

# On the role and participation of Chechens in the emergence of the Endirean principality

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**Abstract.** The second half of 16th and early 17th centuries was an important landmark in the history of the peoples of the Northeast Caucasus. That was when essential events greatly influenced the subsequent course of historical processes. Chechens continued to move from the mountains to the plains. Kumyks are settling in the Terek-Sulak interfluvium, which gives birth to the renowned Endirean principality in the region's history. This is where Chechens (Akkits-Aukhovs) and Kumyks (Northern Kumyks) are further divided into separate ethno-territorial groups. The social terminology of the northern Kumyks features the Sala-uzdeni nobility. The emergence of the term among the northern Kumyk is connected with the Sala (Saloi) Chechen ethnic group closely linked with the early stage of the development of the Endirean principality, headed by Sultan-Makhmud. In recognition of their merits, Sultan Mahmud conferred numerous rights and privileges on members of the Sala ethnic group, from whom he found support and encouragement in his difficult time. This was the basis of the formation of a new higher nobility, the Sala-uzdeni, which subsequently came to include members of various ethnic groups. The Chechens continued to fully support Sultan-Makhmud during military and political events of the first quarter of the 17th century, when he was opposed by Dagestani feudals and Russian troops of Terek.

**Keywords:** Terek-Sulak interfluvium, Endirean Principality, Sultan-Mahmud, Saloi, Sala-uzdeni

## 1. Introduction

The socio-political processes taking place in the Terek-Sulak interfluvium at that time are of great importance for the study of the genesis of social institutions and the dynamics of their development in the history of the peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan. The present state of research on documentary sources makes it possible to take a fresh look at the problem of the emergence of social and political institutions in the Northeast Caucasus, such as the Endirean principality and the Sala-Uzdeni class, which historians have long debated.

## 2. Problem Statement

Identify the role and place of Chechens in the formation of the Endirean Principality, and the genesis of the Sala-uzdeni nobility among the Kumyks.

## 3. Research Questions

What historical facts, and documentary sources, corroborate the significant role of Chechens in the fate of the founder of the Endirean Principality, and their active participation in the military and political events in the Terek-Sulak interfluvium in the second half of the 16th and early XVII.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

A study of inter-ethnic contacts between the population of the Terek-Sulak interfluvium and the socio-political implications of these contacts (Fig. 1).

