁰⁵ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 108, ll. 1-1 ob.

²⁰⁶ Zarema Ibragimova, *Chechnskiĭ Narod v Rossiĭskoĭ Imperii: adaptсионnyĭ period* (Probel, 2006), 108

²⁰⁷ “Statisticheskie svedeniia o kavkazskikh gortsakh, sostoiaščikh v voenno-narodnom upravlenii,” in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 6-8.

and Ingushetia in 1867 stood at 378 people – the smallest number of slaves registered with the government in the entire Terskaia oblast'.²⁰⁸

Several factors contributed to the small rates of slave-ownership in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the late 1860s. First, Imam Shamil's policy of compulsory emancipation of Muslim slaves and abolition of other forms of feudal bondage in the Imamate played an important role in decreasing the number of enslaved communities in Chechnya and adjacent regions.²⁰⁹ Second, the plans of the tsarist government to introduce agrarian and peasant reforms in the North Caucasus stoked real fears of losing the custom-based feudal privileges that existed among the local elites. The impending reforms, among other things, served as a potent catalyst for the exodus of indigenous communities from their homeland and into the Ottoman Empire.²¹⁰ Indeed, Chechnya witnessed one of the largest declines in population in the North Caucasus. By 1865, or two years before the abolitionist reforms, 22,491 people, or nearly 20 percent of Chechnya's entire population, had left their native lands.²¹¹ Those who left frequently took their slaves with them. The third and final factor that accounted for the small rates of slave-ownership in the region was the lack of a rigid feudal form of social

²⁰⁸ *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 9, Feb. 26, 1869, l. 4. See also, "Osvobozhdenie zavisimykh sosloviĭ vo vsekh okrugakh Terkoĭ oblasti," in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 37.

²⁰⁹ Zarema Ibragimova, *Chechnskii Narod v Rossiĭskoi Imperii*, 262. Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (Routledge, 2013), 253.

²¹⁰ Aleksei Narochitskiĭ, et al., *Istoriia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza, konets XVIII v. – 1917* (Moskva: Nauka, 1988), 202-203.

²¹¹ Adolf Berzhe, "Vyselenie Gortsev s Kavkaza," in *Russkaia Starina* (Tiflis, 1882), 16. These estimates, of course, are approximations that are prone to errors and effected by the inability to account for emigration that was not registered with imperial agencies.

stratification in the communities of the five okrugs.²¹² At the top of the social hierarchy in Chechnya were *biĭ* (бий) and *el* (эл).²¹³ These honorary titles signaled high social status and communal respect but did not translate into seigneurial prerogatives or entitlements to peasant labor. Below the class of rudimentary nobility stood personally free *uzden'* (узденъ) of various social gradations. Finally, at the very bottom of society were former slaves, called *azat* (азат), and slaves. In contrast to the societies of Kabarda, Ossetia, and Kumykia, which developed a complicated and tiered web of social stratification premised on various forms of feudal servitude and slavery, the Chechen and Ingush communities had only one type of non-customary (безобрядное, без-адатное холопство) slavery, a fact that was frequently noted by Russian officials.²¹⁴ These non-customary slaves, in turn, were divided into two categories: *laĭ* (лай) and *iasyr'* (ясырь).²¹⁵ In the words of an officer of Chechen origins, Ensign (прапорщик) Tsutsa Bamatkhanov, the *laĭ* slaves acquired their status after remaining enslaved for “three generations.”²¹⁶ The title of *iasyr'*, on the other hand, indicated a more

²¹² Berzhe, *Chechnya i Chechentsy* (Tiflis, 1859), 90. Ibragimova, *Chechnskii Narod v Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 260. Totoev, *Obshchestvennyi Stroĭ Chechni: vtoraia polovina XVIII – 40-e gody XIX veka* (Nal'chik, 2009), 233.

²¹³ Totoev, *Obshchestvennyi Stroĭ Chechni: vtoraia polovina XVIII veka – 40 gody XIX veka* (Nal'chik, 2009), 262.

²¹⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3313, l. 104. SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 29. Also, see the account of Shamil's contemporary stance on the enslavement and the slave trade of Muslims, *Khronika Mukhameda Takhira Al-Karakhi: o Dagestanskikh v period Shamilia*, translated from Arabic by A.M. Baranova (Moscow, 1941), 122-123.

²¹⁵ Berzhe, *Chechnya i Chechentsy* (Tiflis, 1859), 90-91. See also, Feliks Totoev, “Razvitie Rabstva i Rabotorgovli v Chechne (vtoraia polovina xviii – pervaiia polovia xix v.)” in *Sotsial'nye Otnosheniia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza* (Ordzhonikidze, 1978), 69-70.

²¹⁶ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 153, l. 6.

recent captivity and enslavement. Therefore, a *iasyr'* slave could regain personal freedom if, for example, a ransom was paid to his or her owner. According to the Chechen customary (*adat*) law, the enslaved *laiĭ* and *iasyr'* did not have any personal rights whatsoever and were regarded as chattel property of their owners.²¹⁷

The relatively small number of enslaved people in Chechnya and Ingushetia allowed the tsarist administration to achieve its abolitionist goals within months and, apparently, without any significant resistance from slave owners. In order to facilitate the freeing of the enslaved in Chechnya and Ingushetia, the local imperial administration developed a special set of rules for the emancipation of the dependent estate for Chechenkiĭ okrug. For Ingushskiĭ okrug, however, the government decided to use the same emancipation rules that had been implemented earlier in the neighboring Osetinkiĭ okrug.²¹⁸

The fundamental principles of abolition that the government had implemented elsewhere in the Terskaia oblast' remained the same for Chechenkiĭ okrug and Ingushskiĭ okrug. Although some slaveowners manumitted their slaves without the burden of redemption payments, the majority of the enslaved obtained their personal freedom by means of negotiation of voluntary agreements with their owners under the supervision of tsarist officials. Such agreements stipulated the terms of emancipation, including the amount of the redemption payments which the enslaved owed their masters. Until the redemption payments were made in full, the formerly enslaved men, women, and children acquired the legal status of "temporarily obligated" individuals and continued to perform the same slave labor for their

²¹⁷ Fedor Leontovich, *Adaty Kavkazskikh Gortsev: materialy po obychnomu pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza*, vol. II (Odessa, 1883), 81.

²¹⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, l. 2.

owners. When the “temporarily obligated” former slaves fulfilled the terms of their redemption contracts, they did not receive any land from the government and faced a very uncertain future.

The Prelude to Abolition in Chechnya and Ingushetia

The advent of abolitionist preparations in Chechnya and Ingushetia was marked by the establishment of the commission for the review of estate and land-tenure rights of the indigenous population in Terskaia oblast’ in 1863. The commission’s work was at the heart of the legislative initiatives that propelled Russian abolitionist plans in Terskaia oblast’ in general and Chechnya and Ingushetia in particular. The commission’s Chechen department (*otdel*) was set-up in the fortress Groznyĭ. The commission actively solicited information on customs and practices regarding land-tenure rights, as well as the status and treatment of enslaved communities in Nagornyĭ, Ichkerinskiĭ, Chechenkiĭ, Argunskiĭ, and Ingushskiĭ okrugs. Among all these regions, Chechenkiĭ okrug had the largest number of reported slaves: 338 people.²¹⁹ In comparison, Ingushskiĭ okrug, which after Chechnya had the second highest number of registered slaves, had only 35 enslaved men and women.²²⁰ As a result, Chechnya received a substantially larger share of logistical and bureaucratic attention from the government in the abolitionist enterprise when compared to other okrugs.

²¹⁹ *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 9, Feb. 26, 1869, l. 4. It is important to note that different official sources report different numbers of registered slaves in the Chechenskiĭ okrug on the eve of the abolition of slavery in the region. For a comparison of the date concerning the emancipated slaves in the district, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 29 ob.

²²⁰ According to government reports, no slaves were registered in Ichkerinskiĭ and Argunskiĭ okrugs. In Nagornyĭ okrug, the government identified and emancipated only five slaves. See, *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 9, Feb. 26, 1869, l. 4.

Similar to the developments in other parts of Terskaia oblast', the abolition of slavery in Chechnya and Ingushetia was accompanied by a land reform. In the waning years of the Caucasus War in the northeastern Caucasus, the Russian administration issued several proclamations promising the fair distribution of agricultural lands, forests, and pastures across all *auls* in Chechnya and pledged to recognize the people's "eternal ownership" over these lands.²²¹ With the outcome of the land reform, however, the government betrayed its promises. Following the conclusion of the active phase of the military campaign in 1859, the tsarist administration declared that all land in the region rightfully belonged to the state. The government justified its decision by arguing that it had established control over Chechnya and Ingushetia by force "and at the cost of Russian blood."²²² Consequently, the reform became the first major stumbling block of the tsarist politics of modernization in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the 1860s.

The land reform in Chechnya and Ingushetia had four important dimensions. First, the reform distributed large swaths of land into the perpetual private ownership of the indigenous elites and officers who had helped pacify the regions and otherwise distinguished themselves in the service of Russian imperial interests.²²³ The government's land grants in the already land-scarce Chechnya and Ingushetia ranged between an astounding 1,500 *desiatinas* to 6,500 *desiatinas*.²²⁴ Such generosity was meant to reward the political loyalty of the Chechen and

²²¹ SEA, f. 16, op. 3, d. 111, ll. 5 – 9.

²²² Ibragimova, *Tsarskoe Proshloe Chechentsev: vlast' i obshchestvo* (Moskva: Probel, 2000), 217.

²²³ Aslanbek Khasbulatov, "Zemel'nye Preobrazovaniia v 60 – 70 gody XIX veka v Chechne," *Vestnik Chechenskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta (ЧГУ)*, no. 2 (2013): 79-92.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

Ingush allies and ensure their long-term support for the Russian imperial enterprise in the region. Second, the land reform enabled the tsarist government to advance its settler-colonial objectives in the North Caucasus. The Russian administration sequestered significant portions of arable land for the purpose of both expanding already existing Cossack settlements and creating new ones in Chechnya and Ingushetia. In all, the Cossack settlements in Chechnya received 222,000 *desiatinas*, or 34,5% of all available lands in the region.²²⁵ The aggressive expansion of the settler-colonial policy exacerbated land scarcity in these regions and served as a catalyst for popular indigenous discontent and conflicts with the Cossack settlers.²²⁶ Third, the land reform assigned available arable lands into the communal use and custodianship (*obshchinno-peredel'noe pravo*) of each village, distributing equal parcels of land to each peasant household irrespective of its size. On average, the size of each plot of land that the government allotted to each peasant household ranged between 18 to 33 *desiatinas*.²²⁷ The government also consolidated peasants into new or expanded settlements and actively encouraged the resettlement of the peasants living in the mountainous regions of Chechnya and Ingushetia onto the plains. In addition, modeling the reform in central Russia, the land reform in Chechnya and Ingushetia established the village commune as the chief

²²⁵ Khasbulatov, “Zemel’nye Preobrazovaniia v 60 – 70 godakh XIX veka v Chechne,” 86.

²²⁶ Berzhe, “Vyselenie Gortsev s Kavkaza,” in *Russkaia Starina* (Tiflis, 1882), 9 – 10.

²²⁷ Khasbulatov, “Zemel’nye Preobrazovaniia v 60 – 70 godakh XIX veka v Chechne,” 84.

administrative unit in the rural areas.²²⁸ Finally, the abolition of slavery was the fourth stage of the land reform.

To oversee the process of abolition, the Head of the Terskaia oblast', Loris-Melikov, ordered the establishment of commissions for the liberation of slaves in the Chechenskiĭ okrug and Ingushskiĭ okrug. In Chechnya, the commission was chaired by the Head of the Chechenskiĭ okrug, Colonel Murav'ev. Other members of the commission representing the Russian government were a secretary (*deloproizvoditel'*) and a translator. Crucially, the Russian officials invited six deputies to represent the interests of the Chechen slaveowners and two deputies to represent the interests of the enslaved.²²⁹ Working together, the commission drafted a set of instructions that guided the process of abolition and offered valuable input regarding the terms of the slaves' emancipation. The rules received approbation from the Head of the Terskaia oblast' and the Caucasus Viceroy and went into effect in 1867. Finally, in Ingushskiĭ okrug, the commission for the liberation of the dependent estate was chaired by the Head of the okrug, Lieutenant-Colonel Morozov. Unlike in Chechnya, the relatively small number of enslaved individuals in Ingushskiĭ okrug prompted the Russian administration to use the same emancipation rules that had been implemented in the neighboring Ossetia.

The Statute for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Chechnya

²²⁸ It is also important to note that in the process of reorganizing the system of land tenure rights, the government had primarily concentrated its attention on the fertile plains of Chechnya and Ingushetia while leaving the existing forms of landownership in more scarcely populated and less fertile areas of the Caucasus foothills unchanged. See Aslanbek Khasbulatov, "Zemel'nye Preobrazovaniia v 60 – 70 gody XIX veka v Chechne," *Vestnik Chechenskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta (ЧГУ)*, no. 2 (2013): 81.

²²⁹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, ll. 13 ob. – 14.

The drafting of the rules of emancipation of the enslaved communities in Chechnya followed the same collaborative principles that the imperial state had implemented in other parts of Terskaia oblast'. Therefore, the Statute for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Chechnya was a document that disproportionately protected the financial wellbeing and social status of the slaveowners. The Statute consisted of a total of seven articles which established the following procedure for the emancipation of the enslaved communities in Chechnya.²³⁰

The emancipation scheme invited the slaveowners and their slaves to negotiate and put into writing a “voluntary deal” (*dobrovol'naia sdelka*) which outlined the terms of the slaves' emancipation. The emancipation rules required the enslaved to pay a redemption payment (*vykupnaia plata*) stipulated by the rules, which was estimated for each individual enslaved man, woman, and child using such variables as gender, age, health, and overall ability to perform labor. The government commission advised that all enslaved men and women who displayed obvious signs of physical mutilation which prevented them from effectively performing their duties, obtain personal freedom without the requirement of a redemption payment.

Once a slaveowner and his or her slave(s) worked out the specifics of an emancipation deal, the terms of the agreement required the verification and notarization of the local commission at the district court (*Chechenskiĭ Okruzhnoĭ Narodnyi Sud*) which, as I mentioned earlier, was composed of Russian officials and deputies representing the okrug's slaveowners and the enslaved. According to the rules, all adult male slaves of good health between the ages of 16 and 50 years old, irrespective of their marital status, were required to provide 200 silver rubles in redemption payment in order to obtain personal freedom. Male slaves between the

²³⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, ll. 12 – 14.

ages of 50 and 55 years old were required to pay 150 silver rubles in redemption payment. Finally, the Statute automatically liberated male slaves of 56 years and older without the burden of redemptions payments. The male slaves who found it impossible to make the redemption payment acquired the legal status of “temporarily obligated” persons and were required to remain in the mandatory service of their masters for a period of six years while performing the same slave labor.²³¹

Further, the rules dictated that all female slaves of good health between the ages of 16 and 40 years old were required to provide a redemption payment to their owners in the amount of 150 silver rubles. Enslaved women between the ages of 40 and 45 years old were required to pay 30 silver rubles in redemption payment. The Statute relinquished women aged 46 years old and older from the burden of redemption payments and granted them immediate personal freedom.²³² The Statute required enslaved women who were unable to make the redemption payment in cash to remain in the obligatory service of their masters for a period of six years while performing the same slave labor as before the emancipation. Just like formerly enslaved men, these women acquired the status of a temporarily obligated person. Their former owners could not legally sell the women’s bodies, but they had the legal right to continue exploiting their labor for up to six years. In addition, the emancipation rules made some concessions for unmarried formerly enslaved women. Namely, the six-year term of obligatory service in lieu of a redemption payment could be shortened in the event of the woman’s marriage. In this

²³¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, ll. 12 – 12 ob.

²³² *Ibid.*, l. 12 ob.

case, the amount of the unpaid redemption sum could be supplemented with a portion of the woman's *kalym* (the bride price).²³³

When it came to the emancipation of enslaved children, the rules established a redemption payment scale that determined the redemption sum in an amount commensurate to the child's age.²³⁴ First, the Statute declared children younger than one year old personally free. Second, the parents of boys and girls between the ages of ten and sixteen years old were required to pay their owners a redemption sum in the amount of seven silver rubles for a ten-year-old child, fourteen silver rubles for an eleven-year-old child, twenty-one silver rubles for a twelve-year-old child, etc. If the redemption payment could not be made in cash, the formerly enslaved children, according to the Statute, were required to perform mandatory labor for their former owner for a period of six years. Finally, the Russian administration assumed the cost of the emancipation of children younger than ten years old.²³⁵

One last important caveat of the emancipation rules was the rejection of a collective responsibility for a family of enslaved individuals to pay individual redemption sums. The rules clearly stipulated the individual obligation of every formerly enslaved person to fulfill the terms of his or her emancipation. Thus, the Statute relinquished the members of a single family of slaves from the responsibility of assuming the burden of redemption payments in the event of an unexpected death of one of their family members.²³⁶

Abolition in Chechnya and Ingushetia: Outcomes

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 13 ob.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., 12 ob. – 13.

The Caucasus Viceroy issued a directive ordering the “immediate termination of dependency among the social estates” in Chechnya on 17 April 1867.²³⁷ According to the official records, the emancipation campaign in Chechenskiĭ okrug ended in a little less than a month. The Head of the Terskaia oblast, Loris-Melikov, reported to the Caucasus Viceroy that as of 15 May 1867, all slaves in Chechenskiĭ okrug had been liberated.²³⁸ The emancipation campaign in the Ingushskiĭ okrug lasted only five days.²³⁹ From the government’s perspective, the abolition of slavery in Chechnya and Ingushetia was a resounding success. Loris-Melikov emphasized that the slaveowners did not resist the abolition operation. In fact, many of the slaveowners reportedly accepted the government’s plans to abolish slavery with “understanding” and “great sympathy.”²⁴⁰ As evidence of the slaveowners’ acquiescence, Loris-Melikov cited instances of manumission of enslaved men, women, and children without the burden of redemption payments.²⁴¹

Although the rules for the emancipation of enslaved communities in Chechnya and Ingushetia were tailored to the unique socio-economic circumstances of these regions, the process of emancipation resembled the procedures that had been implemented in other regions of the Terskaia oblast’. First, the former slaves and their owners were required by law to negotiate a “voluntary agreement,” which stipulated the terms of the slaves’ emancipation and the amount of the redemption payment that each enslaved individual was required to pay to

²³⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, l. 3.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ *Terskie Vedomosti*, № 9, Feb. 26, 1869, l. 4.

²⁴⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, l. 3.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

his or her master. Such agreements required the written consent of both parties and a seal of approval from the local courts, which served as both the mediators and supervisors of the emancipation scheme. Once the agreements had been signed and certified by the courts, the enslaved had two clearly defined paths to freedom. First, enslaved individuals and families had the option of making a one-time payment of the entire amount of the agreed-upon redemption sum to his or her owner. This option, of course, was unrealistic because *lai* and *iasyr*' slaves were barred from owing property and had no assets that could be converted into cash payments. Therefore, the only realistic option for the enslaved in Chechnya and Ingushetia to obtain personal freedom was the fulfillment of six years of mandatory slave labor, which the government and the slaveowners deemed commensurate to the cash value of the entire redemption payment. This brings us to the second path to freedom. The former slaves who were unable to pay off their redemption debt with a one-time cash payment, acquired personal freedom but remained "temporarily obligated" to their former owners. This ambivalent legal status required the former slaves to continue performing the same slave labor for the benefit of their former owner for the period of up to six years.

The local authorities introduced several modest initiatives aimed at mitigating the transition of formerly enslaved individuals and families to freedom. The commission for the liberation of the enslaved in Chechenskiĭ okrug, for example, hoped to shorten the length of the former slaves' mandatory service by encouraging "private individuals" to hire them as laborers.²⁴² This initiative envisioned the use of the former slaves' salaries as a way to pay off the redemption debt and thereby complete the terms of the emancipation agreement ahead of

²⁴² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3342, l. 13.

time. Whether or not this initiative succeeded in helping formerly enslaved individuals to more quickly fulfill their financial obligations to their former owners is unclear. Further, the government disbursed 2,268 silver rubles to slaveowners in return for the immediate emancipation of enslaved children younger than ten years old without the burden of the redemption payments.²⁴³ The Russian administration also exempted all formerly enslaved people from paying taxes for the duration of eight years.

The question of the eligibility of formerly enslaved persons to receive a land grant from the government was conspicuously absent in the laws that governed the process of emancipation in Chechnya and Ingushetia. However, given the well-documented practice in Kabarda and Ossetia of denying former slaves the eligibility to receive a land grant, we can assume with confidence that while the formerly enslaved individuals in Chechnya and Ingushetia obtained the legal right to own land, they were nevertheless excluded from state-led land distribution schemes and had no means of purchasing land on their own. This predicament reflected a broader debacle of the land reform in Chechnya and Ingushetia. The government's determination to coopt the Chechen and Ingush elites and reward the military service of officers meant that huge tracts of land were distributed among a relatively small group of socially privileged families. Russian officials expected this newly created class of grateful landowners to become the bedrock of Russian autocracy in the region. In addition, the government's settler-colonial policies demanded that significant territories be allocated towards sustaining the growing network of Cossack settlements in the region. This further diminished the total supply of available agricultural land that could be distributed among the common folk. As a consequence, Chechen and Ingush peasants received the smallest

²⁴³ TsGA RSO-A, f. 12, op. 6, d. 194, l. 2.

allotment of agricultural land per male member of a household in Terskaia oblast'.²⁴⁴ The acute scarcity of land in the region, in turn, engendered conflicts not only between settlers and indigenous peasant communes, but also between peasants themselves. Excluded from the state's land distribution programs and lacking vital familial networks and the protection of a clan, the lives of the formerly enslaved people in Chechnya and Ingushetia were constantly plagued by landlessness and chronic poverty.

²⁴⁴ Khasbulatov, "Zemel'nye Preobrazovaniia v 60 – 70 gody XIX veka v Chechne," 87.

CHAPTER 5

Abolition in Circassia:

The Exile, Rebellion, and Land Reform in Kubanskaia Oblast'

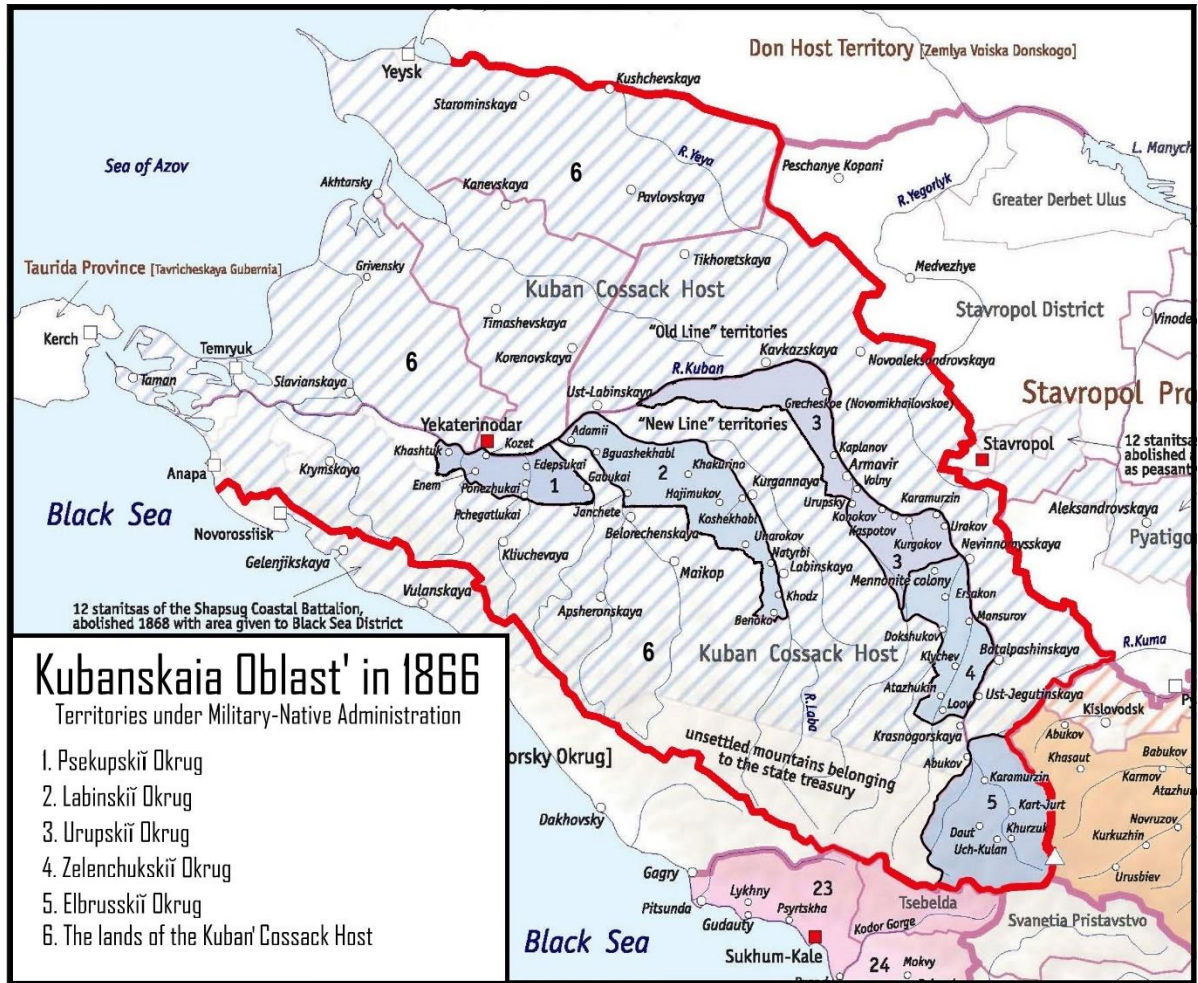


Figure 6. Map of Kuban Province (Kubanskaia oblast') in 1866. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 29.

Introduction

In contrast to the relatively peaceful course of the abolitionist reforms in the northeastern Caucasus, the tsarist government had to reckon with communities that were far more hostile to the idea of emancipation in the northwest. The staunch indigenous resistance to Russian abolition had many antecedents, of which the protracted Caucasus War (1817–1864) was of

paramount importance. The war—which witnessed the tragedy of the Circassian expulsions—remains one of the most researched and hotly debated topics in the history of Russia’s conquest of the region.¹ Historians in Russia and abroad continue to come to terms with the calamity of the Circassian exile today by challenging the region’s historiography and political status quo, but the prospect of conciliation, much less atonement, remains sadly elusive.

Slavery was never far-off from the hostilities of the Caucasus War. Realizing its social and economic significance, the imperial government used the institution of slavery in Circassia as a tactical leverage to compel the submission of the bellicose Circassian communities by non-violent means. Between 1862 and 1863, the government declared a policy that promised unconditional manumission to enslaved people belonging to Circassian tribes that violently resisted Russian incursion.² The policy proved effective in encouraging enslaved people to flee their owners. The tsarist authorities then settled the manumitted people in an *aul* (village) that was established specifically for this policy and aptly named Free

¹ Tugan Kумыkov, *Vyselenie Adygov v Turtsiiu – Posledstvie Kavkazskoi Voiny* (Nal’chik: Èl’brus, 1994), 3-20. Nihad Berzedzh, *Izgnaniia Cherkesov: Prichiny i Posledstviia*, translated from Arabic by Nuriet Khuazheva and Marat Gubzhokov (Maïkop: Respublikanskoe Izdatel’sko-poligr. ob’edinenie Adygēia, 1996), 84-178. Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92-98. Tugan Kумыkov, *Problemy Kavkazskoi Voiny i Vyselenie Cherkesov v Predely Osmanskoï Imperii* (20-70-e gg. XIX v.) *Sbornik Arkhivnykh Dokumentov* (Nal’chik, 2001). Andreï Epifantsev, *Neizvestnaia Kavkazskaia Voïna: Byl li Genotsid Adygov?* (Moskva, 2010). Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2013). James Forsyth, *The Caucasus: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 284-296. Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23-30.

² Ruslan Kandor, *Transformatsiia Traditsionnoi Sistemy Upravleniia Zapadnykh Adygov (Cherkesov): konets XVIII v. – 60e gg. XIX v.* (Maïkop, 2009), 160.

(*Vol'nyi*).³ Conversely, for those Circassian tribes that pledged their loyalties to the Tsar, the imperial government promised to maintain their right to own slaves and pledged to return all their runaway slaves. In a telling case of the government's moral and legal plasticity in relation to slavery during the Caucasus War—which dates from 7 October 1863—the Russian Commander in Chief in Circassia, Adjutant General Nikolaï Evdokimov, issued an official proclamation to the Abadzekh community—a Circassian subethnic group—promising to “cease manumitting their escaped slaves and return them to their rightful owners at once” after the Abadzekh made peace with the Russians.⁴ This policy is yet another testament to the empire's contradictory record of protecting the indigenous norms of servile dependency in the Caucasus, which certainly complicates the narrative of Russian abolitionism.

The culmination of the Caucasus War in 1864 witnessed a mass exodus of the native Adyghe population into the Ottoman Empire. Waves of forced emigrants also included approximately one hundred thousand enslaved men, women, and children.⁵ Russia's purported efforts to stem the flow of enslaved people leaving their native lands evidently came to naught. These Muslim refugees came to be known as *muhajirs* and their migration entered

³ The village – *Вольный Аул* in Russian is located near the capital of Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the city of Nal'chik, Russian Federation.

⁴ RGVIA, f. 14257, op. 3, d. 545, l. 53.

⁵ *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom, and Abolition in World History, 1200-1860*, ed. Christoph Witzernath (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 9. Hakan Erden puts the number of the Circassian slaves who accompanied their masters from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire in the 1860s at 150,000 see *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800-1909* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 53, 118. Ehud Toledano, “Ottoman Conception of Slavery in the Period of Reform, 1830s-1880s,” in *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia*, ed. Martin A. Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 44.

Russian historiography as *muhajirstvo*.⁶ The chaos and suffering that accompanied the expulsion of the Circassians added even greater distress to the enslaved people. The slave trade blossomed on an unprecedented scale wherever the Circassian refugees congregated in large numbers on the shores of the Black Sea. Colonel Nikolaï Kamenev's first-hand account of these tragic events describes an open-air slave market that popped up near Tuapse, in plain sight of Russian authorities⁷:

Their heads drooping, the peasants reluctantly drove carts; they knew that escape from their masters into our domains would give them the right to freedom, while the departure with them [the slaveholders] to Turkey promised only eternal slavery. The peasants carried axes and baskets filled with provisions under the watchful eyes of their owners... A vast open-air market emerged on the shores of Tuapse, where the last in the Caucasus slave market supplied loyal-to-Russia [Circassian] tribes with female and male slaves. The need for hard cash for the journey to Turkey put the emigrants (*pereselentsy*) in complete dependence to the buyers. The latter set outrageously low prices: girls and boys not older than ten years old were sold for ten to thirty silver rubles, oxen for five to three, and cows for two to three rubles.⁸

Not all Circassians opted to leave, however. According to the government's estimates, approximately 19,000 enslaved people remained in Circassia in 1864.⁹ The personal status

⁶ For a comprehensive analysis of *muhajirstvo* phenomenon in the Caucasus and its implications for the history of the Middle East, make sure to read Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, "Imperial Refuge: Resettlement of Muslims from Russia in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1914," Ph.D. dissertation (Stanford University, 2018); Hamed-Troyansky, "Circassian Refugees and the Making of Amman, 1878–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 605–23.

⁷ Tuapse (Russian, Туапсе) today a coastal city located in Russia, Krasnodarskiï kraï on the northeastern shore of the Black Sea.

⁸ Nikolaï Kamenev, "Neskol'ko slov o kolonizatsii zapadnogo Kavkaza voobshche i Psekupskogo polka v osobennosti," in *Kubanskie Voïskovyie Vedomosti*, №39 (1867).

⁹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 20.

and the future plight of this unfree population became the topic of difficult negotiations, violent clashes, and cautious abolitionists policies, which will be examined in this section.

Before discussing how the Russian imperial government abolished slavery in Circassia, a few etymological points of clarification regarding the land and the people of the northwestern Caucasus are in order. First, the name Circassia is a foreign exonym of probable Italian origins. It likely emerged as a phonetic imitation of the Russian and Turkic pronunciations of the word *Cherkess*, which collectively described the disparate tribes of the northwestern Caucasus. Reportedly, “the first to give currency to the name Circassia” were the Genoese merchants from the Crimea in the fifteenth century.¹⁰ Second, the indigenous endonym of this region was and continues to be Adygea. The native inhabitants of Adygea are the Adyghe people. In the early nineteenth century, the Adyghe community was comprised of twelve major tribes:¹¹ Abadzekh, Besleneĭ, Bzhedug, Khatukaĭ, Shapsug, Natukhaĭ, Egerukaĭ, Mamkheg, Makhosh, Temirgoĭ, Ubykh, and Kabardin.¹² Russian historiography subdivided the Adyghe tribes into two artificial categories: “the aristocratic tribes”¹³ (the nine Adyghe

¹⁰ Robert Gordon Latham, *Descriptive Ethnology*, vol. II (London: John Van Voorst, Paternoster Row, 1859), 50.

¹¹ The official flag of the Republic of Adygea (today part of the Russian Federation) displays twelve stars in the shape of a bow and three overlapping arrows. Each star represents the twelve historic Adyghe tribes. The arrows supposedly symbolize the unity of the three ancient Adyghe clans.

¹² Walter Richmond, *The Northwest Caucasus: Past, Present, Future* (London and New York: Routledge 2011), 20-25. Also see, Tamara Polovinkina, *Cherkesiia – Bol’ Moia: Istoricheskiĭ Ocherk (drevneĭshee vremia – nachalo XX v.)* (Maĭkop, 2001), 81.

¹³ The so-called “aristocratic” Adyghe tribes included: Besleneĭ, Bzhedug, Khatukaĭ, Egerukaĭ, Mamkheg, Makhosh, Temirgoĭ, Ubykh, and Kabardin. The so-called “democratic” tribes included: Abadzekh, Shapsug, and Natukhaĭ. See, Valentin Gardanov, *Obshchestvennyĭ Stroĭ Adygskikh Narodov* (Moskva: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1967), 123.

communities where indigenous aristocracy acquired a prominent social standing and political clout) and “the democratic tribes” (the three Adyghe communities in which the general principles of egalitarian self-rule prevailed).¹⁴ This categorization of the socio-political organization of the Adyghe tribes, however, should be taken with a grain of salt, as the realities of the political institutions and social stratification of the Adyghe communities in the early nineteenth centuries were more complex and overlapping than what the dichotomies of “democratic” vs. “aristocratic” could explain. Interestingly, neither Circassia nor Adyghea acquired toponymic currency in the bureaucratic parlance of the Russian administration in the North Caucasus. Instead, the Russian officials used the geography of the northwestern Caucasus to name and demarcate administrative borders of the region on maps and paper. Thus, beginning from the year 1860 and until the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, the northwestern Caucasus acquired a new administrative title that derived its origins from the name of a major river in the region – Kuban’.

Kubanskaia oblast’ (the Kuban’ district) was formally established in February 1860 within the territories that once formed the right wing of the Caucasus Line.¹⁵ The western boundaries of Kubanskaia oblast’ followed the coastlines of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. In the south, the main ridge of the Caucasus mountains served as the natural barrier that demarcated the administrative limits of the district. In the east, Kubanskaia oblast’ shared administrative

¹⁴ Boris Piotrovskii, *Istoriia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza s Drevneishikh Vremen do Kontsa XVIII v.* (Moskva: Nauka, 1988), 387, 397.

¹⁵ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 35, № 35421. The Caucasus Line was a line of Russian defensive fortifications and Cossack colonial settlements that were built to protect the empire’s southern frontiers. The first Cossack settlements appeared in the Caucasus along the tributaries of the rivers Kuban’ and Terek in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

borders with Terskaia oblast' and Stavropol'skaia Gubernia. Finally, in the north, the administrative borders of the Don Cossack Host oblast' marked the boundary of the district. Along with the creation of Kubanskaia oblast', the government in Saint Petersburg decreed the creation of the Kuban' Cossack Host (*Kubanskoe kazach'e voisko*), which was assembled from the Cossack settlements that had previously comprised the Black Sea Cossack Host (*Chernomosrskoe kazach'e voisko*).¹⁶ The administrative boundaries of the district continued to change well into the twilight years of the nineteenth century. However, the administrative capital of Kubanskaia oblast'—the city of Ekaterinodar¹⁷—remained constant. The first Head (*nachal'nik*) or Governor of Kubanskaia oblast' was Major General Nikolaï Ivanov (1860-1862). However, it was the second and third Governors, Count Nikolaï Evdokimov (1862-1863) and Count Felix Sumarokov-El'ston (1863-1869), who played pivotal roles in the abolition of slavery in Circassia.

The total population of Kubanskaia oblast' in 1860 stood at 1,089,089 people.¹⁸ This figure includes the population of the Kuban' Cossack Host settlements of approximately 399,496 people as well as the indigenous communities of approximately 689,593 people.¹⁹ By 1868, on the eve of the abolitionist reforms, the total approximate number of the native

¹⁶ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 35, № 36327.

¹⁷ Ekaterinodar changed in its name to Krasnodar in 1920 following the dramatic events of the Russian Civil War and the Bolshevik victory in this conflict.

¹⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 107, ll. 143 ob.-144.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

population that remained stood at 79,459 people²⁰ — a dramatic decrease caused by the violence of the Caucasus War and the expulsions of the Circassians from the region. To facilitate the emigration, the government provided the would-be *muhajirs* with travelling passports upon request and offered unencumbered passage to the Cossack settlements and Russian colonies, where *muhajirs* could sell all or some of their property in exchange for cash.²¹ By 1871 the number of the Adyghe people declined to approximately 60,424 people.²²

The tsarist government introduced a series of ad-hoc measures to monitor and govern the affairs of the native Circassian population. In the last years of the Caucasus War, the government ordered the resettlement of the indigenous communities to the plains adjacent to the right banks of the rivers Kuban' and Laba.²³ In 1862, Governor Evdokimov appointed Colonel Fitsa Abdurakhmanov, a decorated Russian officer of Kabardian origins, to serve as the Head (*nachal'nik*) of the resettled Adyghe communities.²⁴ The appointment made Abdurakhmanov the chief intermediary between the resettled Adyghe communities and the Russian authorities. The Circassians who had submitted to Russian rule and agreed to resettle in the designated areas were promised allotments of fertile land and were assured the sanctity

²⁰ “Statisticheskie svedeniia o kavkazskikh gortsakh, sostoiashchikh v voenno-narodnom upravlenii,” in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 5. The figure of 79,459 people consisted of 41,015 individuals identified as males and 38,444 females.

²¹ RGVIA, f. 14257, op. 3, d. 528, ll. 1-2.

²² Evgeniĭ Felitsyn, “Statisticheskie tablitsy prostranstva, nasel'ennosti i sravnitel'nye statisticheskie tablitsy narodonaseleniia... v Kubanskoĭ oblasti za 7 let, s 1871-77 gg.,” *Sbornik Svedeniĭ o Kavkaze*, ed. N. Zeĭdlits (Tiflis, 1880), 568-569.

²³ P. Gavrilov, “Ustroĭstvo pozemel'nogo byta gorskikh plemĕn Severnogo Kavkaza,” in SSKG, vol. 2 (Tiflis, 1869), 65.

²⁴ RGVIA, f. 38, op. 7, d. 416, ll. 1-3.

of their property and religion rites. In addition, the government granted the resettled Circassians an exemption from the payment of any taxes until the fall of 1864.²⁵ In 1866, the government in Saint Petersburg issued a decree (*polozhenie*) which established an institutional framework to facilitate the “governance of the mountaineers of Kubanskaia oblast’.”²⁶ Circassia was divided into five military districts (*voenno-okrzhnye upravleniia*): Zelenchuksiĭ, Labinskiĭ, Psekupskiĭ, Urupskiĭ, and Èl’bruskiĭ. The indigenous communities in the region were governed in accordance with the legal conventions of the military-civil administration—a contingent juridical system that balanced the application of shari’a, *adat* (customary law), and Russian laws to govern the lives of non-Russian population. This military-civil administration continued to structure the lives of the Adyghe community until 1871, when the administration was gradually phased-out and the standard norms of Russian civil governance were slowly implemented in the region.

Internally, feudal conventions underpinned the social structure and political organization of the Adyghe communities during the first half of the nineteenth century. Although the ability of the indigenous aristocracy to wield feudal authority declined among the Abadzekh, Shapsug, and Natukhaĭ tribes as late as the eighteenth century, other Adyghe communities remained in the firm grip of the indigenous nobility.²⁷ In these communities, the princely estate—known in the Adyghe language as *pshi*—and the estate of nobles (*worq*) enjoyed a

²⁵ SEA, f. 416, op. 3, d. 115, ll. 1-2.

²⁶ PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 41, № 42913.

²⁷ G. Novitskiĭ, “Geograficheskoe-statisticheskoe obozrenie zemli, naselĕnnoi narodom Adyghe,” *Tiflisskie Vedomosti*, No. 22, 1829. Khan-Gireĭ, *Zapiski o Cherkessii* (Nal’chik: Èl’brus, 1978), 210-212. Valentin Gardanov, *Obshchestvennyĭ Stroĭ Adygskikh Narodov* (Moskva: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1967), 127-128.

privileged social status and held the reigns of political authority in their hands.²⁸ One step below on the social ladder of the Adyghe society was the estate of personally-free peasants known as *tfokotl*. These peasants constituted the largest segment of the Adyghe society, or approximately three-quarters of the region's indigenous population.²⁹ Although the *tfokotl* were personally-free, the feudal nobility placed increasing pressure on them in the first half of the nineteenth century by attempting to restrict the peasants' freedom, subjugate their labor, and claim ownership over land.³⁰ At the bottom of the Adyghe social hierarchy stood the dependent estates that included enslaved men, women, and children.

The first category of the dependent estate in the Adyghe communities, which also happened to be the smallest one numerically, was *og*: a feudally dependent peasant.³¹ To make sense of this category of dependency, it is important to understand the institution of slavery and social dependency in Circassia as a continuum rather than a dichotomy of freedom and nonfreedom. The *og* status indicated a transitional category of dependency between a manumitted slave, or *azat*, and a share-cropping slave—a *pshitl'* (*пшитль*). On the eve of abolition in 1868, the government registered just 163 *og* of both genders in the region.³² Still lower on the ladder of the social hierarchy were the share-cropping slaves known in Circassia as *pshitl'*. This category of social dependency included enslaved people who lived in separate

²⁸ Khan-Girei, *Zapiski o Cherkessii* (Nal'chik: Èl'brus, 1978), 118-121.

²⁹ Semën Bushuev, *Ocherki Istorii Adygei*, vol. 1 (Maikop, 1957), 392.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 19 ob. - 20.

³² "Polozhenie dela osvobozhdeniia zavisimykh sosloviï v gorskikh okrugakh Kubanskoï oblasti," in SSKG, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1868), 54.

households and worked on the land belonging to their owners. Although *pshitl'* were recognized as the property of their owners, their personal status was determined by *adat* (customary law) of the region. Therefore, the Russian authorities labelled *pshitl'* as *adat*-slaves (*адатные холопы*). *Adat* also regulated the parameters of interaction between *pshitl'* and their owners. Hence, the slaveowners' authority over *pshitl'* had certain limits. The government estimated that the number of *pshitl'* in Circassia in 1868 stood at 14,295 people of both genders.³³ Finally, at the very bottom of the social hierarchy of the Adyghe communities were *unauty* (pl.). The status of *unauty* indicated the most oppressive type of enslavement in Circassia because the personal status of *unauty* was not regulated by *adat* or any other body of laws. In other words, *unauty* slaves lived or died at the mercy of their owners. The Russian authorities labelled *unauty* as *adatless*-slaves (*безадатные холопы*). In 1868 there were approximately 3,172 *unauty* slaves in Circassia. The majority of *unauty* slaves—2,116 people—were female.³⁴ All in all, the total approximate number of the dependent estate in Circassia on the eve of abolition stood at 17,630³⁵ people, which constituted approximately twenty-five percent of the entire population of the Adyghe community.³⁶ In the aftermath of the Caucasus War, the search for pragmatic solutions to abolish slavery and determine the future social status of the dependent estate in Circassia became the chief preoccupation of the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3448, l. 18. Other sources provide somewhat different estimates of the enslaved population in Circassia on the eve of the abolition. Bushuev puts the number of the enslaved people in Circassia in 1867 at 19,701, see *Ocherki Istorii Adygei*, vol. 1 (Maïkop, 1957), 395.

imperial government. Neither the enslaved people nor the slaveholders remained passive in this process.

The Prelude to Abolition – The Land Reform

As I argued in other chapters, the abolition of slavery in the North Caucasus went hand in hand with a comprehensive land tenure reform. As a rule, in almost every administrative region of the Caucasus, the imperial government implemented land tenure reforms either at the same time or immediately after abolishing slavery and other forms of servile dependency in the region. The land reform in the northwestern Caucasus stands out as the exception to this rule. Long before abolishing the institution of slavery in Circassia, the Russian administration in Tiflis had conceived of a comprehensive land reform plan in the area. Indeed, the first plans to drastically change the land tenure regime in the region were formulated by Count Evdokimov in 1861—three years before the end of the Caucasus War and seven years before slavery was officially abolished in Kubanskaia oblast'.³⁷

What prompted the tsarist administration to contemplate land reform in the northwestern Caucasus before resolving the so-called ‘peasant question’? The answer to this question is clearly outlined in a letter written on 6 July 1861 by the Caucasus Viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail, to the then-Minister of War, Dmitriï Miliutin. Recognizing that the distribution of arable land among the indigenous communities of the Caucasus played an important role in the stability of Russian rule, the Viceroy notes that in the wake of a massive “emigration (*pereselenie*) of indigenous populations to Turkey,” Kubanskaia oblast’ had an “overabundance” of unoccupied lands.³⁸ The low population density of the remaining

³⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 27, l. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 28.

“acquiesced natives (*pokornye tuzemtsy*)” in Circassia, contended the Viceroy, would make the task of solving the land question there considerably easier than in any other region of the North Caucasus. Hence, the land reform in the region, argued the Viceroy, should begin “promptly,” starting with the indigenous communities that still retained “aristocratic beginnings.”³⁹

In planning the land reform in Circassia, the imperial government pursued several strategic objectives. This included permanently entrenching the region with a Russian presence, subordinating and controlling the movement of the remaining Adyghe population, and establishing new and reliable pillars of political support among the indigenous elites and military officers who were loyal to Russia. To achieve these objectives, the government distributed large tracts of land among Cossack settlements as well as German and Russian colonies, with the Cossack settlements receiving the best agricultural lands in the region.⁴⁰ The creation of new Cossack settlements was never a haphazard affair; their location was specifically chosen by the state to cut the Circassians’ access to the Caucasus mountains (often a safe haven for Circassians) and to push the native Adyghe communities further inland, away from the eastern shores of the Black Sea where they could potentially form ties with Ottoman or British agents. This plan envisioned an ethnic cleansing of the eastern coast of the Black Sea, from the Kerch’ Strait to the river Bzyb’ on the border of Abkhazia and establishment of Cossack settlements.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gavrilov, “Ustroïstvo pozemel’nogo byta gorskikh plemën Severnogo Kavkaza,” in *SSKV*, vol. 2 (Tiflis, 1869), 65.

⁴¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 63., ll. 1 ob.- 2 ob.

After establishing these objectives, the government considered the distribution of land among the Circassians. To do so, Evdokimov envisioned dividing Kubanskaia oblast's entire indigenous male population into three social categories.⁴² Membership in one of these categories determined a person's eligibility to receive a land allotment of a particular size. To determine a person's assignment into a category, Evdokimov proposed using their distinguished record of service to the state or the social status of their family. According to Evdokimov's plan, the *first category* would be comprised of old aristocratic families whose "historical legacy makes them the rightful claimants to landownership in the Caucasus."⁴³ Also listed in the first category of eligibility were men who earned high accolades in the service of the state, especially officer corps who took an active role in the Russian conquest of the northwestern Caucasus and particularly those Circassians who helped Russia subdue the region. Accordingly, Evdokimov suggested granting five thousand *desiatin*⁴⁴ of land to Colonel Sultan Adil' Girei. Another five thousand *desiatin* land grant was suggested for the heirs of Colonel Sagat Girei, Second-Lieutenant Sultan Khan Girei, Azamet Girei, and Mohammed Girei.⁴⁵ Additionally, Colonel Prince Adil' Girei Kaplanov-Nechev as well as

⁴² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 27, l. 14.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Desiatina* (Russian, singular, десятина) – a common unit for measurement of land in Russia between fifteenth and early twentieth centuries. 1 *desiatina* equaled approximately 1,09 hectare or 2,7 acres.

⁴⁵ When proposing the land grants for the members of the Circassian indigenous nobility in the service of Russian military, Evdokimov deemed it important to note that Azamet Girei and Mohammed Girei served in the personal convoy of Tsar Alexander II.

Colonel Prince Mohammed Gireĭ Loov were chosen to receive five thousand *desiatian*.⁴⁶ These men, declared Evdokimov, “will be first native landlords (*pomeshchiki*) in Kubanskaia oblast’!”⁴⁷

The *second category*, according to Evdokimov’s plan, would consist of men who belonged to the estate of the indigenous gentry. In Evdokimov’s thinking, the high social status of these men entitled them to receive large landholdings, which would range between one hundred to two hundred *desiatin* for each senior member of a family, depending on their military rank or social respectability. On top of that, each additional male member of the same family would receive another thirty *desiatin*. Evdokimov insisted that the government-issued land given to people of the first and second categories needed to be recognized as the inalienable private property of the grantees.⁴⁸ Certainly, the government’s generosity was not altruistic. Rather, it was intended to purchase the political loyalty of the Circassian nobility and military cadre to the Russian monarchy.

Finally, the *third category* was comprised of common folk or *tfokotl*—personally free peasants who could not boast aristocratic roots. The third category was the largest and, comparatively, the most disadvantaged group of peasants, whose low social status, according to the draft of the land reform, restricted their right to own land. Unlike the first and second categories—in which the government determined the size of a person’s land allotment on a case-by-case basis—the Circassian men assigned to the third category were projected to

⁴⁶ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 16-17.

⁴⁷ Ibid., l. 17 ob.

⁴⁸ Ibid., l. 14 ob.

receive a uniform and meager seven *desiatin* of land for each male head of a household, irrespective of the household's actual size.⁴⁹ In addition, Evdokimov's plan proposed installing a communal land tenure for peasants of the third category, thus denying the peasants the right to hold land as private property. Communal land tenure, which was a common mode of rural organization in European Russia, served to further attach peasants to their communities and to the land.

What of the enslaved people? In which category did Evdokimov place them? The short answer is none. Evdokimov's plan rejected outright the possibility of landownership for the enslaved people in Kubanskaia oblast'. The conscious decision to exclude close to a quarter of the remaining Adyghe population from receiving any allotment of land may seem at odds with the purported abolitionist credentials of the Russian colonial administration in the Caucasus. In fact, it was not. Evdokimov's preemptive disenfranchisement of enslaved people before their emancipation perfectly encapsulated the prevailing mentality and universe of values of Russian statesmen in the mid-nineteenth century. Evdokimov and his counterparts regarded the rigid, estate-based social stratification of Russian society as both a natural and a desirable form of societal organization, one which promised social order and reinforced the economic subservience of lower classes to the elites. Hence, the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus could not possibly have entailed immediate social equality and equal economic opportunity for all, for it would have set a dangerous precedent for the entire empire. "*Kholopy*" (slaves), Evdokimov argued, would not be included in the land-distribution scheme "because they must remain on the land of their masters."⁵⁰ Evidently, the government

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., l. 14.

expected formerly enslaved people to continue working on the lands of their owners as sharecroppers, indefinitely perpetuating their state of servile dependency.

Tsar Alexander II affirmed Evdokimov's proposal of the land reform in Circassia during his visit to Kubanskaia oblast' in September 1861. The government then proceeded to distribute the first land grants to people assigned to the first category of eligibility in Zelenchukskiĭ and Urupskiĭ okrugs in 1862 and 1863, respectively.⁵¹ However, the ongoing violence of the Caucasus War and the resettlement campaign of the indigenous population had stalled the land reform in the region. As a result, the government was forced to temporarily suspend its land distribution plans in Circassia until 1865. Importantly, the exodus of the Adyghe people from the northwestern Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire had important implications for the course of the land reform in the years that ensued.

Waves of forced emigration of Caucasian indigenous people between 1859 and 1864 left large swathes of unoccupied land, prompting the Russian government to revise Evdokimov's original proposals. These legislative changes boded well for the enslaved Adyghe people. The Caucasus Viceroy announced new guidelines for the assignment and distribution of land allotments to people of the third category on 18 April 1865.⁵² First, the Caucasus Viceroy concluded, rather wisely, that the original land allotment of seven *desiatin* was inadequate for sustaining a household. Hence, the government in Tiflis decreed an increase in the size of land allotments in accordance with the conditions of the local terrain and the availability of arable land in each administrative district of Kubanskaia oblast'. As a result, peasants of the third category living on 'inconvenient' and comparably less fertile areas could expect to receive a

⁵¹ Gavrilov, 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 67.

slightly larger allotment of land compared to peasants living on ‘convenient’ or arable land. What this meant in practice was the following:

In Labinskiĭ and Psekupskiĭ okrugs, the government increased the size of land allotments for the third category from seven to nine *desiatin*. In the northernmost part of Urupskiĭ okrug, it established the norm of ten *desiatin* for each male head of a household, while the *auls* located in other parts of the okrug would be given twelve *desiatin* of arable land per male head of a household. The same allotment of twelve *desiatin* was prescribed for the northernmost parts of Zelenchukskiĭ okrug, while the rural communities that had been settled in the south of Zelenchukskiĭ okrug would receive fourteen *desiatin* of land. Finally, the villages of the Abaza ethnic group that had settled on the lands along the banks of the river Kuma received twelve *desiatin* of arable land for each male head of a household.⁵³ Most noteworthy of all, the Viceroy’s decree abandoned Evdokimov’s plan to exclude enslaved people from eligibility to receive land! Reversing its earlier decision, the government recognized the enslaved peoples’ rights to receive land without preconditions and on equal terms with personally free peasants of the third category.

In addition to increasing the size of land allotments designated for the third category of people, the government also expanded the pool of eligibility for those assigned to the first and second categories, respectively.⁵⁴ The Caucasus Viceroy instructed the Governor of Kubanskaia oblast’ to compile a list of Circassians whose loyalty and distinguished service to the state merited a reward in the form of a land grant. This included men of non-noble

⁵³ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 69.

backgrounds whose military services had earned them a junior or senior (*обер-офицеры и умайс-офицеры*) officer rank. The junior officers were set to receive up to two hundred *desiatin* of land, while the senior officers could expect to receive up to four hundred *desiatin* of land.⁵⁵ In this way, providing Circassian officers with sizeable land grants became a tactic to demonstrate the tangible and quite substantial rewards that fighting for the Russian state carried.

As the government made the logistical preparations necessary to distribute arable land among the native population of Circassia, it concurrently facilitated the settlement of Russian and German colonists in the area. In 1866, nearly eight thousand Russian colonists established six settlements in Urupskii and Zelenchukskii okrugs. This web of colonial settlements grew larger with the establishment of four German colonies that counted 278 homesteads, where approximately 1,390 German colonists lived.⁵⁶

Finally, in 1867, the government embarked on a challenging and time-consuming mission to survey the land in each administrative district of the region and delineate the future borders of *auls*, where the native Circassian population would, at last, find a permanent settlement. The work of surveying the available lands in Urupskii and Zelenchukskii okrugs was completed within a year. Afterwards, the Tsar approved the land distribution plan during the Caucasus Committee meeting in Saint Petersburg on 11 June 1868. But the concrete, on-the-ground process carrying out the delineation and allocation of land to the remaining Adyghe communities would only begin in the spring of 1869.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 69-70.

The land reform in Kubanskaia oblast' continued to gradually unfold throughout the 1870s. However, in some parts of the region, the land question remained unresolved until the early twentieth century. The reform had primarily benefitted the cadre of native and Russian military officers, members of the indigenous aristocratic estate, and Cossack settlements, as well as Russian, German, and Greek colonists. It followed the same logic of aristocratic privilege and service to the state, which discriminated against people of lower social standings and, most of all, enslaved people. As I have demonstrated in this section, the government's original 1861 plan for the redistribution of land in Kubanskaia oblast' had excluded the dependent estate from any land-receiving eligibility. Only in the aftermath of the tragic expulsion of the native Circassian population—which left an abundance of unoccupied land—did the government reconsider its plans and extend the right to receive land allotments to enslaved people. This was a fortuitous turn of events for the former slaves. Many communities of formerly enslaved people in other parts of the North Caucasus were not nearly as lucky.

Further, the land reform left peasants, the majority of the region's population, at a huge disadvantage. Even after the government increased the base size of the land allotment for men assigned to the third category of eligibility, the new land grants were not sufficient to create a thriving rural economy. While the government envisioned the peasants as the main driver of economic productivity and the chief source of tax revenue in the post-reform era, the land reform had decisively stifled any prospect of an economic breakthrough. The land grants—which the government allotted to the rural communities—were insufficient for large-scale productions of cash crops and meaningful participation in the region's incipient market economy. In addition, the communal land tenure—which the government installed in the peasant communities in the wake of the land reform—undermined any hopes of agricultural

entrepreneurship and severely limited the peasants' mobility. The government's failure to allocate sufficient quantities of arable land to the Circassian peasants created artificial land scarcity in the region, which reached its peak in 1917, when the average size of a plot of land cultivated by a male peasant dwindled to just three *desiatin*.⁵⁷

In stark contrast to the meager land allotments that the tsarist authorities provided to the Circassian peasants, the members of the native aristocracy who submitted to Russian rule as well as the officer corps who aided Russia's conquest of the northwestern Caucasus received spectacularly large landholdings. For example, seven families of indigenous aristocratic background received a total of 26,257 *desiatin* of arable land in the lower Urupskii okrug in 1869.⁵⁸ In the same year, the imperial government granted 3,500 *desiatin* of arable land in the upper part of the okrug to the family of General Abdurakhmanov alone.⁵⁹ Lower ranking Circassian officers also received substantial land allotments. For instance, *uriadnik*⁶⁰ Ismail Sheudzhen received a land grant in the amount of 103 *desiatin*. Calvary militiaman, Islambek Dokshukov, received a land allotment in amount of 107 *desiatin*, and effendi Almakhsid Nagev received 103 *desiatin* of arable land from the tsarist authorities.⁶¹ These land grants were meant to both reward the political loyalty of the Circassian elites and officers as well as ensure their prosperity after slavery and servile dependency were abolished in the region.

⁵⁷ Bushuev, 388.

⁵⁸ Gavrilov, 71.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Uriadnik* (Russian, Урядник) – a military rank designating a junior officer in the Cossack corps.

⁶¹ Bushuev, 390-391.

The Prelude to Abolition – The Trials and Tribulations of Abolition in Circassia 1864-1868

The first request for information regarding the social organization of the dependent estates in Kubanskaia oblast' was dispatched from Tiflis to Ekaterinodar on 4 June 1864, a little over two weeks after the end of the Caucasus War.⁶² The Russian administration in Tiflis outlined eight points of inquiry that ranged from questions on “the nature of servile dependency and the total number of enslaved people in the region” to information on the “legal conventions that inform the indigenous system of land tenure” in Circassia.⁶³ Starting from 19 August 1864, the first general sketches on what the institution of slavery and servile dependency looked like in Kubanskaia oblast' began to arrive in Tiflis.⁶⁴ Concise and stingy with details, these reports represent the first systematic effort of the tsarist administration in the northwestern Caucasus to gather data about the practices of enslavement, the rights of the enslaved, and the prevalence of manumission among the native population of Kubanskaia oblast'. Although slavery and the domestic slave trade would not be abolished in the region for several more years, the wheels of the so-called Peasant Reform in Circassia began to turn slowly in 1864 and continued to pick up speed in the years that followed.

The slaveholders and enslaved communities in Circassia were keenly aware of the abolitionist reforms that had precipitated the emancipation of Russian serfs and enslaved people in the neighboring Stavropol'skaia Gubernia in 1861 as well as the abolition of serfdom

⁶² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 86, l. 3.

⁶³ Ibid., l. 3 ob.

⁶⁴ Ibid., l. 7.

in Tiflisskaia guberniia (eastern Georgia) in 1864. However, the most consequential abolitionist reform took place in Kubanskaia oblast' in 1864, when the government ordered the universal emancipation of enslaved people among the "Circassian Cossacks and Armenians" settled on the lands of the Kuban' Cossack Host.⁶⁵ As a result, nearly seven hundred enslaved people were emancipated in the Armenian *aul* Armavir, which was predominantly populated by *Cherkesogaï* or Circassian Armenians. Afterwards, hundreds of enslaved Cossacks of Circassian descent were granted freedom. The archives preserved evidence of the abolitionist campaign in the Cossack communities, including the names of slave owning Circassian Cossacks and enslaved people who belonged to them. For instance, in Taman' okrug, *stanitsa* Grivenskaia-Cherkasskaia, *uriadnik*⁶⁶ Tlebkhoch' Korma was required to manumit a thirty-year-old enslaved woman named Gadiashtsam and her three children.⁶⁷ Another *uriadnik*, Chimaf Gatloka, reluctantly manumitted a twenty-eight-year-old woman named Ganife and her three-year-old son named Guchips.⁶⁸ It is very important to note that because the emancipation of enslaved people in the lands of the Kuban' Cossack Host occurred unconditionally, that is, without compensating slave-owners, the reform heightened expectations of universal and unconditional freedom among enslaved people throughout the northwestern Caucasus. In fact, following the news of emancipation in the

⁶⁵ The official language of the policy decreed emancipation of "feudally-dependent peasants of Asiatic origins (*aziatskogo proiskhozhdeniia*).” For details see, Bushuev, 392. Kandor, 161.

⁶⁶ *Uriadnik* (Russian, Урядник) – a military rank designating a junior officer in the Cossack corps.

⁶⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 86, l. 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Cossack communities, some enslaved people in the region regarded the abolition as a *fait accompli* and acted on this belief by refusing to obey their owners.⁶⁹ Such grassroots, bottom-up agitation for freedom alarmed the Russian administration in Circassia. The prospect of unsanctioned, even if well-intentioned, unrest among the enslaved communities compelled the government to intervene and demand the slaves' unquestionable obedience to their owners until the government deemed it appropriate to address the plight of the enslaved people.

With the prospect of abolition looming large on the horizon, the slave-owners in Circassia took proactive actions petitioning the tsarist government to abandon its plans for emancipation.⁷⁰ They delivered their pleas both in writing and in person. One such deputation of Circassian slaveholders travelled to Tiflis in January 1865. We can judge the importance with which the imperial government approached the question of slavery in the region by the fact that the Caucasus Viceroy himself gave audience to the deputies. The Circassian petitioners had but a single supplication. They asked the Viceroy to allow them to keep their slaves for "the time eternal."⁷¹ The Viceroy sympathized with the deputies' concerns and carefully listened to the slaveholders' appeal. The outcome of the meeting serves as an instructive example of the government's strategy of cautious anti-slavery reforms, which nonetheless accorded the highest priority to the financial interests of the slave-owners. Although the Circassian deputies did not secure the Viceroy's permission to keep their slaves in perpetuity, they did receive Grand Duke Mikhail's promise not to impose any laws that could challenge the right to own slaves in Circassia in the foreseeable future. The Viceroy's

⁶⁹ RGVIA, f. 14257, op. 3, d. 560, ll. 1-2 ob.

⁷⁰ RGVIA, f. 14257, op. 3, d. 567, ll. 2-5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, l. 4.

promise was enshrined in an official proclamation issued on 18 January 1865. The proclamation declared that while the Russian government could not permit an indefinite existence of slavery in Circassia, the tsarist authorities did pledge not to interfere with the institution of slavery. In addition, they agreed to continue protecting the slave-owners' rights to exercise authority over their slaves in accordance with indigenous customs until economic and social affairs in Circassia became stable. Moreover, the Viceroy pledged that when the time came, the government would not act unilaterally to abolish slavery; instead, it would seek the slave-owners' consultation before undertaking the reform to ensure that emancipation would not impose undue financial hardship on the Circassian slaveowners.⁷² Finally, in a gesture of colonial humanitarianism, the government gently asked the slaveowners to treat their slaves "with humanity."⁷³ It is fair to say that the government's refusal to grant Circassian slave-owners an exemption from emancipation disappointed them. Still, the deputies' visit to Tiflis was not fruitless. The state's reassurances to seek the slaveholders' participation in the abolitionist reform did provide a measure of comfort, at least to some slaveowners.

The Viceroy's dialogue with the Circassian slaveholders, which by all accounts was amicable, spurred the imperial government to implement a series of policies aimed at restricting the internal slave trade in Circassia, protecting enslaved people from the arbitrary authority of their owners, and preparing for the eventual abolition of slavery in the region. It must be remembered that the chief goal of these policies was to merely restrict the slave trade in the northwestern Caucasus, not to abolish it entirely. The tsarist government remained true

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Semën Bushuev, *Ocherki Istorii Adygei*, vol. 1 (Maikop, 1957), 393.

to its commitment to respect the indigenous right to own slaves. In March 1865, the Viceroy directed the Head of Kubanskaia oblast', Count Felix Sumarokov-El'ston, to restrict the slave trade in the region by banning the sale of enslaved people outside of the administrative borders of the oblast'.⁷⁴ In 1866, the government further restricted the slave trade by prohibiting the sale of enslaved people outside of the administrative districts within Kubanskaia oblast' itself. These measures were intended to stabilize the population of enslaved people and allow the local administration to create an accurate estimate of the total number of slaves in Circassia.⁷⁵ The Viceroy's directive also required local authorities to offer unconditional and immediate emancipation to enslaved people who were sold in violation of the ban. The owners of the emancipated slaves would not be eligible to seek compensation from the state for the loss of their property. Further, the government divested the slaveholders from the right to exercise judicial authority over enslaved people belonging to them. Instead, the government asserted that all conflicts had to be adjudicated in local courts. In order to offer a small measure of protection to enslaved people, the government also instituted the elected position of the "enslaved elder" (*kholopskiĭ starshina*) at the level of district courts (*okružnoiĭ slovesnyiĭ sud*). The purpose of this position was to represent the interests of enslaved individuals in disputes that arose between slaves and their owners.⁷⁶ My archival work could not definitively confirm whether the creation of the new judicial representative office for enslaved people made a significant difference in protecting the rights of otherwise completely disenfranchised people.

⁷⁴ GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 653, l. 1.

⁷⁵ *Gosudarstvennyiĭ arkhiv Krasnodarskogo kraia* (hereafter, GAKK), f. 774, op. 1, d. 653, l. 1.

⁷⁶ Bushuev, 393.

More research into this topic would require multiple visits to local archives across Krasnodarskiĭ Kraĭ. Nevertheless, these measures serve as a clear illustration of the cautious nature of Russian anti-slavery reforms that gradually paved the way for the eventual abolition of slavery in Circassia.

Slavery should have been abolished in Circassia as early as 1866. At least, that was the projected date for the abolitionist reforms to commence in the region. 1866 was not an arbitrary year. The government's plan was to abolish slavery in Circassia and in the neighboring Terskaia oblast' simultaneously. Russian officials believed that a coordinated abolitionist effort would lessen the slave-owners' resistance to emancipation for two reasons: firstly, it would obviate any damaging claims accusing them of engaging in the preferential treatment of some slaveowners in the North Caucasus over others. Secondly, a coordinated abolitionist effort would prevent the slaveowners in Kabarda from taking their slaves to Circassia, where the enslaved people could be sold or gifted. This plan, however, was suspended in August after the Governor of Kubanskaia oblast' made a strong case for delaying abolition in the region.⁷⁷ Sumarokov-El'ston presented seven arguments in favor of postponing the abolition of slavery in Kabanskaia oblast'. In summary, he believed that emancipating enslaved people in 1866 would inflict significant financial hardships on the slaveowners in the region who were under his control. To justify his argument, he cited the exceptionally challenging state of the local economy that had not recovered since the devastations of the Caucasus War. The introduction of fiscal obligations in 1864 in the form of state taxes and dues had further hampered the pace of any potential economic recovery.

⁷⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 86, ll. 97-99 ob.

Sumarokov-El'ston also invoked the government's earlier promise not to interfere with the institution of slavery in Circassia until slaveowners had enough time to collect their bearings and bring their homesteads in order.⁷⁸ In addition, he argued that the plans to abolish slavery in Circassia in 1866 would most certainly undermine the government's "incredible efforts (*neimovernye usiliia*) to discourage the mountaineers [Circassians] from emigrating to Turkey," and would provoke another exodus, something that the imperial government was very keen to avoid.⁷⁹ Finally, the decision to postpone the abolition of slavery in the Kubanskaia oblast' was also undoubtedly informed by a violent anti-abolitionist rebellion that had engulfed the neighboring Abkhazia in late July of 1866.⁸⁰ The imperial government had legitimate concerns that the social cause of slavery could unite rebels in Abkhazia and Circassia who were frustrated by Russian colonial politics.

Sumarokov-El'ston prevailed in persuading the Caucasus Viceroy to delay abolition in Kubanskaia oblast' in 1866. Concerns over the financial wellbeing of slaveholders in the northwestern Caucasus, as well as fears of yet another mass flight of Circassians traveling to the Ottoman Empire or joining the Abkhaz rebels, were enough to convince the Viceroy to order the postponement of any abolitionist reforms in Circassia until local authorities deemed it feasible and less likely to inflict economic distress on the slaveholders. Hence, as the government moved to abolish slavery in Kabarda, Ossetia, Ingushetia, and Chechnya in 1866, slavery in Circassia was allowed to continue its existence.

⁷⁸ Ibid., l. 98. Also see, GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 653, ll. 105-106 ob.

⁷⁹ Ibid., l. 98.

⁸⁰ Ibid., l. 103 ob.

The government-approved delay of abolition failed to placate all slaveholders in Circassia. Some of them openly rejected the government's conciliatory overtures and refused to settle for anything short of the recognition of slavery as an undeniable right. Notably, anti-abolitionist tensions flared up during an incident that occurred in August 1866.⁸¹ The Russian administration in Kubanskaia oblast' had ordered the assembly of a militia, comprised of mounted Circassians. The militia was tasked with patrolling the porous borderlands that separated Circassia and Abkhazia along the rivers Zelenchuk and Marukh. At the time, Abkhazia was engulfed in a violent anti-Russian rebellion, which began in the late July 1866. It is worth mentioning that the rebellion was prompted by rumors of the government's intention to abolish slavery in Abkhazia. The Circassian militia was charged with the task of intercepting a possible rebel incursion from Abkhazia. However, the commander of the militia unit, Davlet-Girei Kudinetov, refused to follow the orders unless the government pledged to abandon its plans to emancipate enslaved people in Circassia. Otherwise, Davlet-Girei gave a stern warning: "we [the Circassians] will become the Abkhaz," i.e. join the Abkhaz rebels against the Russians.⁸² Though the incident was ultimately resolved by peaceful means, it served as a stark reminder that the question of slavery was a potent force capable of galvanizing the Circassian communities against Russian rule.⁸³

⁸¹ GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 172, ll. 22-24 ob.

⁸² *Ibid.*, l. 23.

⁸³ The Russian government arrested Davlet-Girei Kudinetov in August 1867 and ordered his exile. However, in 1869, following Evdokimov's intercession, Kudinetov was allowed to return to his homeland from the exile, see Kandor, 170-171.

Resistance to abolition notwithstanding, the Russian authorities proceeded with drafting administrative blueprints of the emancipation reform. In January 1867, the administration of Kubanskaia oblast' established a committee for the "consideration of the means and order for emancipation of the dependent peasants," which was chaired by Colonel Pavel Dukmasov, who served as the chief aide to the then-Governor of Kubanskaia oblast'.⁸⁴ The Committee was charged with the task of collecting data on the total number of enslaved individuals and investigating the best means of emancipating the enslaved people in the region. To do that, the administration in Ekaterinodar instructed the Heads (*nachal'niki*) of each okrug to gather information about the number of slaveholders in each administrative district of Kubanskaia oblast', provide an accurate estimate of enslaved individuals in their possession, and collect information on the nature of the different types of dependency that bound enslaved people to their owners.⁸⁵ This task was both difficult and expensive; it required extensive amounts of travel, interviews, and report-writing. Recognizing the high financial costs of the mission as well the hardships involved in traveling and interviewing the local population, Sumarokov-El'ston petitioned the Russian administration in Tiflis to issue a one-time monetary award (*edinovremennoe posobie*) to the government officials charged with the task of collecting information.⁸⁶ These awards were not without merit. By early March 1867, Sumarokov-El'ston reported to Head of the Caucasus Mountainous Administration (*Kavkazskoe gorskoe upravlenie*) in Tiflis, Lieutenant General Dmitrii Starosel'skiĭ, that his office had gathered "all

⁸⁴ GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 653, l. 246.

⁸⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 86, ll. 104-105 ob.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 105 ob.

requisite information concerning the dependent estate in Kuabanskaia oblast’.”⁸⁷ The lengthy description of the cultural and legal conventions that undergirded the institution of slavery in Circassia in the late 1860s was organized in a brochure-style, printed booklet for the convenience of its readers.⁸⁸ A single copy of the brochure was promptly forwarded to Tiflis.

In the spring of the same year, the committee’s work moved beyond surveying and collecting data. Deputies representing the interests of the slaveholders and those of the dependent estates were invited to Ekaterinodar for consultation.⁸⁹ Apparently, the planning and deliberation of the committee had inspired another round of rumors surrounding the imminent abolition of slavery in the region.⁹⁰ Believing the long-awaited freedom to be just around the corner, some enslaved people refused to obey their owners. In one such case, enslaved peasants in Khatukaeviskiĭ *aul* refused to work *en masse*, convinced that their owners were keeping the news of universal emancipation secret.⁹¹ This unrest required the government’s intervention. Colonel Abdurakhmanov, a trusted and loyal intermediary of the tsarist administration in Circassia, was charged with the mission to restore order and demand the slaves’ immediate obedience to their owners. Abdurakhmanov met with ten deputies who represented the rebellious slaves. After hours of admonishing tirades and the dismissal of the slaves’ claims, he demanded to know who was responsible for spreading the false tales of

⁸⁷ Ibid., l. 112.

⁸⁸ Ibid., ll. 113-145.

⁸⁹ GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 653, ll. 366-366 ob.

⁹⁰ Ibid., l. 160 ob.-161.

⁹¹ Bushuev, 400.

freedom. The group refused to surrender this information to Abdurakhmanov, leading to the arbitrary arrest of four members of the delegation.

As tensions mounted, the urgency of the situation became increasingly clear. The Russian administration could not avoid postponing the abolition of slavery in the region any further. The Caucasus Mountainous Administration announced that the abolition of slavery in Kubanskaia oblast' would commence on 1 May 1868, and preparation work on the local level began in earnest. In the military-civil okrugs of Kubanskaia oblast', where the majority of the population consisted of the resettled Adyghe people, the Caucasus Vicery instructed authorities to establish deliberative assemblies, where interested parties could discuss the terms of emancipation.⁹² The government's role in these deliberations was that of a facilitator of debates and an arbiter of disputes. Each assembly meeting was chaired by the Head of each okrug and included slaveholder representatives as well as deputies representing the interests of enslaved people. The seemingly-inclusive membership of the assemblies, however, had its limits. As a testament to its questionable abolitionist credentials and the palpable contempt it held for the most benighted of the enslaved people in Kubanskaia oblast', the tsarist administration excluded the voices of the most oppressed category of the dependent estate in Circassia—*unauty* (pl.)—from participating in the assembly meetings. The local officials based this decision on the claim that the *unauty* were “unaccustomed to having independent will and likely unable to oppose the arguments of their owners.”⁹³ Hence, the deliberations concerning how enslaved *unauty* would obtain freedom proceeded without their input or participation.

⁹² *Ibid.*, I. 280.

⁹³ Bushuev, 403.

Disagreements over the terms of the emancipation of enslaved people emerged soon after the deliberative assemblies held their first official meetings. The main source of contention revolved around the amount of redemption payments that enslaved individuals would be required to pay their owners in order to obtain personal freedom. Quite predictably, the slaveholders insisted on setting an exorbitantly high redemption payment threshold, hoping to prolong the servile dependence of their slaves indefinitely. In response, the deputies representing the interests of the enslaved communities protested, citing the slaves' already destitute state. Another point of contention was the question of property belonging to the *phitli* (pl.), or sharecropping-slaves. Much to the dismay of the dependent estate's deputies, the slaveholders once again asserted their right to claim all the property in the *phitli*'s possession. After several weeks of fruitless disagreements, it was up to the Russian administration to find a workable compromise. The result of the difficult deliberative process was a historic document that guided the abolitionist efforts of the tsarist administration in Kubanskaia oblast'. The official title of the document was the "Rules for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of Kubanskaia oblast'."⁹⁴ On 8 March 1868, the Tiflis Committee for the Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus approved the Rules, thus entering a pivotal stage in the history of abolition in Circassia.⁹⁵

Rules for the Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Kubanskaia Oblast'

⁹⁴ (Russian) *Pravila ob osvobozhdenii zavisimykh sosloviï v Gorskikh plemenakh Kubanskoï oblasti.*

⁹⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3170, l. 4 ob. Also see, "Polozhenie dela osvobozhdeniia zavisimykh sosloviï v gorskikh okrugakh Kubanskoï oblasti," in SSKG, vol. 1, (Tiflis, 1868), 55.

At the heart of Russian legislative efforts to abolish slavery in Kubanskaia oblast' was a document with a long and cumbersome title, which nonetheless left a truly historic impact on the history of slavery in the North Caucasus, and in particular, in Circassia.⁹⁶ The Rules for the Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of Kubanskaia oblast' (hereafter, the Rules), emerged as a result of a series of difficult compromises that strove to reconcile the post-abolitionist expectations of enslaved people and their owners. From the government's perspective, the document symbolized an amicable and just consensus between the slaveholders and the enslaved; it served to showcase the government's success in facilitating the delicate task of emancipation. Upon closer examination, however, the inherent pro-slaveholder biases that percolated on virtually every page of the document become clear. Indeed, if by 1868 some enslaved people were still hopeful that the Russian government would emancipate them immediately and unconditionally, the Rules decisively proved them wrong.

The Rules was not a product of a colonial imposition; its contents did not reflect the spirit of an enlightened European or specifically Russian abolitionist philosophy. On the contrary, similar to the legislative abolitionist overtures that unfolded on local levels elsewhere in the North Caucasus in the 1860s, the imperial government opted to use indigenous *adat* (customary law) as the chief foundation for the emancipation of enslaved people in Circassia. The decision to use *adat* was a strategic one. The government rightfully suspected that using the indigenous body of customary laws to emancipate enslaved people would provoke less slaveholder resistance than using Russian laws. After all, while the Circassian slaveholders may have abhorred the idea of abolition, they still respected the customs of their ancestors. In addition, the use of *adat* offered a semblance of justice rooted in the tradition of the enslaved

⁹⁶ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, ll. 108-127.

people's land. Thus, after being synthesized and altered for brevity and clarity, it was the legal conventions of Circassian *adats* that came to determine the monetary thresholds and temporal terms of redemption that different categories of dependent estates needed to fulfill in order to obtain absolute personal freedom. These and other *adat* stipulations were translated and transcribed in the Russian language, eventually forming the underlying basis for the Rules of emancipation of the dependent estates in Kubanskaia oblast'.

So, what exactly was the Rules and what is the most profitable way of analyzing this document? The Rules was a comprehensive document of codified instructions that established the requisite institutional infrastructure for the abolitionist reform in Circassia. The document was organized into seven chapters. The chapters, in turn, were divided into nearly one hundred articles and annotations containing specific 'start to finish' instructions delineating exactly how to emancipate different categories of enslaved people, leaving little space for ambiguities of interpretation. In specific terms, the Rules stipulated the precise amounts of redemption payments for enslaved *pshitl'*, *og*, and *unaut* and, among other things, established punitive measures of enforcing such payments. Having meticulously examined and translated this document, I believe that rather than studying the contents of the Rules sequentially, i.e. simply moving from the first chapter of the document to the last, it is more productive to first take a broad view of the emancipation rules, beginning with the establishment of the local institutions of abolition, to then focus on specific accounts detailing who was required to purchase their freedom, how much their freedom cost, and what the means of paying redemption debts were.

Chapter one, article one of the Rules heralded the abolition of all forms of enslavement in Kubanskaia oblast'.⁹⁷ However, freedom came at a cost. The long-awaited declaration of universal emancipation was followed by an important caveat: upon gaining personal freedom, emancipated people acquired an ambiguous legal status of 'temporary obligation' (*vremennaia obiazannost'*). In practical terms, this transition from the state of unfreedom to semi-freedom meant that temporarily obligated people were personally free and, therefore, could not be bought, sold, gifted, or used as collateral by their former owners. But, they were still "obligated to perform services and work for the benefit of their former owners in accordance with the existing customs and for the agreed upon duration of time" until the value of each emancipated person, as determined by the Rules, was fully recompensed to the former slaveholders.⁹⁸ In short, the abolition rendered former slaves technically free, but they were still bound to the will of their former owners by the burden of the redemption debt.

Not all was bad news though. The Rules declared the immediate and unconditional emancipation of all enslaved children younger than seven years old. In addition, male and female *pshitl'* aged fifty-five and older, male and female *unaut* aged fifty and older, and enslaved female *og* were granted unconditional freedom. Lastly, enslaved persons who suffered from severe mental illnesses (*'umolishënnye'*), physical disabilities (*'kaleki'*), or who were otherwise unable to work were also exempt from the requirement to purchase their own freedom.⁹⁹ This is, evidently, where the abolitionist generosity of the imperial government

⁹⁷ Ibid., l. 108.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 108-108 ob., 112.

reached its limit. All other categories of the dependent estate in Circassia were legally liable to purchase their own freedom. This important transaction required a practical and unobtrusive institutional infrastructure capable of supervising the project of abolition with the maximum amount of support from the slaveholders and the enslaved.

To facilitate the process of abolition, chapter seven of the Rules sanctioned the creation of the office of peace mediator (*mirovoi posrednik*), which represented the state's closest point of institutional involvement in the quotidian matters of the abolitionist reform.¹⁰⁰ The chief purpose of the office of peace mediator was to legally “affirm the terms of emancipation agreements and mediate disputes, misunderstanding, and complaints that could emerge between the emancipated people and their owners” in the course of the reform.¹⁰¹ Therein lies the key to understanding the Russian abolitionist enterprise in Circassia and elsewhere in the North Caucasus. The tsarist administration opted to take a back seat; it assumed the purported role of an impartial facilitator of abolition, thereby shifting the onus of responsibility for negotiating the precise terms of emancipation on enslaved people and their owners.

The creation of the office of peace mediator was yet another attempt to secure the cooperation of the native community in the difficult task of emancipation, thus enabling their direct participation in this process. The Rules dictated that peace mediators were to be “selected and affirmed by the Head of the oblast’.”¹⁰² Importantly, they did not work alone. Every peace mediator carried out their duties in tandem with two deputies. The first deputy represented the interests of slaveholders. The second deputy advocated for the interests of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., ll. 125-127.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., l. 125.

¹⁰² Ibid., l. 125 ob.

enslaved people.¹⁰³ According to the Rules, the two deputies had to be popularly elected from within their social estate and must receive affirmation from the Head of Kubanskaia oblast'. The deputies played a significant role in the abolition by lending their expertise in the knowledge of *adat* and persuading those more stubborn parties to reach a mutually acceptable compromise over the terms of emancipation. The deliberate inclusion of Circassian deputies in the work of the office of peace mediator likely bolstered the office's credibility in the eyes of the slaveholders and enslaved people. But the Rules did not stop there.

Article four explicitly sanctioned the use of the informal indigenous institution for conflict resolutions—*المصالحة* (*musalaha*)—in emancipation processes¹⁰⁴. Translated from the Arabic language as 'reconciliation', *musalaha* was a well-established indigenous practice for resolving interpersonal or communal disputes and finding an amicable settlement through the intervention of trusted mediator(s). The Rules encouraged the use of *musalaha* in instances when the state-appointed peace mediator and their deputies were unable to broker a compromise and conciliate a dispute between a slaveholder and their slaves. The government's willingness to embrace the indigenous practices of conflict resolution had rendered the abolitionist reform more tolerable to the social and political sensibilities of Circassian slaveholders. The spirit of legal pluralism, which undergirded the abolition of slavery in the Caucasus, permitted both the slaveholders and enslaved people to meet the sweeping (and for some, unwelcome) challenges of emancipation on terms that aligned with the customs of their respective communities.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ In the archival documents, the Arabic word *المصالحة* appears in the Russian manner of spelling and pronunciation as *маслагат*.

Once the terms of emancipation were voluntarily negotiated and any outstanding disagreements between slaveholders and enslaved people were settled, it was time to put pen to paper and formally draft an emancipation agreement (*vykupnaia sd"elka*) in ink, thus rendering it permanent. The switch from words to paper marked yet another important abolitionist milestone. Chapter five of the Rules stipulated the procedure for drafting and officially certifying emancipation agreements.¹⁰⁵ The drafting of such agreements was a public affair. Given the prevalence of illiteracy in the region, the actual act of recording the terms of emancipation on paper occurred in the presence of a peace mediator and their two deputies, the slaveholders, the enslaved people, and, finally, three additional trustworthy witnesses.¹⁰⁶ The emancipation agreements, according to the Rules, could be drafted on “ordinary” paper and had to include the following information written with “complete clarity”:

- names and ages of an entire enslaved family or individuals;
- an account of all valuable property that a slaveowner and enslaved people would retain in their respective possession following the emancipation;
- the total sum of the redemption debt that each individual enslaved person owed to their owner;
- as well as specific amounts of regularly scheduled payments that each family or individual person would pay to their owners in the months and years after emancipation.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., ll. 122-123. It was not uncommon for an enslaved person, usually *pshitl'* (sharecropping slave) to own slaves of their own. Therefore, when discussing the guidelines for drafting of emancipation agreements, it is important to mention that the Rules provided a special provision, which prohibited the owners of *pshitl'* from interfering with negotiation and/or drafting of an emancipation agreements between the said *pshitl'* and belonging to them slaves. For the specific language of the provision, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 122 ob.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., l. 122.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., l. 122 ob.

After all the required information was recorded, a peace mediator would officially certify the document with the state seal and give the single original copy of the document to the elder of an enslaved family or enslaved individual. Importantly, the contents of each emancipation agreement were copied into a special registry book that was kept in the office of the peace mediator. The Rules required the registration of each redemption payment in both the original copy of the emancipation agreement as well as the peace mediator's registry book. Once a redemption payment was recorded on paper, neither the slaveholders nor the enslaved people could dispute the transaction. The ink contours of the state seal on emancipation agreements, stamped with presumed abolitionist zeal in the office of the peace mediator, marked the transition of enslaved people from the personal status of permanent personal dependency to the new personal status of temporary personal obligation.

Having established the institutional framework that facilitated the abolition of slavery in Circassia on the local level, the Rules then addressed the next important step of emancipation—how to pay off the redemption debt itself. In essence, the Rules gave the temporarily obligated people two options. The first option required either a one-time payment or installments of regularly scheduled payments in hard cash. The second option permitted the use of physical labor in lieu of money. Both options, however, required the owner's consent. Chapter one, article two of the Rules left the choice between the two options at the discretion of a mutual (*oboiudnyi*) agreement between an owner and their temporarily obligated people. If such an agreement could not be reached, the state appointed peace mediator and their deputies were expected to settle the dispute in strict accordance with the Rules. If paying off the redemption debt with cash seemed like a straightforward affair, the use of physical labor as the means for the fulfillment of the emancipation agreement terms presented several

logistical challenges. The first challenge was that the vast majority of enslaved people simply did not have cash to purchase their freedom. It is true that some *pshitl'* (sharecropping slaves) could sell whatever little property and cattle they possessed to try to raise the funds required to pay off the redemption debt. Still others could try to borrow money or even resort to begging alms. In general, however, the absence of cash was the norm, and the performance of physical labor became the predominant means for fulfilling the terms of emancipation. As a result, the next challenge stemmed from attempts to convert the inherent subjectivities of physical labor into objective monetary values, made all the more complicated by the different categories of enslaved people that demanded different considerations. The Rules responded to this challenge by offering a tiered system of emancipation that established temporal limits of mandatory service and determined the value of enslaved people's labor using such variables as gender, age, and physical health. What this meant for different categories of the dependent estate in Circassia was the following:

First, several articles in chapter one of the Rules specified a maximum number of years that temporarily obligated people were required to work to fulfill the terms of their emancipation. For all categories of enslaved people, the maximum term for paying off a redemption debt in cash was set at six years, beginning from the day of their emancipation.¹⁰⁸ *Pshitl'* was not permitted to work for more than five years, while the maximum term of obligatory service for *unaut* was set at four years.¹⁰⁹ In addition—and with their owners' permission—*pshitl'* and *og* (the customary slaves) had the option of suspending their

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., ll. 108 ob.-109.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., l. 108 ob.

obligatory labor to find work outside of their owner's property, thus paying off their redemption debt with installments earned from wage labor. *Unaut* (non-customary slaves), on the other hand, were required to remain in their owner's service for one year for female *unaut* and two years for male *unaut*.¹¹⁰

Second, after stipulating the maximum number of years that formerly enslaved people were allowed to remain in the service of their former owners, chapter two of the Rules provided even more specific regulations for the emancipation of the so-called customary slaves (*obriadnye kholopy*): *pshitl'* and *og*. The chapter's opening article emphasized that temporarily-obligated people were required to perform the same work and services for their owners set by the tradition of the land for the duration of their agreed-upon, temporarily-obligated service.¹¹¹ The several articles following outlined arguably the most important stage in realizing the emancipation of enslaved people—setting the price of freedom. The first matter to be settled was the ethically-vexing question of determining the value of each individual *pshitl'* and *og*. If the authors of the Rules had any moral qualms about assigning a monetary value to human beings, the archival documents show no signs of such reservations. At the end of the day, market trumped morality. The Rules offered a tiered scale for determining the monetary value of enslaved people. The scale used such variables as an

¹¹⁰ In the spirit of fairness and balance, it is important to mention the few obligations that the Rules imposed on the owners who supervised temporarily-obligated people as their charges. The Rules required the owners "to continue providing them with food," give one day off "beyond Fridays," and release 'temporarily-obligated people' from labor duties for "at least two weeks during the harvest season." The full description of these stipulations could be found in in the Rules chapter two, articles one and two, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 110.

¹¹¹ The Rules outlined several exemptions from obligatory labor to account for rare but cataclysmic events such as wildfires, floods, pandemics, etc.

enslaved person's age¹¹² and gender in combination with the average market value of customary slaves in Circassia during the mid-nineteenth century. This somewhat-complicated scale of redemption costs is best represented with a table, which lists an age of a physically healthy male or female *pshitl'* or *og* and the cost of redemption corresponding to that age and gender:

The Cost of Redemption Assigned for a Male <i>Pshitl'</i> and <i>Og</i>¹¹³	
Age (years-old)	Redemption Cost (silver Rubles)
7	20
8	25
9	30
10	35
11	40
12	45
13	55
14	65
15	75
16	90
17	105

¹¹² The Rules stipulated that age of an enslaved person should be determined using the earliest available census data (*narodnaia perepis*).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, ll. 110 ob.-111.

18	120
19	135
20 - 40	150
41	145
42	140
43	135
44	130
45	125
46	115
47	105
48	95
49	85
50	75
51	60
52	45
53	30
54	15

The female *pshitl'* and *og* had a different scale of redemption payments. The scale considered not only the gender and health of enslaved women, but also their marital status. The Rules dictated that upon emancipation, all married women up to the age of thirty-five belonging to the estate of customary slaves were required to pay their owners a flat redemption

sum in the amount of one hundred silver rubles. The redemption costs for women over thirty-five-years-old declined precipitously in relationship to a woman's age. The following table illustrates this redemption payment scale:

The Cost of Redemption Assigned for a Married Female <i>Pshitl'</i> and <i>Og</i> ¹¹⁴	
Age (years-old)	Redemption Cost (silver Rubles)
36	95
37	90
38	85
39	80
40	75
41	65
42	50
43	35
44	15

Finally, the Rules established the following scale for redemption payments for unmarried female *pshitl'* and *og*:

The Cost of Redemption Assigned for an Unmarried Female
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¹¹⁴ Ibid., ll. 111-111 ob.

<i>Pshitl'</i> and <i>Og</i> ¹¹⁵	
Age (years-old)	Redemption Cost (silver Rubles)
7	20
8	30
9	40
10	55
11	70
12	85
13	100
14	115
15	130
16-29	150
30-35	100

According to the Rules unmarried women over the age of thirty-five-years-old were required to follow the scale for redemption payments created for married *pshitl'* and *og* women. An important caveat to the Rules permitted unmarried enslaved women to use all or part of their *kalym* (the bride price) to pay off their redemption debt when getting married.¹¹⁶

Having established the monetary scale of redemption costs for *pshitl'* and *og* using such variables as age, gender, health, and marital status, the next important question was how to

¹¹⁵ Ibid., ll. 111 ob.-112.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., l. 113.

translate the physical labor and services of a temporarily-obligated man, woman, or child belonging to these dependent estates into quantifiable monetary values. The Rules provided an answer to this question by using variables like gender and physical ability. Specifically, the Rules set the maximum value for a year's worth of labor or services performed by a healthy adult male at sixty silver rubles, and the minimum value at thirty silver rubles. The maximum value for a year's worth of labor performed by a healthy adult female was set at forty silver rubles, with a minimum value of twenty silver rubles.¹¹⁷ It was up to the former slaveholder and their temporarily-obligated people to negotiate the monetary value of the work needed to pay off the redemption debt. The redemption payments themselves were scheduled to be paid in monthly installments, which were also the subject of mutual negotiation. Specific payment dates were to be set by the Head of each *okrug* in Kubanskaia oblast' in "accordance with local conditions and the means of earning."¹¹⁸ The legal responsibility for the timely payments of redemption installments assigned to a temporarily-obligated family rested on the shoulders of the head or elder (*glava semeštva*) of said family.¹¹⁹

The Rules also permitted temporarily-obligated *unaut* and *og* to pay off their redemption debt with "cattle, grain, other agricultural produce, as well as goods that have intrinsic value and currency in the everyday life of mountaineers."¹²⁰ Disputes over what object or good constituted a legitimate form of redemption payment were to be settled by a peace mediator.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 110 ob.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* l. 114.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 115.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 114 ob.

Importantly, the value of the goods that temporarily-obligated people surrendered to their former owners was to be determined by a group of three appraisers elected by the communal assembly of each village. The appraisal “verdicts” were final and could only be disputed by the office of the peace mediator in instances of clearly and blatantly unfair appraisal outcomes.¹²¹

Finally, the chapter addressed the painful and financially devastating topic of dividing the property that belonged to enslaved *pshitl'* at the time of their emancipation. In general, the Rules dictated that everything of intrinsic value in the possession of *pshitl'* was to be divided equally between them and their former owners.¹²² However, the Rules did provide several exemptions. For instance, objects that had no “practical benefit for the owners,” farmstead structures and the land on which these structures stood, tools, crockery, clothing, domestic poultry, and beehives¹²³ that were in the possession of enslaved people at the time of their emancipation were explicitly exempted from the requirement to be divided in half. All other property was fair game. The division of the property itself occurred at the time of negotiating, signing, and officially certifying the agreement, which outlined the terms of emancipation. Until the agreement was signed, enslaved people were legally barred from selling, trading, or gifting their property without their owners' consent.

¹²¹ Ibid., l. 115.

¹²² Ibid., l. 115 ob.

¹²³ Rather than dividing the beehives themselves, the Rules required division of the honey stored in these beehives.

Next, chapter three of the Rules outlined the steps to be taken for the emancipation of the most downtrodden category of the dependent estate in Circassia, the so-called non-customary slaves—*unaut*. Incidentally, the emancipation regulations for *unaut* were as oppressive as they were predatory. However, before discussing the stark realities of *unaut* emancipation in greater details, it is, perhaps, important to highlight a few ostensibly magnanimous aspects of *unaut* emancipation. Specifically, the Russian government granted unconditional and immediate emancipation to enslaved *unaut* of both genders aged forty-five-years-old and older. This gesture of goodwill, however, was hardly an example of the humanistic impulse of the tsarist administration. Rather, it reflected the depressing, cold, hard facts of the slave-trading economy that ascribed low monetary values to middle-aged enslaved people as a result of the expected decline in their physical productivity and presumed post-sexuality.¹²⁴ To further challenge the seeming magnanimity of the imperial government, I must add that the same article declaring the unconditional emancipation of enslaved *unauty* also permitted slaveholders to keep them for up to one year of obligatory labor to compensate for the eventual moment in which unconditional emancipation would leave a slaveholder without a single *unaut* in their possession.¹²⁵ The purpose of this anti-abolitionist exception to the rule was to mitigate the economic impact of abolition on the financial well-being and labor needs of slaveholders. To give some credit to the authors of the Rules of emancipation, the extra year of obligatory labor of otherwise-emancipated people came with strings attached: it required

¹²⁴ For a discussion on the relationship between female enslavement and the concept of post-sexuality in the context of the Ottoman royal harem, see Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ix, 20-23, 95, 281.

¹²⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 117 ob.-118.

the owner to continue providing their temporarily-obligated servants with “clothing and food.”¹²⁶ This is where the good news ended for enslaved *unauty*.

Addressing the plight of *unauty*, the Rules mandated that “whether *unauty* agreed to pay off their redemption debt through labor or installments of cash earned from wage labor,” they were required to remain temporarily present at their owners’ side for a stipulated period of time. Male *unauty* between the ages of seven and forty-three years old were required to remain in their former owners’ mandatory service for two years, and those aged between forty-four and forty-five years old for one year.¹²⁷ Female *unaut* between the ages of seven and forty-four years old were required to remain in the physical presence and mandatory service of their owners for a period of one year.¹²⁸ After the completion of one or two years of mandatory service, *unauty* acquired the status of a temporarily-obligated person who had the option of either remaining in the service of their former master for a period of no more than four years, or obtaining the owner’s consent to seek wage labor outside of the community in which they lived.¹²⁹

Second came the eyebrow-raising question of determining the cost of redemption of each enslaved *unaut*. Unlike the guidelines that governed the emancipation process of *pshilt’* and *og*, the Rules did not consider gender as a factor that should influence the price of *unaut*’s redemption. Thus, age and health became the primary variables that determined the cost of

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 118.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 117 ob.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 118 ob.

unaut's freedom, and the cost of emancipation for *unaut* was considerably higher than other categories of dependent estates in Circassia. The higher monetary value that was ascribed to enslaved *unauty* was a tragic reflection of the enslaved people's legal status as chattel, which permitted their owners to have a form of control over their bodies and lives that was unrestricted by law or custom. The following table illustrates the redemption costs for *unaut* of different ages and good physical health:

The Cost of Redemption Assigned for <i>Unaut</i>¹³⁰	
Age (years-old)	Redemption Cost (silver Rubles)
7	20
8	30
9	40
10	55
11	70
12	85
13	100
14	115
15	135
16	155
17	175
18-35	200

¹³⁰ Ibid., ll. 118 ob. - 119.

36	185
37	170
38	155
39	140
40	120
41	100
42	75
43	50
44	25

In order to monetize the value of *unaut's* annual labor and to create a schedule of redemption payments, the Rules used the same provisions that had been developed for the emancipation of *pshil'* and *og*, with one important exception. While the maximum duration of the 'temporary-mandatory' service of *pshil'* and *og* was set at five years, the temporarily-obligated female and male *unauty* were required to fulfill the terms of their emancipation contracts and pay off their redemption debts in full within six years.¹³¹ The longer term of redemption payment reflected the government's presumption that the abject poverty expected of emancipated *unauty* would make timely payments of redemption debts especially difficult.

Chapter four of the Rules outlined the guidelines for the emancipation of young children, orphans, seniors, and chronically-ill enslaved people of all categories of dependency.¹³² When

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, l. 119.

¹³² *Ibid.*, ll. 119 ob. – 122.

it came to *pshil'*, *og*, and *unaut* children seven years old and older, the Rules invested the children's parents with the authority to decide the best means of paying off redemption debt costs. The Rules also dictated that under no circumstances could the children be separated from their parents against their will.¹³³ This provision provided parents with young or adolescent children a certain degree of protection against the rapacious designs of former slaveowners, who could have used children as hostages to manipulate their former slaves and extract more labor, resources, and money than was stipulated in the Rules.

The rules deemed that orphans born to parents of a dependent estate were to become the charges of the village commune in which they resided until the age of fourteen. The person (or persons) who agreed to accept an orphan as their charge was required to pay the cost of their redemption to the orphans' owner. The Rules also allowed orphans to remain in the charge of their former owner, and upon reaching the age of ten, they would perform obligatory labor for a period of four years, thereupon achieving unencumbered personal freedom. Enslaved orphans older than fourteen years old were to become the charges of their community, and were placed in the custody of either their former owner or of an "outsider" (*postorennee litso*) to perform wage labor for a period of time not exceeding four years.¹³⁴ According to the Rules, it was the village commune that bore the responsibility of ensuring

¹³³ Somewhat strange exception to this rule was allowed for mothers who having fulfilled the terms of temporary obligation and decided to leave the household of their former owners to leave their young sons (and only sons) with the former slaveowner. If the former owner agreed to take the boy in, the said boy was required to perform labor for the benefit of the owner for the period lasting two years and then switch to the path of redemptive payments. For the specific language of this exception see, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 120.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 121.

that these adolescent orphans fulfilled the terms of their emancipation within the timeframe stipulated by the Rules . In addition, village communes were charged with the task of finding guardians of “trustworthy and honest character” for orphans younger than seven years old within three months of their formal emancipation.¹³⁵ Such guardians could live in the same rural community or outside of it and orphans were to live with their guardians until they reached the age of fourteen.

The final category of formerly enslaved people in Circassia who were vulnerable to abuse and destitution were single (*odinokie*) *pshitl'* seniors aged fifty-five and older, as well as *unauty* aged fifty-years-old and older. Unfortunately, the archives did not reveal the number of formerly enslaved people of advanced age who did not have any family. Nevertheless, the presence of specific instructions governing their emancipation suggests that this number was not insignificant. The Rules stipulated that upon emancipation of elderly enslaved people, their owners were required to provide them with “clothing and shoes.”¹³⁶ In addition, the emancipated seniors had three months to find an occupation capable of providing them with basic sustenance (*propitanie*), and during those three months, the former slaveowner was responsible for providing them with food and shelter. If elderly emancipated people were unable to find employment after three months, the Rules required their village commune to assume the full responsibility of their welfare. The same requirement obliged the village commune to provide food and shelter for those emancipated people who could not find work due to chronic illness or who had no means of supporting themselves on account of having

¹³⁵ Ibid., l. 120.

¹³⁶ Ibid., l. 121.

no family.¹³⁷ The Rules also designated each village's *mulla* and *effendi* as the persons responsible for ensuring that all necessary measures were taken to ensure the welfare of every emancipated single senior and/or chronically-ill person. In order to fund the regular purchase of basic food, clothing, and shelter for the emancipated seniors and chronically-ill people, the Rules made a specific reference to the use of *zakat*—an institutionalized form of almsgiving, which constitutes an important pillar of the Muslim faith and a religious duty of every able Muslim.¹³⁸ Thus, this Islamic practice was seamlessly incorporated into the abolitionist undertaking in Circassia.

Finally, the Rules addressed the question of inadvertent or willful defaults on timely redemption payments.¹³⁹ As I mentioned earlier in this section, when negotiating the terms of the emancipation contract, a slaveholder and their enslaved people had essentially two options to settle the redemption debt. The first and the most common option was labor. Depending on the category of dependency, this option allowed a temporarily-obligated person to perform the same labor duties as before emancipation for a number of years that was specified in the emancipation contract. Of course, from the owners' point of view, using labor as a means of paying off the redemption debt was not an ideal option. Naturally, the anticipation of freedom would make the temporarily-obligated people unmotivated to perform what was the same slave labor and more likely to shirk their labor obligations altogether. Still, labor offered the former slaveholders a familiar transactional exchange, as well as a sense of predictability and

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 121 ob.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 122.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 123-125.

control over the emancipation. The second option allowed emancipated people to pay off their redemption debt with cash. The money could be deposited either as a one-time payment (which was very rare) or through monthly installments payable within a timeframe stipulated in the emancipation contract that could not exceed the limits set by the Rules. The convenience and versatility of cash certainly had their appeal for the owners. However, the option of cash payments also increased the possibility of nonpayment and default.

The Rules anticipated the possibility of nonpayment. As such, chapter six outlined a range of punitive measures for any acts of financial delinquency on the side of temporarily-obligated persons. The opening article of the chapter explicitly placed the responsibility of enforcing timely redemption debt payments on the Heads of each *okrug* in Kubanskaia oblast', the peace mediators, and the village elders (*aul'nyiĭ starshina*). Working in tandem, these three state-appointed and popularly-elected individuals were legally allowed to use the administrative and penal resources of state and local communities to ensure that the redemption debts of formerly enslaved people were paid to the full satisfaction of former slaveholders.

To begin with, the Rules imposed an automatic ½ percent penalty for any failure to submit monthly redemption payments; the penalty would compound each month until the redemption arrears were cleared.¹⁴⁰ To trigger the punitive mechanisms of the emancipation reform, a former slaveowner had to submit a formal verbal grievance to a village communal court.¹⁴¹ The system of military-civil administration (which regulated the lives of the Adyghe people

¹⁴⁰ The penalty, according to the Rules, could be waived by a peace mediator when such verifiable events like “sudden illness, massive death of cattle herds, failed harvest, and/or natural fires,” prevented an emancipated person from making timely redemption payments. See, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 124.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, l. 124 ob.

in Kubanskaia oblast' until 1871) installed indigenous institutions of justice. These institutions were embodied in shari'a courts, which used Islamic juridical norms, and communal courts, which used *adat* to issue verdicts. The nonpayment of redemption debts fell under the jurisdiction of communal courts. According to the Rules, a communal court would hold a formal hearing to investigate the causes that prevented an emancipated person or family from making the scheduled redemption payment on time. If the court deemed these causes legitimate,¹⁴² then it could grant a month-long stay of payments to help the plaintiff recover from adversity and resume redemption payments in good faith. If, however, the court judged the payment delinquency as preventable, or worse, willful, then it was obligated to sanction punitive action to ensure that the owner would receive their money. The Rules set forth three scenarios of punishment. First, the court could attach "a guardian" (*opekun*) to a "profligate" defaulter. The guardian would have the authority to supervise "all manners of [the profligate defaulter's] spending" and to give the final approval over the sale of any property belonging to said emancipated person.¹⁴³ Second, the Rules authorized the court to hire out the "incorrigible defaulter or a member of their family not younger than fourteen-years-old" for work. The income earned from wage labor would have to be requisitioned to pay off the redemption arrears.¹⁴⁴ The third and perhaps most radical scenario allowed village courts to sell off any "movable property not essential to a household" belonging to the defaulter without

¹⁴² The legitimate causes included such adversities as a sudden illness, severe physical injury, theft or destruction of personal property or agricultural equipment, etc.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

their consent.¹⁴⁵ Such sales required the supervision and consent of the peace mediator.¹⁴⁶ Evidently, the imperial government's commitment to employ the indigenous norms of justice in facilitating the abolition of slavery in Circassia made the village commune an integral part of policing and enforcing the spirit and letter of emancipation contracts.

By all accounts, the Rules for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of Kubanskaia oblast' was a victory for slaveholders. Drafted with direct input from slaveholders themselves and premised on the norms of *adat*, the Rules unabashedly protected the financial interests of slave-owners and secured their social prerogatives in the post-emancipation social landscape of Circassia. Yet, despite the broad concessions granted to the Circassian slaveholders by the imperial government, some of them rejected Russian abolition with vehemence. Steadfast in their resolve to keep their slaves, these slaveowners were prepared to fight and die for the cause of slavery.

The Khodz' Insurrection of 1868

Bitter memories of the Caucasus War buttressed the growing resentment against the Russian abolitionist designs in many parts of Circassia. When the emancipation of the enslaved communities seemed all but inevitable, words and feelings turned into action. The most violent incident of indigenous resistance to the abolition in Circassia occurred in April 1868.¹⁴⁷ The incident became known in Russian historiography as the Khodz' Insurrection

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 315, ll. 179-184 ob. See also, A. Mamontova, "Vosstanie Zakubanskikh Kabardintsev v 1868 godu," *Uchënye Zapiski Kabardinskogo Nauchno-issledovatel'skogo Instituta* (Nal'chik, 1947), 49-67.

(*Ходзинский Бунт*), named so after the Khodz' (*Ходзь*) river where a rebellious enclave of the Kabardinian *khadzhret*¹⁴⁸ (*хаджрет*) community staged an anti-abolitionist rebellion. The chief sites of the violent clash were several hamlets and villages located in the outskirts of two densely populated *auls*: Khodz' and Benoko in the Labinskiĭ okrug of Kubanskaia oblast'. The okrug had the highest concentration of Adyghe nobility, whose privileged social status and wealth were tied to the institution of slavery. Specifically, in 1868, forty percent of all Adyghe nobles lived in Labinskiĭ okrug.¹⁴⁹ Each slaveholder in the okrug owned an average of ten enslaved people.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, it is clear that the outcomes of abolition would have been particularly impactful for the indigenous nobility in this region of Circassia.

The first voices denouncing abolition that were registered in Khodz' emerged in 1867. The nobles protested the government's plans to emancipate enslaved communities in the region and repeatedly threatened to leave Circassia for the Ottoman Empire, taking their slaves with them. The government responded with the same assurances that it had issued to other discontent slaveholders in Circassia, reiterating its promises to facilitate the abolition of slavery without imposing undue financial hardships on the slaveowners. These assurances

¹⁴⁸ *Khadzhret* (Russian *хаджрет*) – when translated from the Adyghe language the word means an emigrant. The word derives its etymological origins from the word *muhajir* – a Muslim refugee. This term was frequently used in the tsarist bureaucratic parlance to identify communities of the so-called escaped Kabardians (*беглые Кабардинцы*) or free Kabardians (*вольные Кабардинцы*) who left Kabarda in the course of the Russian conquest and colonization of the region in the second half of the eighteenth century and settled along the river Laba in Circassia well outside of the Russian imperial control. See, Ibragim Kalmykov, *Cherkesy: Istoriko-Ėtnograficheskiĭ Oчерk* (Cherkessk, 1974), 27-29.

¹⁴⁹ Bushuev, 402.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

failed to satisfy the slaveholders from Khodz', and the anti-abolitionist antagonisms finally came to a boiling point on 16 April 1868.¹⁵¹

Reports of the brewing insurrection prompted the Head of Kubanskaia oblast', Count Sumarokov-El'ston, to dispatch his senior aide, Colonel Pavel Dukmasov, to Khodz' to investigate the situation on the ground. After his arrival to the *aul*, Dukmasov reported very alarming developments. "The youths," lamented Dukmasov, "ha[d] completely forsaken the authority of the elders" in the villages and had urged others to raise arms and demand the government's permission to leave for Turkey "for the sake of their religion."¹⁵² To demonstrate their resolve to leave Circassia, the rebels prohibited their slaves and peasants from "sowing bread" and cultivating land, a strategy that could artificially cause famine and force the government's hand in allowing resettlement. Equally alarming were Dukmasov's reports that the rebels had defiantly flouted the government's "strict ban" on carrying weapons in public.

On April 20, Dukmasov managed to arrange a meeting with the residents of the rebellious villages, and a crowd of nearly 500 people gathered on the banks of the river Laba near the Labinsk bridge.¹⁵³ Many people in the crowd carried firearms and were barred from crossing the bridge to attend the meeting. However, a group of approximately fifty unarmed elders were permitted to cross over and talk with Dukmasov. This meeting revealed instructive information, which favored the Russian efforts to put down insurrection as soon as possible. The testimonies of the group of elders suggested that the rebellion had splintered into two

¹⁵¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 315, ll. 179 ob.

¹⁵² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 315, ll. 180.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, l. 181.

opposing camps. The first camp, which representing the will of the majority, wanted to avoid a violent confrontation with the Russian army and preferred restoring order to the villages. The second camp, however, refused to acquiesce to Russian orders demanding them to disarm and end the rebellion, and was prepared to fight to the bitter end if it became necessary.¹⁵⁴

The negotiations failed to produce a peaceful resolution. In the days that followed, the Russian authorities mobilized thousands of soldiers, militia, Cossacks, calvary and artillery regiments. By 23 April, the troops surrounded the villages, cutting off escape routes to the mountains.¹⁵⁵ The display of the overwhelming military force prompted surrender of approximately 400 rebels. The rebels were disarmed and later taken to Sumarokov-El'ston in the nearby *stanitsa*¹⁵⁶ Kostromskaia, where they reportedly appealed for clemency and asked for the government's forgiveness.¹⁵⁷ On April 25, Sumarokov-El'ston issued a final ultimatum to the rebels remaining in the *auls*, calling on them to surrender within twenty-four hours or to be prepared to confront the Russian army. The ultimatum prompted the surrender of an additional 150 people. According to archival records, on the morning of April 26, a total of fifty-six rebels remained barricaded in a small hamlet of Dokmokovskiĭ. When a group of Russian officers led by the Head of Labinskiĭ okrug approached the hamlet demanding immediate surrender, they were met with a volley of bullets that killed a horse and wounded one of the soldiers. Then, orders were issued to storm the hamlet. The Russian onslaught killed all fifty-six rebels. In contrast, two Russian soldiers were severely wounded in the aftermath

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., I. 181 ob.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., II. 182-183.

¹⁵⁶ *Stanitsa* (Russian *Станица*) – a village or settlement located inside of a Cossack Host.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

of the attack.¹⁵⁸ Those who surrendered did not escape punishment. The surviving leaders of the rebellion were arrested and later exiled from the region.

The Khodz' insurrection marked the final violent flare of organized indigenous resistance to Russian abolitionism in Circassia. While the government's plan to emancipate enslaved people in Circassia was the immediate cause of the violence, the insurrection must be understood in the context of a long history of indigenous resistance to Russian conquest and its colonization of the northwestern Caucasus. In addition, the insurrection serves as an instructive gauge of the slaveholders' mood regarding the abolition of slavery. Although they reflected a minority opinion, a significant faction of the slaveholders in Circassia considered the right to own slaves as critical to their social identity and way of life. These slaveholders were willing to leave their native land and go into self-imposed exile in the Ottoman Empire or die for the cause of slavery.

Conclusion

If anyone still harbored hopes that the imperial government might indefinitely shelve plans to abolish slavery in Circassia, the decisive and violent quelling of the Khodz' insurrection dispelled any doubts about the imminence of emancipation. The crushing of the rebellion in April 1868 added strong momentum to the peasant reform and rendered the abolition irreversible. For in the aftermath of the violence, the government reckoned, any sign of wavering on the question of slavery would certainly be interpreted as weakness.

The archives suggest that the institution of slavery in Kubanskaia oblast' was formally abolished within a time span of approximately nine months. The abolition unfolded in two

¹⁵⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 315, l. 184.

phases. The first phase officially began on 1 May 1868.¹⁵⁹ Following the policy pattern—which was put into practice a few years earlier in other parts of the North Caucasus—the government invited the slaveowners to negotiate and enter into “voluntary” emancipation agreements with their slaves on mutually agreeable terms. Despite the government’s admonitions to consult the official Rules for emancipation when drafting an emancipation contract, the slaveholders had a considerable degree of latitude in negotiating favorable terms for emancipation, putting the enslaved people at a large disadvantage. Because the government removed itself from the negotiation table, the slaveholders had few obstacles stopping them from extracting the largest possible redemption payment from their former slaves. It is true that the enslaved people had a small level of protection against the predatory negotiation tactics of their owners. The office of the peace mediator was created as a check against the possible abuses of slaveholders during negotiations. However, the extent to which the state-appointed peace mediators were willing to go to protect the rights of the enslaved people remains unknown. In addition, the undisputable record of government efforts to shield slaveholders from the financial impact of abolition suggests that the peace mediators were likely to turn a blind eye to unfair terms of emancipation agreements.

The first phase of the abolitionist campaign moved at a slow pace but delivered encouraging results. Within several months of abolition in Urupskii okrug, virtually all

¹⁵⁹ It is important to note that the Head of Kubanskaia oblast, Count Felix Sumarokov-El’ston, always regarded the 1 May date as a starting point for abolition of slavery in Kubanskaia oblast’ as inconvenient because it interfered with the agricultural cycle of work in the region and, therefore, it would have likely to distract both the slaveholders and their enslaved people from the task of emancipation. For details, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 103. Also, see Alekseĭ Narochnitskiĭ, *Istoriia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza, konets XVIII v. – 1917 god* (Moskva: Nauka, 1988), 276.

enslaved people entered into voluntary emancipation contracts with their owners.¹⁶⁰ By 1 July 1868, approximately 1,500 enslaved people were emancipated in Èl’bruskiï okrug and an additional nine hundred signed an emancipation contract in Zelenchukskiï okrug.¹⁶¹ However, the pace of emancipation was much slower in Labinskiï okrug, where negligible twenty-one emancipation contracts were signed by early July of the same year. Similarly, in Psekupskiï okrug, the government registered approximately 130 agreements.¹⁶² This dynamic began to change in late summer of 1868. The significant spike in the rate of emancipation was attributed to the shifting agricultural cycle that allowed the slaveholders to begin contemplating emancipation of their slaves after crops were planted and the fields tilled. By late September, the government could boast a significant progress in its mission to abolish slavery in the region. A total of 11,403 enslaved people, or nearly 75 percent of the total enslaved population in Kubanskaia oblast’, were emancipated and acquired the status of temporarily-obligated persons.¹⁶³

The second phase of the abolitionist campaign began on 1 November 1868 and witnessed the formal disintegration of the institution of slavery in Circassia, even eliciting celebratory ceremonies in some villages upon the official announcement of abolition. It mandated the universal emancipation of enslaved people, with strict adherence to the official Rules for emancipation of the dependent estates. In other words, if the slaveholders could use the Rules

¹⁶⁰ “Polozhenie dela osvobozhdeniia zavisimykh sosloviï v gorskikh okrugakh Kubanskoï oblasti,” in SSKG, vol. 1, (Tiflis, 1868), 56.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 647.

as a guide for negotiating an emancipation contract with their enslaved people during the first phase of emancipation, the second phase required the slaveholders to follow every letter of the Rules.¹⁶⁴ The campaign to abolish slavery in Kubanskaia oblast' gradually petered out in the early 1869.¹⁶⁵ The last three months of the emancipation, according to the archives, were quite unremarkable. The slaveholders had largely submitted to the fate of emancipation, and the enslaved people looked to the uncertain future with hope, anticipation better things to come.

¹⁶⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3163, l. 103 ob.

¹⁶⁵ SEA, f. 416, op. 3, d. 287, l. 5.

CHAPTER 6

The 'Strange' Insurrection of 1866 and the Abolition of Slavery in Abkhazia

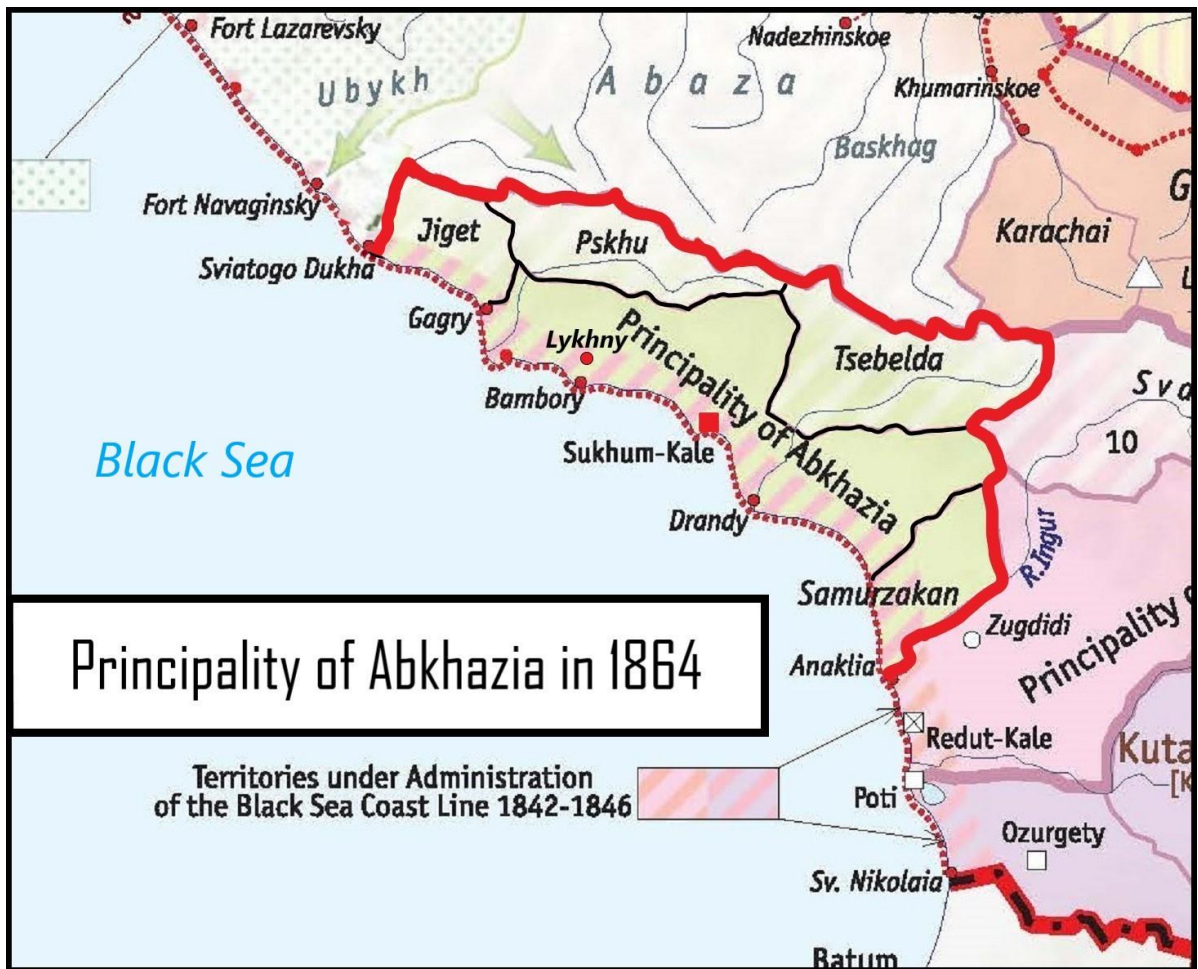


Figure 7. Map of the Principality of Abkhazia on the eve of its abolition in 1864. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 29.

Introduction

The history of the Russian abolitionist campaign in Abkhazia stands out for several reasons. First, Abkhazia, or Sukhumskii otdel, was the last region in the Caucasus where the imperial government had formally abolished the institution of slavery and the slave trade.

Every stage of the abolition was an uphill battle for the tsarist authorities. Indeed, Abkhazia presented the greatest challenge to the Russian abolitionist campaign in the Caucasus. The 1866 Lykhny Rebellion marked the biggest uprising of the indigenous population against Russian anti-slavery policies anywhere in the Caucasus.¹ At its peak, nearly twenty thousand Abkhaz rebels joined forces to halt Russian plans to dismantle the institutions of servitude in the region. The rebellion resulted in the killing of the Russian Governor (*nachal'nik*) of Abkhazia, Colonel Kon'iar, as well as the deaths of dozens of Russian military officers and Cossacks. Only a frantic deployment of Russian troops into Abkhazia stopped the anti-abolitionist violence and ultimately restored Russian authority in the region.

The violent backlash significantly delayed the government's plans to abolish slavery in Abkhazia but did not deter the tsarist authorities from implementing the Peasant Reform. Four years after the Lykhny Rebellion, the imperial government issued a charter (*Polozhenie*) declaring the abolition of all forms of personal dependency and announcing a new land-tenure regime in Sukhumskii otdel. The timing of the abolition meant that Abkhazia was the last place in the Caucasus to formally ban the institution of slavery and the slave trade. The social implications of the abolition were truly momentous. The 1870 charter promised freedom to enslaved or otherwise dependent people in the region. However, the promise of freedom was betrayed. In Abkhazia, as elsewhere in the Caucasus, the Russian government embraced the principle of aristocratic privilege and regarded enslaved people as the legitimate property of their owners. The government's determination to protect the financial welfare of the slave-owners resulted in rather dubious outcomes of the abolitionist reforms.

¹ For a thorough account of the 1866 Lykhny Rebellion see Georgi Dzidzariia, *Vosstanie 1866 Goda v Abkhazii* (Sukhum, 1955). For archival references, a researcher might begin their work in the SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784.

In addition to the violence, the Russian plans to abolish slavery in Abkhazia played a significant role in the tragedy of the Abkhaz *muhajirstvo*. Thousands of Abkhaz families left their ancestral lands under the barrels of Russian guns to be resettled in the Ottoman Empire. Other Abkhaz *muhajirs* left of their own accord, preferring permanent exile in the Ottoman Empire to life under Russian rule. As a result, between January 1866 to December 1867, the native population of Abkhazia declined from 79,190 people to 59,848.² Despite the government's efforts to prevent the Abkhaz slave-owners from taking their slaves to the Ottoman Empire, hundreds of enslaved families were forced to make the dangerous journey across the Black Sea only to face precarious existence in a foreign land.

Finally, the history of slavery, the slave trade, and abolition in Abkhazia is remarkable given the presence of a vibrant, albeit small, community of enslaved Africans. The history of African slavery and the African diaspora in Abkhazia is waiting to be written. Nevertheless, the archives can already tell us the fragmented but compelling story of resilience and emancipation that firmly embeds the narrative of African enslavement in the broader historiography of the Caucasus region.³ One such story documents the emancipation of

² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 107, ll. 48-49. Also see, Dzidzariia, *Makhadzhirstvo i Problemy Istorii Abkhazii XIX Stoletii* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1982), 289. A different population estimate is provided in SSKG, vol. 1, (Tiflis, 1868), 14, which suggests that the indigenous population in the late 1867 Abkhazia stood at 64,933.

³ It must be noted that the contemporary historiography of Abkhazia is uneven and, in many ways, reflects the concerns of the present such as territoriality, sovereignty, ethnic demographics, and Abkhazia's relationship with the neighboring Georgia and Russia. These understandable historiographic trends have rendered other aspects of Abkhazia's history far less explored. With few exceptions, the rich and complicated history of slavery and the slave trade in Abkhazia stands out as a particularly neglected field of the region's history. A good place to begin learning about the course of the so-called Peasant Reform in Abkhazia is Vladimir Avidzba's, *Provedenie v Zhizn' Krest'ianskoï Reformy v Abkhazii* (Sukhum, 1985) and Anatoliï Fadeev's *Russkiï Tsarism i Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Abkhazii* (Sukhum, 1932).

Khanifa, an enslaved “black” woman.⁴ Her story is as brief as it is tantalizing. According to the government’s records, Khanifa lived in the coastal village of Ankhua (Anukhva). Khanifa never had a surname. Her owner, Beslangur Mikamb, manumitted Khanifa unconditionally in late December 1874, nearly four years after the imperial government formally abolished the institution of slavery in Abkhazia.⁵ The manumission was certainly a joyous occasion in Khanifa’s life. However, freedom presented its own challenges. First, Khanifa had no permanent place to live in the village. Second, by the government’s own admission, Khanifa was indigent. The last concern was her age. Khanifa’s precise age remains a mystery, with Russian officials describing her simply as a woman of “advanced age” (*preklonnost’ let*). In the estimation of the tsarist authorities, her advanced age made the prospect of Khanifa’s self-sufficiency all but impossible. Fortunately, Khanifa had a son, a “black” man named Khorshid.⁶ Her son lived in the coastal town of Batumi in Georgia’s Adjara region, which until 1878 remained under Ottoman control. Aside from Khorshid’s identification as being “black” nothing else is known about his personal status. In the light of Khanifa’s destitution and the palpable reluctance of local authorities to assume the burden of providing for her welfare, the Governor of Abkhazia petitioned the Russian authorities in Tiflis to grant Khanifa’s wish to be reunited with her son. To that end, the Governor also requested permission to use state funds to cover the cost of Khanifa’s travel to Batumi. This request received the Viceroy’s approval and Khanifa was allowed a safe passage into the Ottoman-controlled Batumi. Unfortunately, no additional information has yet come to light to trace the

⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 614, ll. 87-87 ob.

⁵ Ibid., l. 87.

⁶ Ibid., l. 87 ob.

fate of Khanifa and her son, a disappointment that could perhaps be rectified through meticulous archival work in Georgia's provincial archives. Nevertheless, the limited information about Khanifa's life from available sources unequivocally confirms the presence of enslaved people of African descent in Abkhazia and opens a new venue for the investigation of transnational slave-trading routes that linked the African continent to the eastern shores of the Black Sea.

Slavery and the slave trade featured a prominent role in the political rapprochement between Russian Tsar Alexander I and Kelesh-Bey Shervashidze (Chachba)⁷, the ruler of the Principality of Abkhazia (1780s-1808), in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In the backdrop of the Russian annexation of the eastern Georgian kingdoms of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801, and the expansion of Russian political influence in Mingrelia and Imereti (western Georgia) in 1803 and 1804 respectively, Kelesh-Bey sought to consolidate his authority in Abkhazia, which at the time was plagued by intractable feudal rivalries. Russia's successful imperial excursions in the South Caucasus presented Kelesh-Bey with an opportunity to rebuff Abkhazia's old but increasingly overbearing patron, the Sublime Porte, and achieve greater political autonomy and, perhaps, independence. To this end, in 1806 Kelesh-Bey sent a letter to then-Caucasus Viceroy, Prince Tsitsianov, asking Russia to extend its protectorate over Abkhazia.⁸ Included in the letter was a list of eight demands that Kelesh-Bey hoped to extract from the Russian imperial government in exchange for Abkhazia's entry into the Russian

⁷ The Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid I, installed Kelesh-Bey Shervashidze as the ruler of the Principality of Abkhazia in the late 1780s. For references see Semën Ėsadze, *Istoricheskaia Zapiska ob Upravlenii Kavkazom* (Tiflis, 1907), 102-106.

⁸ AKAK, vol. 3, № 353, 190-192.

sphere of political influence. Certainly, each one of the eight demands merits a critical examination. However, it is the eighth demand that is of particular interest to this chapter. Conceding that purchase of “*iasyri*” (slaves) is prohibited in Russia, Kelesh-Bey insisted on protecting the right to sell and buy slaves in Abkhazia because “without it [i.e., slavery], they [the Abkhaz] cannot live.”⁹ For Kelesh-Bey, seeking a political alliance with Russia was the lesser of two evils; a tactical necessity that promised to strengthen his personal rule and ward off Ottoman meddling in Abkhazia’s feudal strife. The fact that Kelesh-Bey believed that protecting the inviolability of the institution of slavery was essential for safeguarding his authority is a telling testament to the significance of slavery and the slave trade for Abkhaz society in the early nineteenth century. The Russian government was unperturbed by Kelesh-Bey’s insistence on protecting the institution of slavery and tacitly accepted his demand. Yet, Alexander I could not act on Kelesh-Bey’s plea. Despite the looming outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman war in 1806, unilateral extension of a Russian protectorate over Abkhazia would have certainly antagonized Russia’s already fraught relationship with the Sublime Porte.

Kelesh-Bey’s hopes of a strong military and political alliance with Russia did not come to pass. In 1808, one of Kelesh-Bey’s son, Aslan-Bey, allegedly assassinated his father, took the reins of power into his own hands, and publicly declared his intentions to solidify ties with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Aslan Bey’s rise to power sparked yet another round of Abkhazia’s game of thrones. This time it was Aslan Bey’s younger brother, Sefer Ali-Bey, who claimed the right to rule over Abkhazia. Alienated and lacking powerful allies in his native land, Sefer

⁹ Ibid., I. 192.

¹⁰ Georgi Dzidzariia, *Bor’ba za Abkhaziiu v Pervom Desiatiletii XIX veka* (Sukhum: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1940), 16.

Ali-Bey sought Russian assistance to eject his brother from power. In 1809, Sefer Ali-Bey pledged allegiance to the Russian Tsar¹¹ and converted to Orthodox Christianity, donning a new Christian name – Giorgi.¹² The raging Russo-Ottoman war (1806-1812) presented the Russian imperial government with an opportunity to incorporate Abkhazia into its sphere of influence. In 1810 the Russian military laid siege to the fortress Sukhum-Kale¹³ (Abkhazia's seat of political power), expelled the Turkish garrison from the fortress, and installed Sefer Ali-Bey, now Giorgi Shervashidze, as the Ruler of Abkhazia.¹⁴ Thus began the fifty-four years of Russian protectorate over Abkhazia and its people. The status of a Russian protectorate allowed the principality to enjoy broad political and economic autonomy in its internal affairs. Although the increasing Russian naval presence along the eastern shores of the Black Sea had hampered the slave-trade commerce in the region, the autonomous status of the principality left the institution of slavery largely uninterrupted and the reports of ongoing, albeit covert, slave trade on the coast of Abkhazia continued to arrive to the chancellery of the Caucasus Viceroy with regular frequency.

¹¹ AKAK, vol. 3, № 370, 205.

¹² AKAK, vol. 3, № 375, 209. See also, Dzidzariia, *Bor'ba za Abkhaziiu*, 21-22.

¹³ For a detailed account of Russian siege of Sukhum-Kale in 1810, see *Polnoe Sobranie Sochineniĭ Aleksandra Ivanovicha Mikhaĭlovskogo-Danilevskago: Opisanie Turetskoĭ Voĭny s 1806 do 1812 goda*, vol. 3 (Sankt-Peterburg, 1849), 266-267.

¹⁴ Tsar Alexander I issued a Manifesto on 17 February 1810 declaring admission of the Principality of Abkhazia under Russian protectorate and investing Giorgi Shervashidze (Sefer Ali-Bey) with the title of the Ruler of Abkhaziiia (*Vladetel' Abkhazii*). For the archival reference to the Manifesto, see AKAK, vol. 4, № 562, 418. The full text of Alexander I's 17 February 1810 Manifesto can be accessed in many publications, including Dzidzariia, *Bor'ba za Abkhaziiu*, 23-24.

Both foreign and Russian contemporary sources testify to the pervasive persistence of the slave trade in Abkhazia under the Russian protectorate. Swiss historian and traveler, Frédéric DuBois de Montperreux, left a historically rich record of his visit to Abkhazia in 1833.¹⁵ One of the long passages in the travelogue provides a detailed description of a “vile” slave trading enterprise on Abkhazia’s Black Sea coast.¹⁶ Moreover, Frédéric DuBois de Montperreux explicitly blamed the Ruler of Abkhazia at the time, Prince Mikhail Shervashidze, for giving his patronship to the illicit slave trade. Further, another damning report from 1846, which was written by a Russian official and classified as top secret, directly implicated three Turkish merchants and close associates of Mikhail Shervashidze, Kara Hussein, Abdichaush Chokha-Dar, and Tata Ismail, in overseeing a flourishing transnational trade in boys and young women in the coastal Abkhazia.¹⁷ Allegedly, Kara Hussein operated a well-established slave-trading operation from Abkhazia’s coastal town of Ochamchire and transported enslaved people directly to Istanbul while Abdichaush Chokha-Dar controlled his slave-trading operations from the outskirts of Batumi, another coastal town which until Russian annexation in 1878 remained under Ottoman control.¹⁸ According to the report, in that year alone the two merchants sold nearly 400 boys, girls, and adults into Ottoman slavery.¹⁹ However, Turkish slavers were not the only ones engaged in the kidnapping and selling of people. The top-secret

¹⁵ Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux, *Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Géorgie, en Arménie et en Crimée*, vol. 1, (Paris: Librairie de Gide, 1839), 206-346.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 258-259.

¹⁷ SEA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 3632, ll. 4-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 4.

report also implicated Abkhaz outlaws Uchana Margania and Shishaki Margania in kidnapping young boys in the neighboring Mingrelia and selling them to various Abkhaz slavers.²⁰ Finally, the same report claimed that the Ruler of Abkhazia had personally entangled himself in the webs of servitude by using human being as tokens of his political power. Allegedly, during a visit of several Circassian princes and their large retinue to Mikhail Shervashidze, the Ruler of Abkhazia was presented with a gift of thirty splendid Circassian horses. To match the generous spirit of his guests, Mikhail Shervashidze gifted thirty young boys and girls to the Circassian princes.²¹

The autonomous status of the Principality of Abkhazia ended in 1864. In that year, the Russian authorities exiled the last Ruler of Abkhazia, Mikhail Shervashidze (Hamud Bey), to Voronezh²² under the pretext of alleged treasonous links with the Ottoman government during the 1853-1856 Crimean War.²³ The former principality was then formally incorporated into the Russian Empire as the Sukhumskii Voennyi otdel (hereafter, Sukhumskii otdel). In order to govern the newly annexed territory, the imperial administration introduced a system of temporary military-civil administration in the region.²⁴ The government also sanctioned the

²⁰ Ibid., l. 5.

²¹ Ibid., l. 4 ob.

²² Mikhail Shervashidze's exile commenced with his arrival to Stavropol'. Soon after, he was transferred to the city of Rostov. Finally, the last Ruler of Abkhazia arrived in Voronezh on 17 August 1865. Mikhail Shervashidze died in the city in 1866.

²³ Despite the exile, the imperial government continued to honor Mikhail Shervashidze's many years of service to the Russian state. Mikhail Shervashidze retained the title of "serene Prince" and received a substantial annual pension that reflected his princely origins.

²⁴ According to a Decree (Polozhenie) on governing Sukhumskii otdel issued on 11 August 1866, the new territorial-administrative boundaries of the Sukhumskii otdel incorporated all of Abkhazia, the city of Sukhum, and the lands of the two former *pristavstvo*

creation of district courts (*okružnoi slovestnyi sud*) where the tenets of Abkhaz oral customary law were used to adjudicate disputes and crimes with the exception of capital murder, which fell under the jurisdiction of Russian criminal laws. However, in setting up the temporary system of justice in Abkhazia, the imperial government did not object to the exclusion of enslaved *akhuiu* and *akhashala* people from eligibility to serve as deputies in these court proceedings.²⁵ Administratively, Sukhumskii otdel was attached to the Kutais Governorate. In 1866 Sukhumskii otdel was subdivided into three okrug: Abzhuiskii, Bzybskii, Sukumskii, and two *pristavstvo*: Samurzakan'²⁶ and Tsebel'da. In the same year, the fortress Sukhum-Kale was renamed Sukhum and continued to serve as the Abkhazia's administrative capital. The southwestern administrative borders of Sukhumskii otdel traced the coastline of the eastern shore of the Black Sea. In the north, Sukhumskii otdel shared an administrative border with Kubanskaia oblast', with the main ridge of the Caucasus mountains

– Tsebel'da and Samurzakan'. To examine the Decree in its entirety, see PSZ, *Vtoroe sobranie* vol. 41, № 43551. The next round of territorial-administrative reforms was introduced on 26 April 1883 during the reign of Alexander III. According to the provisions of *Uchrezhdenie upravleniia Kavkazskogo kraia*, Sukhumskii otdel changed its name to Sukhumskii okrug, which was then divided into four *uchastok*: Gudautskii, Gumistinskii, Kodorskii, and Samurzakanskii. The reform placed Sukhumskii okrug under the administrative jurisdiction of Kutais Governorate-General. For details on the 1883 administrative reform in the Caucasus see PSZ, *Tret'e sobranie* vol. 3, № 1522.

²⁵ SSKG, vol. 4 (Tiflis, 1870), 29-30.

²⁶ Of particular interest to the history of abolition in Abkhazia was the region of Samurzakan', which the imperial government incorporated into Sukumskii Otdel but at the same time recognized the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the region. In Samurzakan' the tsarist authorities identified the presence of the dependent estates whose social standing and servitude obligations were identical to those in Abkhazia. However, the dependent estates in Samurzakan' had different titles, which were used to designate different categories of social dependency.

serving as a natural dividing line. Finally, in the northwest, the administrative borders of Sukhumskii otdel traced the boundaries of Chernomorskiĭ okrug.

As in much of the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century, feudalism, customary law, and the bonds of clan identity or rural commune (*akyta*) structured the social relations among the Abkhaz communities. The nominal power to rule over Abkhazia belonged to the Shervashidze (Chachba) clan. Abkhazia's Ruler – *akh* – traditionally resided in the settlement of Lykhny, which served as the physical center of political authority for the Shervashidze dynasty until Kelesh-Bey Shervashidze moved the seat of his clan's political power to the fortress of Sukhum in the early nineteenth century. The Shervashidze family was de-facto the largest landowner in the region. Conservative estimates indicated that the last Ruler of Abkhazia, Mikhail Shervashidze, alone nominally controlled 283,806 *desiatin* of and benefitted from the labor of at least 5,048 peasants.²⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the Shervashidzes' ability to wield power had many limits. Many historians have pointed out that the true extent of Shervashidze authority was always circumscribed by both geography and shifting political affinities of the local feudal aristocracy and common folk. A number of these refused to recognize the Shervashidzes as their rulers and resisted efforts to subordinate their political autonomy to the centralizing aims of Shervashidze clan.²⁸

The imperial government organized indigenous Abkhaz society into two broad categories: the *akhalapshiuu* – patrons/protectors – and the *kipshi* – those under someone's patronship/protection. The feudal nobility (*akhalapshiuu*), in turn, was divided into two

²⁷ *Materialy i Zapiski po voprosu o vladetel'skikh i imushchestvennykh pravakh potomkov svet. Kniazia Mikhaila Shervashidze, poslednego vladetelia Abkhazii*, (Venden, 1913), 44.

²⁸ Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov, "Abkhazia i Sukhum in XIX stoletii," in *Zapiski Kavkazskogo Otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*, vol. 20/2 (1910), 149-150.

categories: the princely families – *tavada* – and feudal nobility – *amysta*. The archives indicate that in the late 1860s there were approximately four thousand people of both genders who claimed a noble lineage.²⁹ The government’s inquiries determined that the Abkhaz aristocracy owned approximately 23% of all *akhashala* (enslaved people with no personal rights) in the region.³⁰ Although serfdom had not acquired a robust institutional foundation in Abkhazia in the early nineteenth century, the Abkhaz nobles had consistently attempted to impose greater feudal obligations on the common folk in the decades that followed the installment of the Russian protectorate.³¹ The nobles’ efforts to attach personally-free peasants to the land, normalize the extraction of resources from the peasants, and claim ultimate ownership over the land stemmed from the Abkhaz nobles’ emulation of the hereditary prerogatives claimed by the aristocracy in the neighboring Georgia and Russia. Such claims became especially pronounced on the eve of the Russian abolitionist and land reforms in Abkhazia in the 1870s.

Closing the ranks of socially-privileged communities in Abkhazia were *shinagmy* and *ashnakumy* – personally-free peasants who claimed class proximity to *amysta*. *Shinagmy* and *ashnakumy* peasants reportedly performed the duties of overseers on seigneurial manors of landed nobility. They supervised the fulfillment of expected labor obligations and reported peasant transgressions to their feudal patron. According to the government estimates, the total

²⁹ “Ocherk ustroïstva obshchestvennogo-politicheskogo byta Abkhazii i Samurzakani,” in SSKG, vol. 3, (Tiflis, 1870), 6.

³⁰ “Osvobozhdenie zavisimykh soslovii v Sukhumskom Otdele (Abkhazii i Samurzakani), in SSKG, vol. 5 (Tiflis, 1871), 45.

³¹ Fadeev, *Russkii Tsarism i Krest’ianskaia Reforma v Abkhazii*, 22.

approximate number of peasants who claimed the status of a *shinagm* and *ashnakum* in 1870 was approximately 1,800 people.³²

The *kipshi*, or common folk who lived under patronship of feudal nobility and princely families, constituted the absolute majority as a percentage of the total population in Abkhazia. The personal status and the degree of personal obligations among these people is best understood as a scale of dependency that ranged from complete personal freedom to complete enslavement as the ultimate form of a person's subjugation. The free peasants – *ankhae* – formed the largest segment of the indigenous Abkhaz society. The Russian surveyors estimated that in 1870 the number of *ankhae* peasants stood at approximately forty-seven thousand people.³³ *Ankhae* peasants also formed the largest group of slave-owners in Abkhazia. According to the government's estimates, *ankhae* peasants owned close to 75% of all *akhashala* (enslaved people with no personal rights) in the region.³⁴ It is important, however, to reify the meaning of freedom for *ankhae* peasants. As Abkhaz historian Georgii Dzidzariia points out, the free status of *ankhae* peasants was a simple matter of juridical formality rather than a defining characteristic of the peasants' life.³⁵ In reality, *ankhae* peasants were economically and politically dependent subjects who, in accordance with the oral traditions of Abkhaz customary law, were required to perform a great variety of labor obligations for the benefit of their patrons. The Russian administration summarized the

³² SSKG, vol. 3, (Tiflis, 1870), 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, l. 7.

³⁴ SSKG, vol. 5 (Tiflis, 1871), 45.

³⁵ Georgii Dzidzariia, *Vosstanie 1866 goda v Abkhazii*, (Sukhumi, 1955), 31.

general customary obligations of *ankhae* peasants into ten articles.³⁶ These obligations included regular delivery of wine, corn, millet, bread, beans, meat, and/or poultry to their patrons. Also included was the performance of agricultural work for a specified number of days on the fields of their patron, the maintenance of the patron's horses, and the running of miscellaneous errands. Personal freedom of *ankhae* peasants manifested itself primarily through the custom of *assastvo* – the right to move from one community to another at the peasants' will.³⁷ *Assastvo* allowed *ankhae* peasants to abandon a feudal patron who became abusive or unable to offer protection. The estate of *ankhae* peasants itself was stratified. Particularly, well-to-do *ankhae* peasants often exercised political authority within the peasant community. Closely related to social standing of *ankhae* peasants were *amatsiurasgu*. These peasants formed a peculiar transitional category of dependency between the enslaved sharecropping peasants (*akhuiu*) and personally-free peasants (*ankhae*).

One step below on the social ladder stood enslaved sharecropping peasants – *akhuiu*.³⁸ When translated from the Abkhaz language, *akhuiu* means “he who prepares food,” or simply “servant.” This category of peasants was settled on lands in the vicinity of their owner's household. The majority of *akhuiu* peasants were once enslaved people (*akhashala*) who lived in the households of their owners but changed their status of enslavement after their owner allowed them to start a family. Along with the permission to start a family, Abkhaz customary

³⁶ SSKG, vol. 5, (Tiflis, 1871), ll. 49-50.

³⁷ SSKG, vol. 3, (Tiflis, 1870), ll. 13-14.

³⁸ In the official documentation generated by various government commissions, which investigated the customs and social organization of the Abkhaz society, the enslaved sharecropping *akhuiu* peasants were also known as *agyryva* or *agyryua*. The etymological origins of these estate names trace their roots to comparable forms of subjugation and institutions of servitude in the neighboring Guriia and Mingreliia.

law also obligated the owner of the *akhuiu* family to give them a plot of land, oxen, cow, and a cauldron. The primary obligation of enslaved *akhuiu* was the performance of agricultural labor for the benefit of their owners. Each *akhuiu* household was responsible for sending a certain number of people to work the fields of their owners at least three days per week. *Akhuiu* women were responsible for preparing meals for their owners and guests and performed a great variety of house chores such as cleaning and washing clothes. In addition, customary law obligated *akhuiu* families to send one young boy or girl to their owner's house. These children lived in the patron's household as servants until they reached the age of puberty, at which point they were deemed ready for marriage. However, the owner also had the right to gift *akhuiu* daughters as part of the dowry for their own daughters.³⁹ Although *akhuiu* peasants were unequivocally regarded as being in a state of personal dependency to their owners, it seems that Abkhaz customary law imposed some restrictions on the owner's ability to sell or gift these peasants. Reportedly, the owner of an *akhuiu* household was required to negotiate his intentions of selling or gifting *akhuiu* peasants to another owner.⁴⁰ Thus, customary law allowed *akhuiu* peasants to enjoy a certain degree of personal autonomy as they lived in separate households and could exercise certain rights, such as the right to have a family, the right to retain a certain portion of their agricultural produce, and (in rare circumstances) the right of *assastvo*, or resettling on the lands of another owner. Government estimates indicated that the number of enslaved sharecroppers in Sukumskii otdel in 1870 stood at approximately

³⁹ Shalva Inal-Ipa, *Ocherki po istorii braka i sem'i u Abkhazov*, (ABGIZA, 1954), 47.

⁴⁰ SSKG, vol. 5, (Tiflis, 1871), ll. 47-48.

eight thousand people or sixteen percent of the entire population.⁴¹ The *ankhae* peasants owned approximately 60% of all *akhuiu* peasants in Abkhazia.⁴²

Finally, at the very bottom of Abkhaz society stood enslaved *akhashala* – people with no rights and no legal protection against abuses of their owners. A common translation of the word *akhashala* means “unwanted,” or “that which was gained.” According to the findings of various Russian commissions, which surveyed the Abkhaz population and studied its social practices, the majority of enslaved *akhashala* originated from captured or purchased people from neighboring regions of the Caucasus who had since become fully assimilated into Abkhaz society, i.e., they spoke the Abkhaz language and professed the same religion as their owners. *Akhashala* typically lived in the household of their owners and performed a great variety of household chores. Female *akhashala* frequently became concubines of their male owners or served as servants to their owner’s wife or daughters. The number of *akhashala* in Abkhazia on the eve of abolition was relatively small. In 1870, imperial authorities estimated the approximate number of *akhashala* in Sukumskii otdel to be between 1,300 and 1,400 people or just two percent of the entire Abkhaz population.⁴³ The relatively small number of *akhashala* in Abkhazia could be explained by the fact that it was more profitable for *akhashala* owners to transition them into the status of enslaved *akhuiu* peasants because it relinquished the owners from the responsibility of providing housing, sustenance, and clothing to their slaves. *Akhuiu* peasants were expected to both provide for their own families and support the needs of their owners.

⁴¹ SSKG, vol. 3, (Tiflis, 1870), l. 7.

⁴² SSKG, vol. 5, (Tiflis, 1871), l. 48.

⁴³ Ibid.

In addition, the imperial government identified several social categories of dependent estates in Abkhazia's region of Samurzakan'. As mentioned earlier, the dependent estates in Samurzakan' had nearly identical personal and economic obligations to their patrons and owners as in Abkhazia but used different terminology to distinguish between categories of personal dependency. For instance, the estate of formally free but economically dependent peasants in Samurzakan' was known as *piosh'*. Then, the transitional class of dependent peasants was known in Samurzakan' as *moĩnale* (*amatsiurasgu* in Abkhazia). According to the government's estimates, *moĩnale* and *amatsiurasgu* together counted approximately 1,300 people.⁴⁴ The estate of enslaved sharecropping peasants in Samurzakan' was known as *del'makhore*. Their social status and personal dependency matched those of *akhuii* in Abkhazia. Lastly, the most oppressed category of enslaved people in Samurzakan' was known by the same name as in Abkhazia – *akhashala*.

The last social estate that featured prominently in the social landscape of Abkhazia and Samurzakan' in the late 1860s was the *azat* peasants. With a population of approximately 2,200, *azat* people originated from enslaved *akhashala* and *akuii* who obtained absolute personal freedom after being manumitted by their owners.⁴⁵ The Russian authorities charged with learning the complex system of social estates in Abkhazia concluded that most manumissions of enslaved *akhashala* and *akuii* occurred on religious grounds as a "soul-saving act." A manumitted *azat* (or their son) had but one obligation – master the Arabic language and regularly read the Quran while praying for the salvation of the soul of their

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

former owner. Government agents concluded that the status of former enslavement did not impede the social integration of *azat* peasants into the broader Abkhaz society after manumission.⁴⁶ Such a conclusion, however, should be taken with a grain of salt. The agents' arguments were based on the premise that following the annexation of Abkhazia into the Russian Empire in 1864, *azat* peasants were no longer dependent on the protection of clan-based or familial networks and could instead rely on the protection of Russian laws and institutions to secure justice and enjoy security.

This brief sketch of Abkhazia's society on the eve of Russian abolition illustrates the complexity of the economic and social hierarchies of indigenous Abkhaz society in the late 1860s. It is also worth mentioning that the rigid barriers between social estates in the region were further reinforced by well-established marital conventions that forbade marriages outside of one's social group.⁴⁷ Therefore, the outcome of the Russian abolitionist project hinged on the ability of the imperial government to recognize the complexities of the institution of slavery in the region and learn the variegated degrees of social dependencies among the native Abkhaz communities. Despite the earnest efforts of Russian agents charged with the difficult task of compiling data concerning the dependent estates in Abkhazia, the government's reports frequently missed their mark and ultimately undermined the abolitionist campaign. The chronology as well as the study of the successes and failures of the Russian abolitionist efforts in Abkhazia are the subject of the following sections.

The Prelude to Abolition

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Shalva Inal-Ipa, *Ocherki po istorii sem'i i braka u Abkhazov*, (ABGIZA, 1954), 36.

The road to abolition of slavery in Abkhazia was a difficult one. Despite more than six decades of Russian protectorate over Abkhazia, in the mid-1860s the imperial government still had a poor understanding of Abkhaz society in general and the institution of slavery in particular. Following the abrogation of the autonomous status of the Principality of Abkhazia, the imperial government undertook the important task of surveying the region with the aim of gathering the information required to implement a wide range of reforms, including the abolition of slavery. However, the clumsy efforts to collect accurate data about the different kinds of social dependency and land-tenure rights that existed in Abkhazia antagonized the native population. The alarm associated with possible reforms was particularly palpable among the *ankhae* peasants. In July of 1866 the government-sanctioned surveyal efforts provoked the largest anti-abolitionist revolt in the Caucasus. This section will examine the early stages of the government's efforts to understand the institutions of social subjugation in Abkhazia in the months leading up to the great Lykhny Rebellion.

The first systematic efforts to collect data on the nature of the institutions of servitude and landownership rights in Abkhazia commenced in 1865. This ambitious mission was formally set into motion at the order of the then-Chief of the Military Headquarters of the Caucasus Army, Major-General Pavel Kartsov, to Kutais Governor-General, Dmitriï Sviatopolk-Mirskiï, who exercised direct administrative control over Abkhazia and its people. Kartsov charged the local administration to gather information about “different dependent estates that exist[ed] in Abkhazia, Samurzakan’, and Tsebel’da,” the land-tenure rights enjoyed by each social estate, and, among other things, information about “the cost of redemption” that enslaved, and otherwise dependent persons, “must pay in exchange for freedom.”

Furthermore, in 1865 the government in Tiflis deployed a specially established commission to Abkhazia, which was chaired by General Ponse.⁴⁸ The chief goal of the commission was to determine the amount and value of the property belonging to the exiled Ruler of Abkhazia, Prince Mikhail Shervashidze. In addition, Ponse's commission was charged with the task of studying the social affairs and question of landownership in Abkhazia.⁴⁹ One of the commission's members, titular councilor Cherepov, focused specifically on collecting information about social estates in the region. Reportedly, the Abkhaz people met the commission's inquiries with palpable hostility. News of the oppressive terms of the emancipation settlements in Russia in 1861 and in Georgia in 1864, which transferred huge tracts of arable land to the nobility, greatly concerned the Abkhaz peasants who regarded the land as their inalienable property. The prospect of having to pay redemption into the pockets of the Abkhaz aristocrats for the right to own and cultivate land, which they saw as their rightful property, had understandably agitated the peasants.⁵⁰ The commission did not accomplish its mission and was ultimately disbanded at the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the Russian Governor (*nachal'nik*) of Abkhazia, Colonel Kon'iar, coordinated the collection of information on the local level and oversaw the writing of summary reports, which described different categories of social dependency that existed in the region. After several delays, Kon'iar's report reached the Caucasus Mountain

⁴⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, ll. 109 – 120 ob.

⁴⁹ Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov, "Abkhaziia i Sukhum v XIX stoletii," in *Izvestiia Kavkazskogo otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*, vol. 20, 2 (1909-1910), 180.

⁵⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, l. 158.

Administration in Tiflis in November 1865.⁵¹ The report left much to be desired. According to Kon'iar's own evaluation of the report, the findings contained errors and inconsistencies that raised more questions than gave answers.⁵² The chronic lack of administrative resources and baffling regional diversity of the Abkhaz society, lamented the Colonel, was the chief culprit behind the unsatisfactory reconnaissance efforts of the Russian administration in Abkhazia. To rectify these mistakes, Kon'iar proposed creating an entirely new investigative Commission charged with the task of systematically "verifying and revising population statistics, studying the indigenous landownership rights, and examining the nature of the social bonds that structured relations among different estates" of the native Abkhaz society.⁵³ In Kon'iar's estimation the persistence of the institution of slavery and the nebulous system of land tenure presented two of the biggest challenges to the stability of Russian rule in Abkhazia. Thus, these two areas required the government's immediate attention. However, Kon'iar insisted that the implementation of these two fundamental reforms must not inflict financial distress nor degrade the privileged social standing of the indigenous Abkhaz aristocracy. "Abkhazia," Kon'iar concluded with a premonition, "is looking at us with a distrustful gaze of a conquered subject but recognizes in us still vague possibility for the betterment of its wellbeing. The longer we delay execution of the necessary reforms, the quicker the people's faith in our ability to introduce change will weaken and thus exacerbate the people's mistrust of our intentions and causing yet more debacles in the future."⁵⁴

⁵¹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 180, ll. 1-10.

⁵² Ibid., l. 2 ob.

⁵³ Ibid., l. 3 ob.

⁵⁴ Ibid., l. 6.

Kon'iar backed his calls to abolish slavery in Abkhazia with a plan for the gradual emancipation of enslaved and dependent persons. He summarized his abolitionist vision in a letter, which he forwarded to the Kutais Governor-General.⁵⁵ Kon'iar's plan called for the deployment of indigenous customary law to undertake a cautious campaign of emancipation of all dependent estates in Abkhazia. Kon'iar argued that using legal conventions outside of the oral canon of the Abkhaz customary law would almost certainly alienate the native population or worse, provoke a violent backlash. Positioning himself as somewhat of an expert on the topic of slavery in the region, Kon'iar contended that the act of manumission in Abkhazia had no defined legal preconditions or seasonality. In other words, manumission constituted an arbitrary prerogative of a slave-owner. Moreover, the act of manumission itself could be complete or partial. The complete manumission entailed an immediate transition from the status of social dependency to unfettered personal freedom signified by the new social status known as "*azat*" – a manumitted person who was freed from any personal, social, or economic obligations to anyone in their respective community. The instances of complete emancipation in Abkhazia, according to Kon'iar, were rare and usually occurred as a "soul-saving" gesture.⁵⁶ More common were partial manumissions. These types of manumissions allowed an enslaved person to transition into a milder form of personal dependency in relationship to their owners. Partially manumitted persons could acquire the right to have a family, own personal property, and cultivate their patron's land.

⁵⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 181, ll. 10-17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 11 ob.

In practical terms, Kon'iar's roadmap consisted of four points, which, in his opinion, would have gradually abolished slavery in Abkhazia. The first point of his plan proposed requiring every slave-owner to provide their male *akhashala* "with a wife and a plot of land."⁵⁷ With time, this measure would have eliminated the status of "*akhashala*" as a legal category of absolute enslavement and provided former *akhashala* a transitional path to the less oppressive status of "*agyrva*." Second, Kon'iar suggested using the indigenous institutions of justice to allow enslaved people to challenge their servile personal status in communal courts. Judicial priority would be given to cases in which an enslaved person could prove that the genealogy of their family originated from a social estate of free people. Also, this measure would have permitted enslaved women to obtain freedom through payment of a redemption sum determined by the indigenous courts. Third, all cases that involved demands of enslaved individuals to purchase their freedom would be scrutinized by local courts. The courts, it was assumed, would deny the slave-owners the right to set unreasonable conditions for emancipation. Finally, the fourth point of Kon'iar's plan called for an immediate ban on the practice of partial emancipation in favor of complete manumission.⁵⁸

Kon'iar's proposals made their way onto the Viceroy's desk in September 1866.⁵⁹ After reviewing Kon'iar's ideas, the Viceroy judged the plan premature. In the fall of 1866, the government still had a poor notion about the social stratification of the native Abkhaz society. In addition, plans to renew the government's efforts to collect information about the social

⁵⁷ Ibid., l. 16 ob.

⁵⁸ Ibid., l. 17-17 ob.

⁵⁹ Ibid., l. 28 ob.

and economic situation in Abkhazia were already being set in motion. However, recognizing the incendiary potential of abolition in the region, the Viceroy issued a set of temporary instructions which were meant to guide the actions of Russian officials in Abkhazia when dealing with the questions of slavery and manumission. These instructions did not seek abolition of the institution of slavery in Abkhazia. Rather, they offered convoluted guidelines on how to best manage conflicts between the enslaved people and their owners.

First, the Grand Duke ordered that any disputes concerning the emancipation of enslaved persons in Abkhazia, irrespective of the circumstances of their enslavement, be adjudicated in local courts.⁶⁰ Second, court orders that denied dependent persons the right to freedom were required to receive second opinions from the Governor of Abkhazia and Kutais Governor-General before being delivered to the Viceroy for the final review. Conversely, court orders that denied slaveholders the right to ownership over a person would come into effect if a plaintiff did not appeal the court's decision or when an appeal was submitted with the court order but rejected by the Kutais Governor-General. Third, the courts were instructed to inform litigants that they had exactly two weeks to appeal the court's ruling by delivering a written petition to the Governor of Sukhumskiĭ otdel. Failure to submit a formal appeal within the specified timeframe automatically rendered all grievances against a verdict invalid and litigants legally liable to abide by the court's decision. Lastly, should a court recognize an enslaved man's right to freedom, then his entire immediate family was eligible to receive freedom under certain conditions. Namely, the children of the court-emancipated man were eligible to receive immediate freedom irrespective of their age, gender, and marital status. This provision also applied retroactively to children who had been sold to a slaveholder prior

⁶⁰ Ibid., l. 29.

to the court's ruling. The purchaser of such children, however, had the legal right to seek recompense from the original seller for the loss of their slaves through courts. Of course, every rule has an exception.

The provision that guaranteed immediate freedom to the children of men emancipated by the court had several gendered caveats.⁶¹ Namely, daughters of emancipated men who had been sold into slavery and become married were granted personal freedom (i.e., they could no longer be bought or sold by their owners). However, according to the Viceroy's instructions, these women were required to remain in the dependency of their husbands' owners until occurrence of one of three events. First, a woman could leave the dependency of her owner following the passing of her husband. Second, the woman could leave the dependency of her owner if she became divorced from her husband. Or, third, the woman could leave the dependency of her owner in the event that her husband became manumitted.

Further, separate instructions were also issued for the wives of men emancipated by the court. Their wives were eligible to receive freedom if they were not enslaved by their husbands' owners (i.e., these women were free at the time of their marriage) and if their husbands paid the bride price (*ach'ma*) using their own money. The wives of men emancipated by the courts who belonged to another owner and whose bride price was paid by their husbands' owners could obtain freedom after payment of the original bride money, subtracted by the number of years that the woman had served for the benefit of her owner. The final cost of the manumission in such cases would be determined by courts. Finally, the wives of men emancipated by the court who also belonged to their husband's owner as slaves and whose

⁶¹ Ibid., l. 29 ob.

bride price was paid for by their owner could obtain freedom after the payment of an average amount of bride money as established by Abkhaz customary law.

At first glance, the Viceroy's instructions appear well-intentioned and even progressive. However, the numerous supplemental provisions, which regulated the eligibility and process of emancipation of the families of men emancipated by courts, clearly illustrate the limits of Russian abolitionism in Abkhazia. The likelihood that enslaved men would be able to challenge the status of their enslavement in local courts was low, and the preconditions for the emancipation of women who shared familial bonds with their would-be emancipated husbands and fathers were exceptionally onerous. While appearing to seek justice for the wrongly-enslaved men, the imperial government was fully committed to shielding the slaveholders from negative financial ramifications of Russian abolitionist policies.

Finally, in light of the unsatisfactory performance of General Ponse's commission, Colonel Kon'iar proposed the formation of a new surveying commission whose investigative work would be dedicated entirely to the question of landownership, slavery, and dependency in Abkhazia. This proposal was endorsed by Kutais Governor-General in January 1866. The Governor-General shared Kon'iar's belief that "the questions concerning property rights, emancipation of the dependent estates, and personal status of the highest estate in Abkhazia, Tsebel'da, and Samuzarkan'⁶² are so intertwined that it would make perfect sense to resolve

⁶² A brief but important note concerning the government's research and attempts at codifying the rights and privileges of the nobility in Abkhazia's region of Samuzarkan' is in order. According to the statement made by the Kutais Governor-General, Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskiĭ, in his letter to then the Chair of the Committee for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus, Aleksandr Kartsov, in January 1866, the task of examining the rights and privileges of the highest estates in Samuzarkan' was assigned to a commission in Zugdidi, the administrative capital of Mingrelia (Western Georgia) on account of the nobles' "Christian faith." See, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 180, l. 12.

these questions simultaneously through the work of a single commission.”⁶³ Kon’iar’s proposal also coincided chronologically with the establishment of the Committee for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus in May of 1866 in Tiflis. The idea of deploying a new surveying commission to Sukumskiĭ otdel aligned with the objectives of the Committee. Hence, by 30 June 1866 the Committee authorized the creation of a new surveying commission under the chairmanship of Prince Major Sulkhan Baratov (Baratashvili).⁶⁴ The arrival and surveying work of the commission in Sukhumskiĭ otdel in early July would prove to be the fateful moment in the long-growing discontent of the Abkhaz population with Russian abolitionist plans.

The 1866 Lykhny Rebellion

The 1866 Lykhny Rebellion in Abkhazia was the biggest anti-abolitionist uprising of the indigenous population against the Russian imperial government in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. The rebellion enjoyed the popular support of the peasant masses and many Abkhaz nobles. At its peak, approximately twenty thousand armed rebels attempted to dislodge Russian authority in Abkhazia. The goals of the rebellion changed frequently. However, what united the disparate band of Abkhaz rebels was a shared desire to restore native institutions of political authority and preserve the social status-quo in the region. Although the rebellion ultimately failed, it disabused the imperial government of any illusions for an orderly and peaceful abolitionist campaign and succeeded in staving off the implementation of the peasant and land reforms in Abkhazia for several years.

⁶³ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 180, l. 12.

⁶⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 181, l. 57 ob.

The chief and unequivocal cause of the 1866 uprising in Abkhazia was the government's proclamations of plans to abolish slavery and institute comprehensive land reforms in the region. However, other factors played an equally important role in galvanizing the popular discontent, which eventually transformed into a violent rebellion. First, both independent contemporary accounts and official government reports implicated the chronic lack of cultural sensibilities, persistent insolence, and heavy-handed policies of the government officials in Abkhazia in aggravating the people's apprehensions about their future under Russian rule. For instance, the nineteenth-century Russian historian of the Caucasus, Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov⁶⁵, characterized then Governor of Abkhazia, Colonel Kon'iar, as a person who was largely "unfamiliar with the character and the way of life of the region," and who found direct communication with the Abkhaz population both "onerous and pointless."⁶⁶ The Kutais Governor-General, Sviatopolk-Mirskiĭ, confirmed this assessment in his own note to the Caucasus Viceroy in October 1866 (approximately two months after the rebellion). The Governor-General acknowledged that the administrative cadre of Russian officials in Abkhazia lacked a proper understanding of the region and was generally "unsatisfactory" in the performance of their duties.⁶⁷ Thus, several years of arrogance, incompetence, and

⁶⁵ An interesting fact is that Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov's father, Nikolaĭ D'iachkov-Tarasov, served as a member of the Sukhum estate-land commission, which played a central role in analyzing the system of social dependency in Abkhazia and drafting the rule for the emancipation of enslaved and dependent persons in the region. Nikolaĭ D'iachkov-Tarasov lived and worked in Abkhazia between 1867-1876 and 1878-1880. As such he had the opportunity to observe the course and outcomes of the abolition in Abkhazia.

⁶⁶ Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov, "Abkhazia i Sukhum in XIX stoletii," in *Zapiski Kavkazskogo Otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva*, vol. 20/2 (1910), 185.

⁶⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, l. 160. For additional archival evidence that corroborated the allegations of casual insolence of the Russian imperial authorities in Abkhazia as one of

reluctance to build effective channels of communication capable of assuaging the legitimate concerns of the people have undermined the credibility of the Russian administration in Abkhazia on the eve of the rebellion.

The local officials' lack of foresight and inept, at times disrespectful, interaction with the Abkhaz population exacerbated the fears of a looming, unjust dispossession associated with the government's plans to abolish slavery and redistribute land in Abkhazia. Numerous sources indicate that the work of several government-sanctioned investigative commissions which furtively surveyed the land and people in Abkhazia stoked damaging rumors and speculations of the injustices that the Russians were planning. Indeed, Sviatopolk-Mirskii highlighted the investigative work of numerous fact-finding commissions as another cause of the rebellion.⁶⁸ The alleged unapologetic insolence of some members of these investigative commissions alienated both peasants and nobles from the imperial authorities in Sukhum and Tiflis.⁶⁹ The testimony of the head of Pitsundsk district, Major Chavchavadze, to the Governor of Sukhumskii otdel in 1867 (one year after the calamity of the Lykhny Rebellion) plainly stated that "the work methods of Major-General Ponse's commission... left a heavy impression among the people and created a mound of unaddressed doubts with regard to the future of landownership and estate rights" in Abkhazia.⁷⁰ Thus, the culture of arrogance that

the likely causes of the rebellion see also, RGIA, f. 678, op. 1, d. 610, ll. 28 – 37., f. 649, op. 1, d. 409, ll. 37 – 44. SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 252, ll. 1-2., d. 2784, ll. 165.

⁶⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, l. 158.

⁶⁹ Dzidzariia, *Vosstanie 1866 goda v Abkhazii*, 102-103.

⁷⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 180, l. 43.

accompanied the government's surveying work in the region compelled the Abkhaz population to assume the worst of the legislative intentions of the imperial administration.

Second, a considerable segment of the Abkhaz people was unnerved by the prospect of land reform and abolition in Sukhumskiĭ otdel because of the emancipation policies that had been implemented in Russia and Georgia. Such apprehensions were not unique to Abkhazia. The rumors of imminent abolition stirred the passions of enslaved people and slaveholders in many parts of the Caucasus.⁷¹ The peasants and nobility had many reasons to feel anxious. The largest segment of the Abkhaz population, *ankhae* peasants, owned most of the enslaved people in the region. Hence, for these peasants the abolition of slavery would mean potentially ruinous dispossession. Next, the question of landownership held great importance for both common peasants and members of the privileged social estates. Many people in Abkhazia were aware of the outcomes of the emancipation of Russian serfs in 1861 and the emancipation of serfs in eastern Georgia in 1864. By early 1866, plans to abolish serfdom and redistribute land were gaining legislative momentum in Imereti, Guria, and neighboring Mingrelia (western Georgia). Given the aristocratic vector of the land-tenure reforms, which imposed significant financial burdens on peasants and bestowed large landholdings on members of indigenous nobility, the peasant population in Sukhumskiĭ otdel was understandably concerned about similar reforms in their own homeland.⁷² Abkhaz customs dictated that land belonged to the person who tilled it, thus making all peasants who worked the land rightful claimants of their plot, which they considered inalienable private property. Any state-

⁷¹ Dgidzariia, *Makhadzhirstvo i Problemy Istorii Abkhazii XIX Stoletia* (Sukhumi: Alashara, 1982), 270.

⁷² Dgidzariia, *Vosstanie 1866 goda v Abkhazii*, 127.

sanctioned land distribution scheme that would deny the Abkhaz peasantry the right to own land, or worse, require payment of redemption for land, would have certainly provoked protest.

The Abkhaz nobles, on the other hand, had their own axe to grind with the imperial government. Some members of the Abkhaz aristocracy felt disgruntled after the Russians annexed Abkhazia in 1864. These nobles felt threatened by the prospect of losing their traditional authority among the Abkhaz population and regarded the government's attempts to introduce fundamental reforms in the region as illegitimate and almost certainly dooming.⁷³ Rather than try and compromise with the tsarist government, these nobles saw escape into Ottoman Empire as the only option for protecting their high social standing and ensuring their ability to compel the submission of dependent peasants and enslaved people under their rule. Some of these nobles succeeded in pressuring their peasants to leave Abkhazia *en masse*.⁷⁴ At the same time, those Abkhaz nobles who threw their lot in with the Russians expected the government to reward their loyalty with either generous land grants commensurate to their privileged social status, or a record of distinguished service in the ranks of the Russian military.⁷⁵ This expectation was born from a well-established government practice of bestowing significant allotments of land to indigenous aristocracy who accepted Russian rule.

⁷³ For reports about fears of the Abkhaz nobles to lose their enslaved and dependent peasants as a result of Russian abolitionist reforms see SEA, f. 545, op. d. 2784, l. 86-86 ob.

⁷⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 76, ll. 113-116.

⁷⁵ On the eve of the abolition, the imperial administration came to realize that many Abkhaz noble families falsely claimed the status of indigenous gentry often embellishing their social standing, alleging untrue land-tenure rights, and exaggerating the extent of their authority over the Abkhaz peasants all in an effort to extract the largest possible compensation from the government. For details see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 180, ll. 41-90.

If, however, the tsarist authorities were to embrace the Abkhaz customs with no regard to the existing social hierarchies and recognize the peasants' unrestricted right to claim the land that they cultivated, the nobles could stand to lose ownership over large and lucrative swathes of land. Therefore, the Russian plans to abolish slavery and institute a land tenure reform in Abkhazia became a source of constant concern and frustration among Abkhaz nobles.

Finally, the tumultuous events of the 1866 Lykny Rebellion must be contextualized within the broader circumstances of the people's discontent, caused by events that were largely unrelated to the state policies.⁷⁶ In 1864 Abkhazia experienced bad harvests and crop failures. The failed harvest of corn, the staple item of the Abkhaz diet in the nineteenth century, caused shortages of bread in the region.⁷⁷ In addition, an unknown grape disease devastated most of Abkhazia's vineyards that same year.⁷⁸ These great agricultural misfortunes were further amplified by an outbreak of smallpox that affected numerous villages. Such adversities took a heavy toll on the population of the region and naturally put people on edge. In the background of these hardships, the pervasive, albeit unfounded, rumors that the tsarist government planned to institute universal military draft and force mass conversion to Christianity gripped people's imaginations, adding an additional layer of suspicion to the already deeply unsettled population.⁷⁹ Although the fears of forced conversions and universal conscription did not come to pass, by the summer of 1866 a significant number of people in

⁷⁶ Dzidzariia, *Vosstanie 1866 goda v Abkhazii*, 120.

⁷⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 76, ll. 180-198.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Fadeev, *Russkii Tsarism i Krest'ianskaia Reforma v Abkhazii*, 33.

Abkhazia were emotionally fatigued, economically ruined, and simply angry. The arrival and clumsy work of yet another Russian investigative commission in the region in July of 1866, which heralded the vexing news of approaching universal emancipation, proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

The three-member commission arrived in Sukhum on 10 July 1866 at the request of the Governor of Abkhazia, Colonel Kon'iar.⁸⁰ The commission was chaired by Prince Sulkhan Baratov whose surname gave the commission its unofficial name: the Baratov's commission. The two other men who accompanied Prince Baratov were Captain-Lieutenant Korganov and titular councilor Cherepov. Baratov's commission followed in the footsteps of a different fact-finding mission which conducted its surveying work in Abkhazia under the leadership of General Ponse in 1865. Specifically, Baratov's commission was charged with the task of collecting more data about the norms that governed the practices of landownership in the region as well as the social conventions that structured the relationships between different estates in every region of Abkhazia. The Caucasus Mountainous Administration in Tiflis issued each member of the commission detailed instructions.⁸¹ According to these instructions, the commission had to inform the local population that the government needed to collect demographic data to begin preparations for resolving the question of slavery and personal dependency in the region. Furthermore, article eight of the instruction urged the commission members to reiterate that "the government is only starting the process of emancipation and has not emancipated anyone in Abkhazia." Therefore, all enslaved and

⁸⁰ Dzidzariia, 131.

⁸¹ For a complete list of instructions provided to Baratov's commission, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 181, ll. 78 ob. – 83.

dependent estates were required to remain in complete obedience to their patrons and continue fulfilling their customary obligations until further notice.⁸² Lastly, the commission had to explain that the administration would be unable to offer any subsidies to offset the possible costs associated with emancipation by means of redemption payments.

After a short stay in Sukhum, the three men parted ways and travelled to different regions of Abkhazia to begin their work. Prince Baratov headed to Abkhazia's region of Abzhua while Korganov travelled to Tsebel'da and Cherepov⁸³ made his way to the Bzyb' district. Accompanying the titular councilor were the Head of Bzyb' district, Captain Izmailov and two popularly elected judges – a nobleman Titu Margania and *ankhae* peasant Kamkhaz Khagba.⁸⁴ The surveying work of titular councilor Cherepov is of particular importance to the arguments presented in this section because it was Cherepov's allegedly crude investigative work and uncouth manner of communication with the Abkhaz people that provoked the unrest that quickly engulfed Sukhumskii otdel.

The relations between Cherepov and the population of Bzyb' district began to sour precipitously on the first day of Cherepov's arrival to the village of Pitsunda on July 15.⁸⁵ In

⁸² Ibid., l. 81.

⁸³ It is important to note that Cherepov's previous stint of administrative and surveying work in Abkhazia as a member of General Ponse's commission earned him a rather sordid reputation and, in some cases, open loathing from local people. Therefore, Cherepov's attempts to gather information received a particularly thorough attention of the investigative committee, which the government created to understand the central causes of the Lykhny rebellion. To read the investigation report into the rebellion in its entirety, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784.

⁸⁴ Dzidzariia, 131.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 132-133.

the span of one day, Cherepov managed to insult the local princely family, quarrel with and accuse gathered Abkhaz nobles of submitting false testimonies, and completely confuse *ankhae* peasants about the terms of the planned emancipation. Consequently, the Abkhaz nobles stormed off from the village in fury. The *ankhae* peasants, whom Cherepov summoned to testify, refused to answer any of the commission's questions.irate and dejected, Cherepov absconded from the village in the evening. However, a word spoken is past recalling, and Cherepov's departure did little to assuage the people's anger. The news of Cherepov's insolence and the government's purported plans to require peasants to pay redemption for their freedom spread like wildfire across Bzyb' district. The *ankhae* peasants became enraged after it became evident that the instructions issued to Baratov's commission did not draw any meaningful difference between their social status and that of other dependent estates in Abkhazia.⁸⁶ These peasants surmised that the government equated their social standing to that of slaves. So, when Cherepov attempted to question another assembly of peasants on 18 July in the village of Kaldakhvara, none of the peasants were willing to talk.⁸⁷ Cherepov's warning that refusal to answer the commission's questions might prompt the government to emancipate slaves without any compensation to their owners failed to persuade the peasants to talk.⁸⁸ Silence greeted Cherepov and his aides again on 19 July in another village.⁸⁹ In short, the commission's work in Bzyb' district hit a wall.

⁸⁶ Dzidzariia, 128.

⁸⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, l. 5.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., l. 6.

The Abkhaz peasants in Bzyb' district emphatically rejected the government's abolitionist formula, which promised freedom in exchange for payment of redemption dues. Lamenting the lack of progress, the Head of Bzyb' district Izmaïlov submitted a report on 19 July to the Russian Governor of Abkhazia. In the report, Izmaïlov acknowledged that the widespread lack of cooperation from the people in Bzyb' district "would likely persist," particularly among the *ankhae* and *akhuiu* peasants.⁹⁰ These peasants, according to Izmaïlov, balked at the notion that they would have to pay redemption to secure their freedom and, possibly, the right to own land. This sentiment was clearly captured in a statement made by an *ankhae* peasant, Osman Shamba, at a peasant assembly on 26 July:

We don't understand the emancipation of peasants on the terms that you [the government commission] explain to us. We don't have the means to redeem our freedom from the landlords, like you propose... If the government wishes to emancipate peasants from their landlords, then we hope that the Tsar will be merciful, take heed of our poverty, and redeem us peasants from the landlords.⁹¹

The terms of the proposed emancipation appeared so outrageous to the Abkhaz peasants in Bzyb' district that they questioned the very veracity of Cherepov's instructions and public announcements. The Russian Tsar, surmised the peasants, would not inflict such an injustice on the Abkhaz people. Doubts over the commission's credibility prompted the peasants to form a delegation of popularly elected deputies who would travel to Tiflis, where they could learn "the truth of the matter" and explain the "ancient rights" of the Abkhaz people to the Caucasus Viceroy.⁹² This initiative from below, however, was flatly rejected by Colonel Kon'iar, who interpreted the peasants' demands for a meeting with the Viceroy as an affront

⁹⁰ Ibid., l. 7.

⁹¹ Dzidzariia, 135.

⁹² Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov, 186.

against his authority. At the same time, Kon'iar's own attempts to persuade the increasingly unruly population to cooperate with Cherepov and his aides came to naught.

On 21 July, Kon'iar travelled to the village of Duripsh, the only village in the Bzyb' district that remained relatively calm.⁹³ There, the Governor of Abkhazia addressed an assembly of peasants that numbered approximately three hundred people. Kon'iar's entreaty to the peasants was intended to deliver much-needed clarity on the government's abolitionist plans and compel peasants to cooperate with Cherepov. Explaining the premises of the abolition, Kon'iar declared that the "redemption payments would be paid by the dependent estates and would be converted into monetary value from the estates' natural (labor) duties" of the enslaved and dependent people.⁹⁴ Hoping to reassure the increasingly agitated peasants, Kon'iar also stated that the timing of abolition in Abkhazia had not yet been determined and that "however big or small the redemption payment might be," the government would facilitate such payments by means of regularly scheduled installments, a measure which would presumably ameliorate the financial burden of the peasant reform.⁹⁵ Kon'iar's impassioned speech, however, failed to diffuse tensions. On the contrary, the Governor's suggestion that *ankhae* peasants would be required to purchase their freedom only increased the peasants' already palpable dismay. The threats of punishment for refusal to answer the commission's questions also failed to inspire the peasants' cooperation. The Governor of Abkhazia was forced to leave the village when some of the peasant drew their weapons.

⁹³ Dzidzariia, 138.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

As frustration with the government's abolitionist plans continued to grow, the unrest spilled outside of Bzyb' district and acquired the trappings of a movement that picked up momentum with each passing day. In late July the commission's work in Abkhazia's region of Tsebel'da was suspended indefinitely.⁹⁶ Although the members of Baratov's fact-finding commission in Tsebel'da did not encounter the same kind of hostility from local populations that had gripped the Bzyb' district, the commission's officials deemed it wise to return to Sukhum. Once they reached the capital of Sukhumskiĭ otdel, the commission members submitted a formal request to continue their surveying work among the Abkhaz population on the condition that they refrain from making any official announcements concerning the proposed methods of emancipation in the region.⁹⁷ The growing anti-abolitionist unrest in Abkhazia also affected the government's surveying work in the neighboring Kubanskaia and Terskaia oblasts', where the imperial administration temporarily suspended its investigations into the social organization and land tenure rights of indigenous communities.

Meanwhile, large crowds began to assemble on the outskirts of the village of Lykhny – the historic seat of political power of the Shervashidze dynasty and the administrative capital of Russian governance in Bzyb' district. The great assembly in Lykhny was meant to establish a united front against Russian abolitionist proposals and allow people to speak with a single voice. The crowds of Abkhaz peasants and noblemen continued to swell when Colonel Kon'iar made the fateful decision to meet the ever-growing gathering on 25 July 1866. By early afternoon the great assembly reportedly numbered between five and seven thousand

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁹⁷ RGIA, f. 649, op. 1, d. 409, ll. 39.

people.⁹⁸ Accompanying Colonel Kon'iar was a retinue of officials that included the Head of Bzyb's district Izmaïlov, popularly elected district judges Titu Marganiia, Shmafa Magi, Ivan Godzhgiar-Ipa, and Kamkhaza Khagba, translators, and the brother and nephew of the exiled former Ruler of Abkhazia, Georgi and Alexander Shervashidze.⁹⁹ In Kon'iar's estimation, the presence of the Shervashidze princes was meant to signal the approval of the former ruling dynasty for the government's abolitionist plans. Kon'iar was greeted by eight elected deputies, all *ankhae* peasants, who spoke on behalf of the great Abkhaz gathering. The central point of the deputies' speech revolved around the government's plans to abolish slavery and dependency in Abkhazia by requiring the peasants to pay for their freedom. Thus, the people's discontent did not stem primarily from the fear of losing enslaved people in their possession, although these concerns also played an important role in instigating the rebellion; rather, what bothered *ankhae* peasants the most was the proposed methods of the abolition and the unsettled question of landownership in the region. The peasant deputies once again demanded permission to travel to Tiflis with the Viceroy or, at the very least, receive audience with the Kutais Governor-General in order to convey the people's protest and explain the "ancient" conventions that governed social relations among the Abkhaz people. This meeting, the peasant deputies argued, would help the government to see the errors of their abolitionist designs. Kon'iar flatly rejected these demands and warned that unless the people gathered in

⁹⁸ Dzidzariia, 143.

⁹⁹ Reportedly, it was decided that Cherepov would not accompany Colonel Kon'iar to the meeting with assembly of Abkhaz people and instead await the outcome of the meeting at the palace of the former ruler of Abkhazia in Lykhny. This was a wise decision given Cherepov's hopelessly rotten reputation among the Abkhaz population.

the field started cooperating with the commission and answer its questions in his presence, he would be forced to all the information that the government required by use of force.

Kon'iar's threats to use violence against the great assembly of Abkhaz people triggered almost an immediate violent backlash. The gathering quickly spiraled out of control and marked the crescendo point of the anti-abolitionist unrest. Shots rang chaotically as a large crowd charged towards Kon'iar and his retinue. Reportedly, a small group of the Abkhaz nobles tried to rein in the rage of the crowd, giving Kon'iar and other imperial officials just enough time to escape. The Russian Governor of Abkhazia and his company managed to reach the palace of Abkhazia's exiled former ruler, Prince Mikhail Shervashidze, in the village of Lykhny. However, the stone walls of the palace could not protect the government officials for long. The rebels surrounded, sieged, and ultimately stormed the building. The one hundred Cossacks guarding the premises of the building could not stave off the onslaught of rebels. Over the course of the attack and storming of the palace, the Russian Governor of Abkhazia, Colonel Kon'iar, was brutally murdered. Also killed was the loathsome titular councilor Cherepov, whose body was reportedly severely mutilated; the Head of Bzyb's district Izmailov; and fifty-four officers and Cossacks.¹⁰⁰

The violence in Lykhny and the killing of the Russian Governor of Abkhazia catapulted the rebellion to a greater geographic scope, sending a loud echo throughout the Caucasus isthmus. On the morning of 25 July, the rebels attacked Russian quarantine station in the port town of Gudauty and Russian fortress of Pitsunda.¹⁰¹ Then, the rebels set their sights on

¹⁰⁰ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, l. 237.

¹⁰¹ SEA, f. 416, op. 1, d. 185, ll. 3-4.

Sukhum, the capital of Sukhumskiĭ otdel. The rebels reached the city in the late afternoon of 26 July and laid siege to the main fortress. Anti-government violence also erupted in Abkhazia's region of Tsebel'da and the environs of Sukhum. On July 29th some members of Abkhaz nobility declared Prince Georgi Shervashidze, the son of the deposed Ruler of Abkhazia, the new Ruler (*vladetel'*) of the Abkhaz land.¹⁰² News of the rebellion in Abkhazia reached all levels of the tsarist administration throughout the entire Caucasus region.¹⁰³ Government officials expressed concern that the news of anti-abolitionist violence in Abkhazia might inspire equally devastating insurrections. A particularly tense situation unfolded in Kabarda where the surveying work of the estate-land commission engendered resistance from local slaveholders.¹⁰⁴

Despite the powerful momentum that stemmed from the rebellion's early success, rebel forces could not expel the Russian military presence from Abkhazia. After nearly two weeks of besieging the capital of Sukhumskiĭ otdel, the seemingly endless reinforcements of Russian soldiers, Cossacks, and militia succeeded in pushing back the rebel forces, eventually initiating a widescale counterattack. For all their courage and commitment to resisting the government, the rebels simply could not sustain a prolonged military campaign against the numerically and materially superior Russian military. In addition, despite the broad popular support of the rebellion, a significant number of Abkhaz nobles refused to join the hostilities and remained either neutral or firmly loyal to the Russian government. Prince Georgi

¹⁰² Dzidzariia, 158.

¹⁰³ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, ll. 33-33 ob. See also, GAKK, f. 452, op. 2, d. 517, ll. 1-91 ob.

¹⁰⁴ GAKK, f. 452, op. 2, d. 593, l. 8.

Shervashidze, whom the rebels declared the new Ruler of Abkhazia, had passively accepted the leadership role as an unwelcome imposition and had no real desire to fight against the Russians to restore Abkhazia's sovereignty. The prince reported himself to government officials as soon as he could safely do so. The government's investigation into the prince's role in the rebellion quickly cleared him of any wrongdoing; Georgi Shervashidze continued his illustrious career in the Russian state service. By the end of August 1866, the hotbed of the Lykhny Rebellion in Bzyb' district, Tsebel'da, and Sukhum okrug had been subdued. The government issued arrest warrants against the most active instigators of the violence. As a consequence, approximately thirty men were arrested, accused of sedition, and sentenced to hard labor in exile.¹⁰⁵ In addition, three men were court-martialed, sentenced to death, and publicly executed in April 1867.¹⁰⁶

In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, the imperial government instated a series of administrative reforms and punitive measures. Their aim was to pacify the population and further integrate Abkhazia into the existing legal and political landscape of Russian colonial governance in the Caucasus. Notably, the tsarist authorities postponed the implementation of the peasant reform in Abkhazia. On 20 August the government ordered all villages accused of participation in the rebellion to surrender their weapons under threat of arrest and exile.¹⁰⁷ In the aftermath of this disarmament campaign, the government reportedly confiscated 5,667 rifles and 670 pistols across sixty-three villages.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, the Abkhaz population

¹⁰⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, ll. 207-208.

¹⁰⁶ Dzidzariia, 183.

¹⁰⁷ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2784, l. 130.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 296-314 ob.

not implicated in participation in or support of the rebellion was forbidden from openly carrying firearms in public.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the government in Tiflis introduced two successive administrative reforms in 1867 and 1868 respectively, working in cooperation with the members of the Caucasus Committee in Saint Petersburg. The reforms reorganized the administrative map of Abkhazia and established a new administrative hierarchy in the region.¹¹⁰ Finally, General Geïman was appointed as the new Governor of Abkhazia in 1867.

The rebellion also forced the government to temporarily suspend its work collecting data on enslaved population and land tenure rights in the neighboring Kubanskaia oblast' and Terskaia oblast'.¹¹¹ The tsarist authorities were fearful that the rebellion in Abkhazia might spark similar anti-abolitionist unrest across the entire North Caucasus. As such, they preferred to err on the side of caution by advising local estate-land commissions to scale back their surveying efforts. Such fears were certainly not unfounded. The violent backlash against the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia emboldened the Circassian slaveowners to warn the Russian administration that any attempts to take away their slaves would force them to join the rebels in Sukhumskii otdel.¹¹² Although the rebellion in Lykhny did not transform into a region-wide insurrection, echoes of the violence in Abkhazia in the summer of 1866 rang loud in all corners

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., l. 129.

¹¹⁰ For a detailed account of the administrative reforms in Abkhazia in the aftermath of the rebellion see *Polozhenie ob upravlenii Sukhumskim otdelom* in RGIA, f. 1268, op. 12, d. 30, ll. 1-41.

¹¹¹ GAKK, f. 452, op. 2, d. 593, ll. 1-8 ob.

¹¹² GAKK, f. 774, op. 1, d. 172, l. 23.

of the region and threatened to upend the government's plans to abolish slavery in the Caucasus.

Another consequence of the 1866 Lykhny Rebellion was a tragic wave of *muhadzirstvo* that witnessed the departure and resettlement of nearly twenty thousand Abkhaz in the Ottoman Empire. Although the imperial government did not force the Abkhaz population into exile, it actively facilitated their resettlement. Moreover, the government's efforts to assist the Abkhaz population in leaving their homeland frequently took on a religiously prejudiced tone. Many high-ranking government officials in the Caucasus, especially in the coastal areas where the potential for interactions with Ottoman subjects was the greatest, viewed the Muslim identity of the Abkhaz communities as a threat to the stability of Russian imperial rule in Abkhazia. The same officials were eager to settle Russian Christian colonists in the emptied lands. Indeed, so strong was the government's desire to encourage voluntary resettlement of the Abkhaz population into the Ottoman Empire that it even permitted Abkhaz slaveholders to take their enslaved people with them. This self-serving policy that further casts doubt on the abolitionist credentials of Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus.

On 9 February 1867, nearly six months after the Lykhny Rebellion, the Caucasus Viceroy sent an extremely important letter to the Kutais Governor-General.¹¹³ The letter contained a proclamation to the residents of Abkhazia and Tsebel'da which had a momentous impact on the history of the Russian abolitionist campaign in Abkhazia. First and foremost, the proclamation contained words of admonition directed at the Abkhaz rebels and their supporters. The imperial government, the Viceroy insisted, would not tolerate such brazen disobedience, and would not abandon its plans to abolish slavery in the region: "The criminal

¹¹³ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 189-189 ob.

resistance of the residents of Abkhazia and Tsebel'da," declared the Viceroy, "cannot change the government's decision; slaves and other dependent estates in Sukumskii Otdel will be emancipated..."¹¹⁴ However, the same proclamation also contained a statement akin to a compromise. Those Abkhaz who refused to "unquestioningly" submit to the government's will could leave Abkhazia for "Turkey." Most importantly, the Viceroy permitted the Abkhaz slaveholders who wished to settle in the Ottoman Empire to take their enslaved people with them. Although the proclamation made it clear that the slaveholders had to secure the consent of their enslaved people to accompany them on the difficult journey to the Ottoman Empire, the idea that the slaveowners would make a conscientious effort to secure the cooperation of people whom they saw as their rightful property was ludicrous. This meant that the thousands of enslaved or dependent Abkhaz people who left their homeland in the aftermath of the Lykhny Rebellion had very little choice in the matter.

In a letter addressed to Baron Alexander Nikolai, the Head of the Main Headquarters of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, sent in April 1867, the chief deputy (*pomoshnik Glavnokomanduiushchego*) of the Caucasus Viceroy, Aleksandr Kartsov, noted that "in the recent time the Muslim population of Sukhumskii otdel was discovered to have an aspiration to leave for Turkey."¹¹⁵ Kartsov went on to suggest that "given the political considerations, it was deemed necessary to not only avoid discouraging this resettlement but, on the contrary, provide all possible government assistance with the view of weakening the Muslim element on the eastern shores of the Black Sea."¹¹⁶ Reports from Abkhazia indicated that nearly the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., l. 189.

¹¹⁵ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 3167, l. 1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., l. 1 ob.

entire population of the Tsebel'da region was planning to leave their homeland. These developments prompted Kartsov to recommend initiating the preliminary stages of a colonization campaign. Their aim would be to settle between 100 and 200 ethnically Russian families in Tsebel'da who already lived in other parts of the Caucasus and had developed familiarity with managing their homesteads in this environment.

The same sentiments were echoed by then-Governor of Abkhazia, General Geïman, who contended that the political loyalty of Russian settlers would strengthen the government's hold on Abkhazia, while the settlers' "industriousness" could serve as a model to "the native Abkhaz population."¹¹⁷ In 1867, Geïman submitted a project titled "On Settling Russian Settlements in Tsebel'da and Dal."¹¹⁸ Tsebel'da, argued Geïman, must be settled with "pure-blooded Russian settlers, who must not be assembled from some human rabble."¹¹⁹ On the contrary, continued Geïman, these settlers "must serve as the archetype of labor productivity." This, according to the General, would serve "as the best channel for the Russification of Abkhazia, whose veins will be injected with a new stream of blood."¹²⁰ The plans to colonize the Tsebel'da region were put into action in 1868 and were signified by the publication of an advertisement in the government-run newspaper *Kavkaz* encouraging the colonization in November of the same year.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., ll. 18-24 ob.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., l. 18.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., l. 19.

¹²⁰ Ibid., l. 19 ob.

¹²¹ "Neskol'ko slov o zaselenii Tsebel'dy," *Kavkaz*, № 129 (November 1868), ll. 3-4.

Finally, although the imperial government had suspended its surveying work in preparation for the abolition of slavery in Abkhazia, it never abandoned the plans to emancipate enslaved and dependent people. Thus, on 23 April 1867, the Caucasus Viceroy sanctioned the creation of a Sukhum estate-land commission, which embarked on yet another mission to survey all regions of Abkhazia and collect the data required for the emancipation of dependent and enslaved peoples in the region.¹²² The nearly two years of the commission's investigative work laid the legislative ground for the universal emancipation of enslaved and dependent people as well as the land-tenure reform in Abkhazia.

The Road to Abolition After the Lykhny Rebellion

The Sukhum estate-land commission was chaired by lieutenant colonel Kraevich and included two additional members: lieutenant colonel Shreder and major Mombeli. The members of the commission visited each administrative district in Sukhumskiï otdel, where they conducted many interviews and drafted numerous reports. In comparison to the tumultuous tenure of the Baratov's commission, the surveying work of the Sukhum estate-land commission proceeded without any incidents or resistance from the Abkhaz population. However, while the estate-land commission continued to gather information on a local level in Abkhazia, the capital of the Russian imperial enterprise in the Caucasus, Tiflis, became an equally important site for determining the future of abolition in Abkhazia.

Concerned by the possibility of an unfavorable outcome to the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia, a deputation of Abkhaz nobles approached the Russian Governor of Abkhazia,

¹²² SEA, f. 231, op. 1, d. 8 (b), l. 1. Also, accompanying Prince Grigorii Shervashidze were *tavada* Bata Emukhvari, Konstantin Inal-ipa, Misoust Marshaniia, and *amista* Titu Marganiia.

General Gemian, with a request to secure an audience with the Viceroy.¹²³ Gemian approved the nobles' request and communicated their desire for a dialogue with the Viceroy. The deputation of the Abkhaz nobility under the leadership of Prince Grigoriï Shervashidze travelled to Tiflis, where it reportedly received a "warm" welcome from the Caucasus Viceroy.¹²⁴ At the same time, the government invited the members of the dependent estates to elect deputies and bring their testimonies to Tiflis.¹²⁵ To facilitate the deliberation of the deputies' statements, the Viceroy established a special ad-hoc committee under the chairmanship of Prince Bagration-Mukhranskiï. The committee also included the Head of the Mountainous Administration, General Pavlov; the Governor of Abkhazia; General Gemian; the Chair of the Sukhum estate-land commission, Colonel Kraevich; and other high-ranking government officials. It is also important to mention that the deliberative committee established by the Viceroy worked in tandem with the aforementioned Committee for the emancipation of dependent estates in the mountainous tribes of the Caucasus. The convoluted system of bureaucratic apparatuses dedicated to the question of abolition and land redistribution in Abkhazia reflected what appears to be the government's sincere desire to hear testimonies from all social estates in Abkhazia. In short, the deputations and lobbying efforts of the Abkhaz nobility and the dependent peasants in Tiflis played an equally important part in shaping the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia.

¹²³ Aleksandr D'iachkov-Tarasov, "Abkhazia i Sukhum in XIX stoletii," 201.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Here it is important to note that not all categories of the dependent estates were invited to send deputies to Tiflis. The deputies representing the interests of dependent peasants consisted exclusively of *ankhae* peasants. The most subjugated estates of *akhashala* and *akhuiu* peasants had no representation during the legislative deliberations concerning the future of abolition in Abkhazia.

The testimonies of the deputies who represented the interests of the Abkhaz nobility and the dependent estates provided two diametrically opposed narratives on the nature of landownership and social dependency in Abkhazia. The camp of Abkhaz nobles claimed the landownership rights modeled on the seigniorial rights that had been prevalent in Tiflisskaia and Kutaiskaia gubernii and Mingrelia before serfdom was abolished in these regions.¹²⁶ In other words, the Abkhaz nobles hoped to secure the same generous entitlements that the imperial government had bestowed on the landlords of eastern and western Georgia in the aftermath of the abolition of serfdom. Furthermore, in a formal note submitted in 1870 to Sviatopolk-Mirskiĭ, the chair of the Committee for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates, the nobles argued that the dependent estates in Abkhazia had “never enjoyed unabridged freedom.”¹²⁷ On the contrary, these deputies insisted that peasants constituted the “absolute property of the landowners who had the right to sell them with the land or without it, or simply give them away.”¹²⁸ To support their arguments, the nobles referenced the custom that required the dependent peasants to pay their patron a bride price – *akhhshbyr* – to give their daughters into marriage.¹²⁹ The nobles also drew comparisons between the subjugated status of *agyrva* in Abkhazia to that of *modzhalab* in Georgia’s regions of Mingrelia and Imereti, whom the imperial government recognized as serfs.¹³⁰ The nobles strategically deployed

¹²⁶ Avaliani, *Krest’ianskiĭ Vopros v Zakavkaz’e: Krest’ianskaia reforma v Mingrelii, Svanetii, i Sukhumskom otdele* (Odessa, 1913), 73.

¹²⁷ SEA, f. 416, op. 3, d. 1020, ll. 9, 44 ob.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Avaliani, 73.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

vocabulary that referenced the institution of serfdom in Georgia, thus equating the institutions of social subjugation in both regions. In essence, the arguments of the deputies who represented the estate of nobility followed a simple logic. Since the government recognized the seignorial rights of Georgian landowners to the land and peasants, it was required to extend the same recognition to the nobles in Abkhazia.

The deputies representing the interests of the dependent estates were quick to counter the nobles' arguments.¹³¹ The peasant deputies pointed out that the nobles' claims to land contradicted the well-established canons of Abkhazia's customary law, which dictated that land belonged to the person who tilled it. Therefore, the peasants, and specifically the *ankhae* peasants, were the rightful owners of the land. In addition, the peasants rejected suggestions that their personhood belonged to the members of the higher social estate. The peasants' narrative contended that their dependency to the nobles had always been nominal and that the labor obligations which they traditionally performed for the benefit of their patrons hinged on the peasants' consent to such patronship.

Meanwhile, on 2 September 1869 the Sukhum estate-land commission submitted a comprehensive report concerning "the character of the estate and land tenure rights of the Abkhaz population."¹³² The report was delivered for the review and consideration of the Committee for Emancipation of the Dependent Estates in Tiflis. A close reading of the report reveals three analytical categories which undergirded the arguments of its authors. First, the report was descriptive: it provided a thorough overview of different categories of social dependency and enslavement in Abkhazia. Second, the document attempted to analyze and

¹³¹ Ibid., 74.

¹³² SEA, 545, op. 1, d. 422, ll. 72-73 ob.

explain the social significance of dependency in the context of Abkhaz indigenous norms and customary law. Third, the report proposed a set of guidelines for abolishing slavery and the various incarnations of unfree labor in Abkhazia.

When reflecting on the history of slavery and the nature of various forms of unfree labor in Abkhazia, the authors of the report concluded that the broad spectrum of social subjugation in the region was primarily centered on the personal dependency of people to their owners or patrons. “The peculiarities and idiosyncratic nature of such dependency,” suggested members of the Commission, “must be understood on its own terms and within the context of indigenous customs.”¹³³ Landownership, on the other hand, did not feature any role in defining a social hierarchy of subordination in Abkhazia. Furthermore, the report divided personal dependency in Abkhazia into two main categories: unconditional dependency (*bezuslovnaia zavisimost’*) and conditional dependency (*uslovnaia zavisimost’*). Unconditional dependency represented the ultimate form of personal subjugation in Abkhazia; it included all persons with the status of *akhashala*.¹³⁴ Conditional personal dependency, on the other hand, had many gradations. One of the most important features of conditional dependency highlighted in the report was the fact that the liability for the performance of obligations associated with a particular status of conditional dependency was attached to a household rather than an individual. Thus, the members of a dependent household could negotiate and rotate the performance of specific tasks among each other. The number, as well as the kinds of expected labor obligations, remained constant irrespective of the size of any given household. The most onerous type of conditional personal dependency existed among the estates of *akhuiu*, or

¹³³ Ibid., l. 73 ob.

¹³⁴ Ibid., l. 74.

del'makhore and *amatsiurasgu*. Conversely, the least burdensome type of conditional personal dependency existed among the estate of *ankhae* or *piosh*, whose status, the authors suggested, was more akin to that of “vassalage” (*podvlastnost'*).¹³⁵

According to the report, the key to a successful campaign of emancipation in Abkhazia was to dismantle the system of custom-based labor obligations that was assigned to each dependent estate. The Commission argued that the most fundamental indication of a person's dependency, or lack thereof, manifested itself through the performance of obligatory and specific, albeit regionally diverse, labor obligations. Therefore, only by focusing on eliminating the estate-specific labor duties could the government abolish slavery and emancipate all dependent persons in Abkhazia. How could such a task be accomplished? The report answered this question first by recognizing existing forms of social and economic exploitation in Abkhazia as institutions with a long history rooted in oral traditions of the customary law of the land. For all its desire to absorb the Abkhaz people into the social and political milieu of Russian imperial society, the imperial government demonstrated a steadfast (and often self-serving) commitment to respecting the norms and customs of the indigenous communities, as long as these customs did not pose a clear threat to the stability of imperial rule in the region. Thus, in recognizing the legitimacy of slavery and the existing norms of social dependency in Abkhazia, the government also acknowledged the right of the beneficiaries of unfree labor to receive a fair compensation for the inevitable financial losses associated with the government's abolitionist plans.¹³⁶ The Sukhum estate-land commission

¹³⁵ Ibid., l. 75.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 78.

had decisively ruled out any possibility of allowing the government to assume the financial burdens of abolition, thus making even the thought of unconditional emancipation of all persons in Abkhazia a nonstarter. Hence, the next challenge that demanded the government's legislative solution was how to compensate the Abkhaz slaveholders and nobility for losing access to the labor of their slaves and vassals.

While it was impossible to assign a fair monetary value to a person's labor on account of the still-feudal nature of economic relations in the region, the report suggested that the Russian administration could determine the cost of redemption payments based on the average value of labor output, i.e., the estimated monetary value of the goods and services generated by enslaved and dependent persons. The estimated value of such labor should approximate the average cost of purchasing an enslaved person or average cost of redemption payment for a dependent household.¹³⁷ In essence, the Commission suggested that the financial burden for obtaining freedom must fall squarely on the shoulders of enslaved and dependent persons.

The Abolition Charter of 8 November 1870

8 November 1870 marked the formal abolition of slavery and the slave trade in Abkhazia. The document that outlined the chief legislative contours of the abolition had a distinctly descriptive bureaucratic title: *Charter (polozhenie) on abolition of personal dependency and the land-tenure arrangements for the people in Sukhumskii otdel (Abkhazia and Samurzakan)*.¹³⁸ Evidently, Russian abolition of slavery and other forms of servitude was tied to a fundamental reorganization of the land-tenure rights in Abkhazia. The charter was the culmination of many months of legislative deliberation and difficult negotiations between

¹³⁷ Ibid., ll. 77-77 ob.

¹³⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2844, ll. 1-4.

the Abkhaz slave-owners, Sukhum estate-land commission in Abkhazia, the Committee for Liberation of the Dependent Estates in the Mountainous Tribes of the Caucasus in Tiflis, and finally the Caucasus Committee in Saint Petersburg. On the surface, the charter turned the page on the cruel history of slavery and the slave trade in Abkhazia. A close analysis of the charter, however, makes it abundantly clear that “the gift of freedom” contained many onerous conditions, allowing servitude to survive as an interim mechanism for compulsory redemption.

The actual contents of the charter were revealed to the people of Sukhumskiĭ otdel during a public ceremony in Sukhum on 19 February 1871. The timing of the public announcement, which occurred on precisely the same date as the official proclamation that abolished serfdom in the Russian Empire in 1861, was not coincidental. The government deliberately chose this date in order to link the abolition of slavery in Abkhazia to a decade-long campaign to gradual dismantle various institutions of servitude in the empire. Thus, the emancipation of enslaved people in Abkhazia was transformed from an occasion of peripheral historic significance to an integral part of the Russian history of abolitionist reforms. To mark the abolition of slavery in Abkhazia, the Caucasus Viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich Romanov, sent a joyous telegram from Tiflis to then-Governor of Abkhazia, Major-General Vasilĭ Geĭman, in Sukhum on the same day. The Viceroy’s brief note conveyed elated words of “congratulations to the people of Abkhazia and Samurzakan” on the emancipation of all dependent estates in the region.¹³⁹ “May God bless them in this new life,” declared the Viceroy.¹⁴⁰ The newfound

¹³⁹ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 422, l. 946.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

freedom, according to the Grand Duke, was a gift of Russian civilization bestowed on the still-backward tribes of Abkhazia by the “grace of the Great Monarch.”¹⁴¹ The Viceroy expressed hope that the “Tsar’s generosity” would be appreciated by the Abkhaz people and inspire them to prove their loyalty to the state “through deeds and feelings.”¹⁴² Of course, the cheerful tone of the Viceroy’s telegram belied the harsh realities of the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia.

So, what were the specific provisions of the charter that facilitated the abolition of slavery and other forms of personal and economic dependency in Sukhumskii otdel? The charter was organized into two sections containing a total of thirty-one articles. The first section outlined provisions for the abolition of “personal dependency” for each category of the dependent estate in Abkhazia. The second section provided regulations for the land-tenure reform in the region. Underlying each article of abolition and the land-tenure reform was an important footnote that granted the Caucasus Viceroy virtually unlimited executive authority to further “develop any of the clauses contained in the charter and determine the order of their implementation at his own discretion.”¹⁴³ The charter also deployed an eclectic combination of Russian civil laws and Abkhaz customary law to determine the format of the temporary-obligatory service, set the monetary range of redemption payments, and adjudicate disputes for each category of the dependent estate.

Compared to other abolitionist acts implemented in the 1860s by the imperial government in different regions of the Caucasus, the charter for Abkhazia was a comparatively short document. Nevertheless, with a few important exceptions, the charter followed an already

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2844, l. 1.

familiar pattern of abolition. It established two paths to freedom for the enslaved people. The first path envisioned a compulsory and strict adherence to the emancipation provisions outlined in each article of the charter in accordance with a person's status of enslavement or dependency. The office of Peace Mediator, which served as the state-appointed intermediary between the Abkhaz slaveholders and enslaved or dependent people, had the authority to determine the exact terms of these emancipation contracts. This path placed the imperial government at the center of the abolitionist reform. The second path invited the slaveholders and their enslaved and dependent people to negotiate and draft individual voluntarily emancipation agreements (*dobrovol'noe soglashenie*). Article nineteen of the charter explicitly encouraged the enslaved people and their owners to enter into such an agreement at their own discretion, thus rendering the government a silent observer of the abolition rather than an active participant.¹⁴⁴ The charter, in this case, served as a guide for negotiating the precise terms of emancipation agreements, providing the slaveholders and enslaved people considerable flexibility in determining the costs of redemption. Once the general terms of an emancipation agreement had been drafted, it was up to the office of the Peace Mediator to give its final blessing by notarizing the final draft of the written document. The imperial government imposed only one hard requirement on the notarization of voluntary emancipation agreements: verification that the terms of such agreements could not exceed the maximum four-year term of mandatory labor obligations, nor exceed the maximum permitted threshold of the redemption payment, which was assigned to each category of enslavement or dependency.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2844, l. 3.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Polozhenie dictated that formerly enslaved people could fulfill the terms of their emancipation contracts either through the performance of long-established and custom-based labor duties for a period lasting no more than four years, or by making a direct payment of an agreed-upon redemption sum, which approximated the monetary cost of the four years of customary labor obligations. One unique feature of Russian abolition in Abkhazia was the fact that individual households of enslaved or dependent peasants had a legally stipulated right to choose how to pay off the redemption debt to their owners. The decision to switch from the performance of customary duties to cash payment (or payments in kind using cattle, fabric, and/or other valuable goods) could be made at any point during the four-year tenure of the temporary-obligatory service. This right was clearly affirmed in article twenty-one of the charter.¹⁴⁶ It is important to note that similar abolitionist legislation in other regions of the Caucasus mountains concerning changes in the terms of redemption agreements always required the consent of slaveowners. The kind of empowering law-making established in Abkhazia for the benefit of the most downtrodden in society constituted an unusual departure from the government's traditional support of the financial interest of slaveholders in the Caucasus. In addition, to facilitate the process of emancipation, article twenty-two encouraged the "development of the practice of surety (*poruchitel'stvo*)," which could guarantee the fulfillment of an emancipation contract by a third party.¹⁴⁷

The momentous declaration that officially abolished slavery in Abkhazia was clearly spelled out in article two of the charter. The article boldly heralded the abolition of all forms

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

of “personal dependency among all people of Sukhumskiĭ otdel and specifically: *akhashala*, *akhuiu*, *amatsirasgu*, and *ankhae* in Abkhazia and *akhashala*, *del'makhore*, *moĭnale*, and *pioishi* in Samurzakan’.”¹⁴⁸ The same article granted the rights of free rural residents (*svobodnyĭ sel'skiĭ obyvatel'*) to all estates listed in the charter beginning from the day of the charter's public promulgation. However, following the already established practice of delaying freedom to enslaved people in the Caucasus, the imperial government tied the right to personal freedom to several conditions. According to article three of the charter, all emancipated persons acquired the vaguely defined status of temporarily-obligated servants and were required to “continue performing the same customary services and labor obligations for the benefit of their owners for the duration of no more than four years.”¹⁴⁹ The prerequisite of four years of obligatory service effectively negated the spirit of abolition and gave the moribund institutions of servitude and slavery in Abkhazia a state-sponsored lifeline. True to its commitment to protect the financial interests and social wellbeing of slave-owners in the Caucasus, the government deployed the system of temporary-obligatory service as a transitional measure intended to provide the slaveholders with ample time to adjust their financial affairs and transition to a fledgling free-labor market. For the enslaved people, the system of temporary-obligatory service placed a burdensome price tag on one's freedom and further stunted their life chances.

The charter assigned a specific set of redemptive obligations to every dependent estate in Abkhazia. Article four summarized temporary labor obligations of *akhashala*, the most subjugated dependent estate. Although the charter granted enslaved *akhashala* freedom, the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

article contradicted the promises of emancipation by mandating that all temporary-obligated *akhashala* remain “in complete obedience to their owners in accordance with the laws and customs of the land” for the obligatory four-year term. Thus, the imperial government allowed slavery to continue its miserable existence in Abkhazia under a different name for an additional four years. The state-sponsored protection of the social status quo in Abkhazia left the social conditions of enslaved *akhashala* unchanged, with one important exception. A brief footnote in article four gave *akhashala* the right to marry without permission of their owners. At the same time, the law exempted slaveholders from any responsibility to care or provide for children born in such marriages.

Article four also enumerated an exceptionally short list of slaveholder responsibilities to the emancipated but still dependent *akhashala*. Specifically, the owners of *akhashala* were legally required to provide them with “provisions, clothing, dwelling, and warmth, which they [*akhashala*] enjoyed prior to the publication of the charter.”¹⁵⁰ The slaveholders were also legally responsible for the maintenance of *akhashala* who could not perform labor obligations on account of their age or health for the term of four years. Evidently, the law limited the slaveholders’ obligations to ensure *akhashala*’s basic survival. The charter made no mention of the necessity to respect the human dignity or bodily autonomy of *akhashala*.

The charter allowed temporary obligated *akhashala* to purchase their freedom with cash or other valuable goods. According to article six, a temporary obligated *akhashala* between the ages of ten and fifty years old could make a redemption payment in an amount that ranged between 50 and 120 silver rubles.¹⁵¹ Women between the ages of ten and forty-

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., l. 1 ob.

five years old could purchase their freedom for precisely the same monetary range. Determining the final cost of a redemption payment for individual *akhashala* was left up to negotiations between enslaved *akhashala* and other owners. If the two parties could not agree on a fair cost of redemption, the office of Peace Mediator could arbitrate such disagreements and assign a redemption amount based on calculations of the average annual cost of manual labor performed by male or female *akhashala*. Additionally, *akhashala* children aged ten and younger, men fifty or older, and women forty-five and older at the time of public promulgation of the abolition charter, were to be emancipated without the need to pay redemption money to their owner.¹⁵² Lastly, article seven of the charter allowed temporarily obligated *akhashala* who opted to fulfill the four-year-term of their emancipation through manual labor to fulfill their obligations by making a redemption payment at any time based on the number of remaining years of their obligatory servitude.¹⁵³

Should a conflict emerge between *akhashala* and their owners, article five provided instructions on how such disputes should be resolved. It is important to note that these instructions departed from the government's traditional reliance on the indigenous customary law. In addition to the established Abkhaz customs, the charter explicitly referenced the statutes that regulated emancipation of Russian household serfs in 1861.¹⁵⁴ In specific terms,

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ An interesting footnote attached to article seven of the abolition charter stipulated special emancipation provisions for *akhashala* who became enslaved because of their failure to pay off a debt. In such instances, the indebted *akhashala* were required to perform mandatory manual labor or pay their owner a redemption sum in the amount equal to the original debt. For the specific language of this provision see, SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2844, l. 1 ob.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., l. 1 ob.

article five gave *akhashala* the right to bring grievances to the specially created office of Peace Mediator. Depending on the gravity of such grievances and the mediator's ability to corroborate the charges of alleged abuse, the mediator could either dismiss the charges outright or lay them at the feet of a slaveholder. Should a slaveholder fail to rectify their behavior, the peace mediator (in the most extreme cases) had the legal authority to relinquish *akhashala* from the requirement of the temporary-obligatory service, which would grant immediate and unconditional freedom to a formerly enslaved person.

Finally, articles eight and twenty-three of the charter offered a measure of financial relief to the formerly enslaved *akhashala*.¹⁵⁵ First, the government exempted formerly enslaved people from the requirement to pay taxes and/or state dues for the period of ten years beginning from the day of their complete emancipation and settlement as an independent household. Second, emancipated *akhashala* were eligible to receive land "in the amount sufficient for fulfilling their daily necessities."¹⁵⁶ Although the size of land allotments for the formerly enslaved people fell under the purview of the new land-tenure statute, *akhashala*'s eligibility to receive land represented a much better prospect for social integration and economic self-sufficiency for the most oppressed category of enslaved people in Abkhazia. Also, emancipated *akhashala* who could prove that they became enslaved in violation of the Abkhaz customary law or were sold into slavery in contravention of Russian policies that regulated the slave trade in Abkhazia immediately acquired the status of a free rural resident. Lastly, emancipated *akhashala* whose owners left Abkhazia during the 1867 wave of forced

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

resettlements, along with *akhashala* widows and children of captured Russian soldiers, could count on receiving immediate freedom without having to pay redemption to their owners.¹⁵⁷

The next group to be emancipated was the enslaved sharecropping families – *akhuiu* and *del'makhore*. Article nine provided a specific list of labor obligations, which the temporarily obligated *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* were required to perform for the benefit of their owners over four years.¹⁵⁸ First, “in accordance with the existing customs,” *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* families were required to provide a set number of people per household to perform agricultural work for a total of fifty days per calendar. Second, each household was required to cook *gomi*¹⁵⁹ and corn for “the owner’s table” as prescribed by the established Abkhaz customs. And third, *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* boys who served in the households of their families’ owners at the time of the public promulgation of the charter were required to continue their service for the duration of two years before being allowed to return to their families as free persons.¹⁶⁰ The charter effectively abolished a multitude of other custom-based servitude obligations of *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* peasants.

The charter also provided the emancipated *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* with the option to fulfill the four-year term of obligatory servitude through the payment of a redemption sum. For example, article ten permitted *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* households to make a redemption payment in lieu of mandatory agricultural work on the lands belonging to their owners. The

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 1 ob.

¹⁵⁹ *Gomi* is a staple of the traditional Georgian cuisine (particularly the Samegrelo region) made from cornmeal, which is often topped with strips of *sulguni* cheese.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 2.

government calculated the redemption payment based on the number of workers provided by each *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* household, with a base estimate of forty silver rubles for four years of agricultural labor per worker. Thus, a household that sent two workers would be required to pay eighty silver rubles in redemption money. Finally, *akhuiu* or *del'makhore* households that sent three or more workers to work in the fields of their owners would be required to pay 120 silver rubles to fulfill the terms of their emancipation.¹⁶¹ Next, the government estimated the cost of four years of mandatory cooking of *gomi* and corn to be equal to the redemption sum of forty silver rubles.¹⁶² Lastly, the charter established twenty silver rubles as the monetary value of two years of manual labor performed by *akhuiu* or *del'makhore* boys at the households of their owners. Therefore, the total cost of a redemption payment for each individual household of emancipated *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* peasants could range greatly depending on such factors as the number of people in any given household and the kinds of services that the formerly enslaved sharecroppers were already performing on the eve of the abolition.

The charter also established special emancipation provisions for *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* peasants who had not yet been settled on a separate plot of land at the time that the Peasant Reform in Abkhazia was announced. These peasants continued to live in the household of their owners despite the change of their enslavement status from *akhashala* to *akhuiu* or *del'makhore*. Article eleven exempted these peasants from the temporary servitude

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² The actual amount of the redemption for the cost associated with cooking *gomi* and corns of the former slaveholders could be adjusted based on the total number of *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* households who provided this type of servitude to their owners and the frequency with which each household was required to cook and deliver this food to their respective owners.

requirement if they could pay a redemption sum in the amount that “equaled half of the redemption amount which was set for *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* households that send one agricultural worker and cook *gomi* and corn for their owner, i.e. forty silver rubles.”¹⁶³ In addition, a footnote attached to article eleven promised the same ten-year-long tax exemption as well as eligibility to receive a land allotment to former *akhashala* who transitioned into the status of *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* peasants and therefore lacked land by continuing to live in the household of their owner.¹⁶⁴

The following section of the charter dedicated two articles to regulating the process of emancipation for *amatsirasgu* and *moĭnale* peasants. The charter preserved the already existing custom-based labor obligations of *amatsirasgu* and *moĭnale* peasants. Namely, article twelve required each *amatsirasgu* and *moĭnale* household to send one worker to continue performing agricultural work for the benefit of their owners for the period of four years. The number of the required working days ranged between two to three days per week or five to six days per week depending on the customs of a specific region. The emancipated but still obligated *amatsirasgu* and *moĭnale* peasants also had the option of fulfilling the terms of their obligatory service through payment of redemption money. Article thirteen set precise redemption costs for different categories of *amatsirasgu* and *moĭnale* households. Households that sent one worker to perform agricultural work for two to three days per week were required to pay a redemption amount of forty silver rubles. Households that sent one worker for five to six days of work per week were required to pay eighty silver rubles as redemption.

¹⁶³ Ibid., l. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Ankhae and *pioshi* were the last category of the dependent estate in Abkhazia whose eligibility to obtain freedom was attached to the four-year term of temporary obligation service. Given the economic rather than personal nature of *ankhae* and *pioshi*'s dependency, the terms of their obligatory services were comparatively light and adhered strictly to Abkhaz customary law. Article fifteen outlined four specific obligations that *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants were required to perform for the benefit of their patrons.¹⁶⁵ First, *ankhae* and *pioshi* were required to perform "the meat duty" by delivering either "a goat, calf, lamb, parts of a cow, lamb, and pig" to their patron's house during a "known" time of year. Second among the obligations was the delivery of a "usual quantity of corn," not exceeding eight *okalat*¹⁶⁶. Third was the delivery of a "usual quantity of wine," not exceeding eight *abkhal*¹⁶⁷. The fourth and last obligation that *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants were required to perform for the period of four years was the "performance of agricultural labor in the usual amount but not exceeding three days of work per year."¹⁶⁸ The charter formally abolished all other kinds of customary obligations that *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants had traditionally performed for their owners. Article sixteen of the charter allowed the performance of labor duties stipulated by the law to be substituted for a payment of an agreed-upon redemption sum through cash, cattle, or other valuable goods.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., l. 2 ob.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Concluding the list of abolitionist provisions was a set of sweeping measures that applied to all categories of enslavement and personal dependency in Abkhazia. For example, article seventeen of the charter mandated that “all property belonging to people emancipated from personal dependency must remain in their inalienable possession.”¹⁷⁰ This clear insistence on protecting the property rights of enslaved and dependent people in Abkhazia constituted yet another important departure from the government’s pattern of yielding to the demands of slaveholders to control as much of the property belonging to enslaved and dependent people as possible. Equally important was article eighteen, which stipulated that “the land belonging to the dependent estates at the time of their emancipation” was required to remain in their sole possession and could not be used as part of the redemption settlement. This measure ensured that the largest possible number of emancipated persons in Abkhazia could have access to land – arguably the most important asset in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. The charter also barred slaveholders from selling the “labor of emancipated persons without obtaining their explicit consent.”¹⁷¹ Of particular importance was a policy that granted immediate freedom to “wrongly enslaved *akhashala*, *akhuiu* or *del’makhore*, as well as orphans from *akhuiu*, *del’makhore*, *amatsiurasgu*, or *moñnale*” estates who lived in the households of their owners at the time of the abolition. Finally, a special clause in article twenty-three guaranteed immediate and unconditional freedom to all *akhashala*, *akhuiu*, and *amatsiurasgu* who had been released from slavery but later captured and once again enslaved by a mountainous tribe of the northwestern Caucasus.¹⁷² These far-reaching abolitionist

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., l. 3 ob.

policies offered different categories of emancipated persons a certain degree of protection against the rapacity and potential abuses of their former owners, who could attempt to subjugate the people who once lived under their authority.

The 1870 *Polozhenie* was undoubtedly a historic document that put an indecisive end to the centuries-long history of enslavement and the slave trade in Abkhazia. The charter provided a comprehensive roadmap for the gradual emancipation of all enslaved and dependent people in the region. It was, of course, far from perfect. In many ways, this document betrayed the spirit of abolition. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to underestimate the effects of the Peasant Reform on Abkhaz society. For all its shortcomings, the Russian abolition marked a critical rupture in the lives of indigenous Abkhaz people. Moreover, in addition to eliminating the various categories of personal dependency, the charter also introduced a fundamental reorganization of land-tenure rights in Abkhazia.

The Abolition Charter of 8 November 1870

The imperial government introduced the land-tenure reform in Abkhazia simultaneously with the abolition of slavery in the region. The second section of the 1870 *Polozhenie* contained eight articles that served to establish a system of eligibility for receiving land allotments in post-reform Abkhazia.¹⁷³ As in other regions of the Caucasus where the imperial government implemented land reforms, the tsarist officials set out to artificially create a class of loyal landed aristocracy. These new landed elites, the government surmised, would serve as a potent bulwark against foreign and domestic threats to Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus. The authors of the land reform used indigenous categories of social privilege as the

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, ll. 3 ob. – 4.

main criterion for determining the size of land allotments distributed to the Abkhaz community. According to this land distribution scheme, the princely and noble Abkhaz families were legally entitled to receive generous land grants from the government as their inalienable private property by virtue of their social class. In addition, the land reform rewarded families and individuals of less illustrious genealogies with sizeable land allotments from the state, provided that their ancestors' loyalty to Russian Tsars could be proven through words and deeds.

If Russian policies of awarding huge allotments of the best agricultural lands to the indigenous elites as inalienable private property was a standard and effective tool of cooptation, which the imperial government deployed everywhere in the Caucasus, then the state's land policy toward common peasants and formerly enslaved people in Abkhazia constituted an important deviation from established practices. Over the course of the land reform in the Caucasus mountains, the imperial government installed a communal land tenure regime in virtually all regions of the Caucasus. The communal land tenure in the Caucasus replicated the system of administrative organization of peasant communes in European Russia. Such a system limited peasants' overall mobility and restricted the property rights of individual peasant households to land. In Abkhazia, government officials concluded that indigenous customs did indeed recognize private ownership of land. Therefore, at the recommendation of the Sukhum estate-land commission, the tsarist authorities in Tiflis departed from mandating communal landownership, preferring instead to endow each peasant household with a private plot of land. Article twenty-four of the charter guaranteed "all residents of Sukhumskii otdel, of the lowest and highest social estates..., the right to manorial, plowing, and gardening lands, which according to the customs of the land, constituted a

person's or household's private property."¹⁷⁴ In practical terms this meant that enslaved or dependent peasants who were already settled on land at the time of their emancipation were allowed to keep this land as their inalienable property. In addition to individual private ownership of land, article twenty-five entitled each rural community to receive an unspecified quantity of land from an area adjacent, if possible, to village lands, which was not privately owned according to the Abkhaz customs, based on the needs of the rural community.

Specific groups of slaveholders and members of the privileged social estates could expect to receive a generous land grant from the tsarist government. Namely, article twenty-six promised former patrons of emancipated *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants "special land allotments" of two *desiatina* per each household of *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants.¹⁷⁵ Then, article twenty-seven entitled the families of *tavada* and *amista* (*zhnoskua* in Samurzakan) social estates, "whose noble genealogy has been proven in accordance with the instructions issued by the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus army," to an additional land allotment that ranged from 25 to 250 *desiatin*.¹⁷⁶ The government tied the final size of such land grants to the customary social privileges of *tavada* and *amista* families and the record of service to the Russian state.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 3 ob. It is also important to note that a footnote attached to the article twenty-four also vested the Caucasus Viceroy with the authority to issue ad hoc rules that set limits on the Abkhaz customary law with the purpose of systematizing the process of review of overlapping claims to land.

¹⁷⁵ The article also contained a special provision for emancipated *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants who owed the debt of redemption to multiple patrons. The charter stipulated that persons who shared patronship over the same households of *ankhae* and *pioshi* peasants would divide the additional land allotments equally among each other.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 3 ob.

¹⁷⁷ A few words on how the imperial government verified noble pedigrees among the Abkhaz claimants to aristocracy are in order. One of the tasks of the Sukhum estate-land commission, the chief regional body responsible for investigating the social structure of the

Thus, noble families with a long and easily verifiable record of loyal service to the empire could count on a generous reward in the form of a large land grant from the Russian government. It is also very important to note that the same article vested the Viceroy with the authority to increase the size of land allotments for *tavada* and *amista* families whose exceptional record of distinguished service to the empire warranted such awards.¹⁷⁸

The Russian land-tenure policies toward emancipated *akhashala* were arguably one of the most important parts of the land reform in Abkhazia. While the government generally denied enslaved people the right to own land in many regions of the North Caucasus, article twenty-eight of the charter entitled emancipated *akhashala* to receive a land allotment not exceeding “five *desiatin* per each male or female soul.”¹⁷⁹ To be clear, the suggested size of the land

indigenous Abkhaz society, was assessment and verification of families’ claims to the status of nobility. To that end, in 1870 the Caucasus Viceroy had issued special instructions for “claimants belonging to the estates of *tavada* and *amista* (*zhnoskua*).” According to these instructions, a family that claimed the title of *tavada* or *amista* had to submit a written affidavit to the government officials within a three-month period beginning from 15 October 1870 to 15 January 1871. The written affidavit had to include such information as the place of a family’s residency, names of all male and female family members and their age, names of the ancestors in the first and second generations, and any written documents that could support the claims to the family’s noble origins. Those families who failed to submit an affidavit in support of their claims to aristocracy within the designated by the government three-month timeframe automatically forfeited their claims to noble origins. In addition, the instructions encouraged claimants of the *tavada* and *amista* titles to submit a list of any awards that the Russian imperial had conferred on these families in recognition of their distinguished civil or military service to the Russian state. The tsarist government then used this documentation during the land reform in Abkhazia to determine the size of the land allotments for *tavada* and *amista* families. The noble families whose loyalty and distinguished service to the Russian state was verified through government-issued awards and other marks of recognition received the largest possible allotment of land. The Viceroy’s instructions concerning ascertainment of the privileged status of the Abkhaz nobility was published in the Russian language in newspaper *Kavkaz* – the government’s chief voice for public promulgation of the government’s policies and news in print. See, *Kavkaz*, №115, (Oct. 1870).

¹⁷⁸ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2844, l. 4.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 4.

allotment for emancipated *akhashala* was meager. Nevertheless, the decision to include formerly enslaved people into the land distribution scheme on par with other residents of Abkhazia was a significant step towards the eventual integration of emancipated *akhashala* into Abkhaz society. All other unoccupied arable lands in Abkhazia, according to the charter, became the property of the state. Article thirty-one of the charter also vested the Caucasus Viceroy with the authority to issue special instructions on surveying and distributing available lands.¹⁸⁰

The Sukhum estate-land commission continued its work in Abkhazia until 1876 when it was reorganized into the “Sukhum land commission.”¹⁸¹ The decision to drop the word “estate” in the commission’s name meant to signal the purported resolution of the peasant question in Abkhazia. Indeed, according to the government’s strategic plan all enslaved and dependent people in the region would fulfill the terms of their temporary-obligatory service within five years after the official promulgation of the abolitionist charter. To that end, the government supplemented the central provisions of the 1870 *Polozhenie* with additional legislative acts that established institutional abolitionist infrastructure in Abkhazia and streamlined the process of emancipation and land distribution in the region. In 1871, the government issued additional instructions that established “the office for the affairs of the formerly dependent estates.”¹⁸² That same year, the imperial government issued “rules

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ The change in the commission’s name signified the purported resolution of the peasant question in Abkhazia and the government’s shifting focus on the question of landownership and land distribution in the region. Of course, the dependency of peasants to their former patrons did not end in 1876.

¹⁸² SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 422, ll. 216-216 ob.

concerning the reconciliation of disputes by peace mediators,” as well as “rules for appealing the decisions and actions of peace mediators and the office for the affairs of the formerly dependent estates.”¹⁸³ This body of laws facilitated the period of transition from the state of temporary dependency to absolute freedom for *ankhae* (*piosh*), *amatsiurasu* (*moĩnale*), *akhuiu* (*del'makhore*) peasants and enslaved *akhashala*.

Conclusion

The outcomes of the Russian abolition and land reform in Abkhazia left a complicated legacy of missed opportunities. The abolition of slavery in Abkhazia was, without a doubt, a turning point in the history of the region and its people. However, the government’s steadfast commitment to protecting the financial interests of the Abkhaz nobility and slaveholders undermined the promises of abolition for the vast majority of the population. At every stage of the reforms, the tsarist administration prioritized hopelessly anachronistic prerogatives of the Abkhaz social elites, profoundly miscalculating the resources necessary for uplifting formerly enslaved and dependent people from the tenacious bonds of social subjugation.

First, although the 1870 *Polozhenie* formally abolished slavery in Abkhazia and declared all enslaved and dependent people juridically free subjects, this declaration proved to be a mere disheartening formality. The system of temporary-obligation (*vremennaia obiazannost'*), which required different categories of enslaved and dependent people to perform customary labor duties for the benefit of their patron for several years, effectively negated the spirit of abolition and extended the lifeline of inhumane and unfree labor in Abkhazia. This policy unjustly derailed the life chances of formerly enslaved and dependent people and inhibited their economic opportunities in Abkhazia, all in the name of sustaining

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, l. 305.

the economic primacy of the moribund class of indigenous aristocracy. Further, the imperial government earmarked colossal resources to compensate the former slaveholders for the loss of free labor. The tsarist government set aside an enormous amount of 409,410 silver rubles to ensure the “economic stability” of the Abkhaz nobility and the former slaveholders. According to this compensation scheme, the owners of *ankhae* and *piosh* peasants were set to receive a one-time disbursement of 151,410 silver rubles.¹⁸⁴ The owners of *amatsiurasu* and *moĩnale* peasants received 18,000 silver rubles.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, the owners of *akhuiu* and *del'makhore* peasants received 200,000 silver rubles disbursement from the state.¹⁸⁶ In addition to compensation for the loss of the dependent peasants, each slaveholder was eligible to receive fifty silver rubles from the government’s treasury for every emancipated *akhashala* (enslaved person) in their possession.¹⁸⁷ In stark contrast to the government’s generosity for the Abkhaz nobility and slaveowners, the tsarist administration offered only limited taxation subsidies and provided small grants to the most destitute of formerly enslaved people. Finally, the implementation of the peasant reform in Abkhazia was suspended during the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war, which provoked yet another anti-government rebellion in not only Abkhazia but also Dagestan and Terskaia oblast’. The imperial government violently suppressed the rebellion and responded with severe reprisals that targeted the entire native population of Abkhazia. The performance of what was supposed to be temporary obligations

¹⁸⁴ SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 422, l. 217.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., l. 217 ob.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

continued in many parts of Abkhazia until the imperial government cancelled the outstanding debts of the formerly enslaved and dependent individuals in 1912.¹⁸⁸

Second, in the aftermath of the abolition, the government failed to provide the Abkhaz peasantry with sufficient allotments of land. According to the ill-considered prescriptions of the 1870 *Polozhenie*, emancipated people were eligible to receive between three to seven *desiatin* of land per household. Reportedly, a significant proportion of the land that was earmarked for distribution to the peasantry was categorized as “inconvenient” (*neudobnaia*) – that is, unfit for cultivation. In his report on the outcomes of the abolition, the Russian Government of Abkhazia admitted that “sadly, the Sukhum estate-land commission lacked the requisite means for addressing the multiple and complex tasks that were assigned to the commission by 1870 *Polozhenie*. Consequently, the recently emancipated dependent estates who received freedom are still waiting to get land.”¹⁸⁹ In contrast, members of the Abkhaz nobility were eligible receive up to two hundred and fifty *desiatin* of land. We must also add to this number the special provisions, which promised the Abkhaz nobles and officers an additional ten *desiatin* of land for each order or medal that was in their possession. The government’s own statistics illustrated the stark disparities in landownership between common folk and “members of the privileged class.” According to the government report, by the early 1880s the population of Abkhazia stood at 60,814 people. The peasants accounted for 96.3% of the population, or 58,569 people.¹⁹⁰ In the course of the land reform, the peasants

¹⁸⁸ RGIA, f. 565, op. 6, d. 21489, ll. 27-30 ob.

¹⁸⁹ To view the contents of the entire report, see SEA, f. 545, op. 1, d. 986, ll. 79-116.

¹⁹⁰ *Kavkazskii Kalendar'* (Tiflis, 1883), 247.

received 191,783 *desiatin* of land, equivalent to 62.2% of all arable land in Abkhazia.¹⁹¹ The “privileged classes,” which numbered 2,245 people or 3.6% of the entire population according to government estimates, received 100,093 *desiatin* of arable land, which amounted to 32.4% of all arable lands in Abkhazia.

The trials and tribulations of abolition in Abkhazia notwithstanding, the so-called Peasant Reform marked a moment of profound rupture in the historical timeline of the region. As much as the Russian imperial government foisted the abolition from above, it was the Abkhaz populace who ultimately shaped the course and the outcomes of the emancipation.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

CONCLUSION



Figure 8. Map of the Caucasus Viceroyalty before the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. Source: Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 59.

Russia’s annexation of the Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801 marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Caucasus the consequences of which continue to unfold in the present day. Hence, the year 1801 becomes a convenient point of departure for the study of Russian abolitionism in the region. From that point on, Russia has changed the Caucasus in profound ways just as much as the Caucasus changed Russia. This dissertation argues that that aside from rhetorical condemnations of slavery, abolitionism has never become a guiding

principle or clearly articulated policy that accompanied Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus. Russian abolition of slavery in the Caucasus must be embedded in and understood as part and parcel of the era of the Great Reforms whose historical antecedents emerged from the debacles of the Crimean War (1853-1856). Indeed, until the abolition serfdom in the Russian Empire in 1861, the Russian government was *reluctant* to emancipate the enslaved people and largely turned a blind eye to the practices of slave labor in the Caucasus. The policy of non-interference into the socio-economic order of the conquered communities, particularly in the remote and hostile regions of the North Caucasus, was a deliberate tactic of Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century. In practical terms, this policy recognized enslaved people as the legitimate property of their owners and protected the slaveowners' rights to own enslaved people in return for an oath of allegiance to Russian Tsars.

Comprehending the external and internal upheavals that accompanied the Russian imperial project in the Caucasus is imperative for the deconstruction of the myth of the Russian abolitionism. Building an empire in the mountains proved to be an incredibly difficult feat. The region's geography and spectacular ethnic diversity posed a set of practical security challenges for the establishment of an effective governing institutions. These challenges were further amplified by the presence of Russia's two regional rivals – the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. Further, the desolating outbreaks of cholera, pestilence, and other epidemic diseases became a common occurrence that devastated local economies and engendered social instability. To complicate things even further, corruption among some Russian state officials diverted the much-needed resources from the state treasury and into private pockets of avaricious bureaucrats and military officers. Embezzlement and predatory taxation

antagonized local communities and imposed a great burden on already impoverished peasants. Last, but not least, Russian efforts to build a façade of stability, security, and justice in the region were plagued by the seemingly incessant raids and rebellions against the Russian colonial presence among the empire's new subjects and its neighbors.

Taking a stock of the institutional architecture and governing practices of the Russian imperial administration in the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century, a scholar of the Caucasus, Bruce Grant, offered a very accurate summary of the incongruous nature of tsarist policy making efforts in the region: "To maintain that there was a coherent rule of Russian engagement in the Caucasus throughout the first half of the nineteenth century would be to overstate a set of policies that were remarkably contingent on circumstance, to a large degree determined by competing leaderships, and taking place under regular siege".¹ Hence, beginning from 1801 and until the end of the brutal Caucasus War in 1864, the chief priority of the imperial government in the Caucasus had been to entrench its presence in the region and cement its political hegemony. Abolitionism hardly seemed like an answer to the empire's security woes.

The Russian army entered the region determined to preserve and fully enforce the existing rights and entitlements among the ruling elites for as long as they remained loyal to Russia. Instead of exploring legislative avenues to facilitate universal emancipation and surveying the conquered territories in search of enslaved people, the Russian imperial government was far more preoccupied with pacifying violent resistance against its rule and purchasing political loyalty of the communities under its control. In the decades preceding the abolition, each successive administration approached the question of enslavement and dependency in the

¹ Grant, *The Captive and the Gift*, 27.

region with a notable reluctance to challenge the social status quo preferring instead to manage various forms of unfree labor rather than trying to dismantle them. Indeed, how could an empire that enshrined serfdom in its own laws take up the banner of abolitionism on its imperial periphery? It could not and did not do so.

The abolition of slavery and the accompanying land reform in the nineteenth-century Caucasus had momentous implications for the social, political, and economic landscape in the Caucasus mountains. Indeed, slavery was legally abolished in the Caucasus perhaps for the first time in the region's history. Yet, the reforms had dubious outcomes. The imperial government's insistence on protecting the financial interests of the slaveowners and solidifying the already elevated social position of the indigenous ruling elites meant that the formerly enslaved people remained ever dependent. The post-emancipation status of "temporary obligation" that the government assigned to the formerly enslaved people had *de facto* prolonged their enslavement for several more years. The stigma of enslavement also disqualified many formerly enslaved people from the entitlement to receive a land grant. Once the terms of the temporary obligation were finally completed, the moment that marked the definitive separation from the authority of the slaveowners, the formerly enslaved individuals and families faced uncertain horizons for their future. Similar to the experiences of the household serfs in Georgia, poverty and lack of opportunities for genuine social mobility forced some of the formerly enslaved people to remain in the employ of their former owners as household servants, renters, and sharecroppers with little to no hope of becoming landowners themselves.

While tracing the post-emancipation plight of the formerly enslaved people in the Caucasus would require a substantial time and additional archival research in multiple

countries, the failures of the abolition are evident in the plain sight of two legislative acts issued by the government in Saint Petersburg on the eve of the onset of the World War I. The first legislative act received the approval of Russia's legislative body, the Duma, and the monarch's blessing in 1912.² Following in the footsteps of Stolypin's agrarian reforms in the empire's heartland, the law mandated to end the temporary-obligated status of the formerly enserfed people in the Tiflis, Kutaisi, Erivan, Elisavetopol, and Baku governorates – the administrative units in the South Caucasus, which today comprise such countries as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Nearly five decades after serfdom and servitude were formally abolished in the South Caucasus, nearly one third of formerly enserfed household remained in the state of dependency to their former owners because they were unable to pay off the redemption sum prescribed by the terms of their emancipation. In many cases, the landlords actively undermined the efforts of the temporary-obligated peasants to pay off their redemption debts preferring instead to continue exploiting their labor and services in perpetuity. The 1912 law sought to permanently dismantle the surviving remnants of servitude across the entire South Caucasus region – a feudal atavism that hindered local economy and perpetuated generational cycle of poverty and dependency. The second legislative act was formally adopted in 1913 and meant to address the plight of *raiaty* – an estate of dependent rural communities who continued to perform a broad range of labor obligations and feudal services for the benefit of the ruling elites in places like Dagestan and Zakataly up until 1913.³ The government's investigation determined that in 1910 approximately 70,000 people

² RGIA, f. 565, op. 6, d. 21489, ll. 27-30 ob.

³ RGIA, f. 565, op. 6, d. 21489, ll. 138-144.

remained in the state of feudal dependency in Dagestan and Zakataly.⁴ The 1913 law mandated to end of forms of feudal dependency in Dagestan and Zakataly and committed state funds to compensate Dagestani landowners for the loss of their labor and land that could result from the emancipation. The 1912 and 1913 legislative acts were a very belated response the failures of abolitionist reforms to eradicate anachronistic and unjust practices of unfree labor in the Caucasus. Yet even these legislative efforts failed to put a permanent end to the long legacy of enslavement and various forms of dependency in the region. When the Russian Empire entered the Great War in August 1914, the government suspended its plans to emancipate the dependent communities in the Caucasus and focused its attention on mobilizing the industrial and human resources to win the war. Only the great turmoil of the Bolshevik coup in 1917 and the Civil War (1917-1922) had destroyed the social order that for centuries sustained the institutions of unfree labor in the region.

⁴ RGIA, f. 1276, op. 19, d. 500, l. 7 ob.

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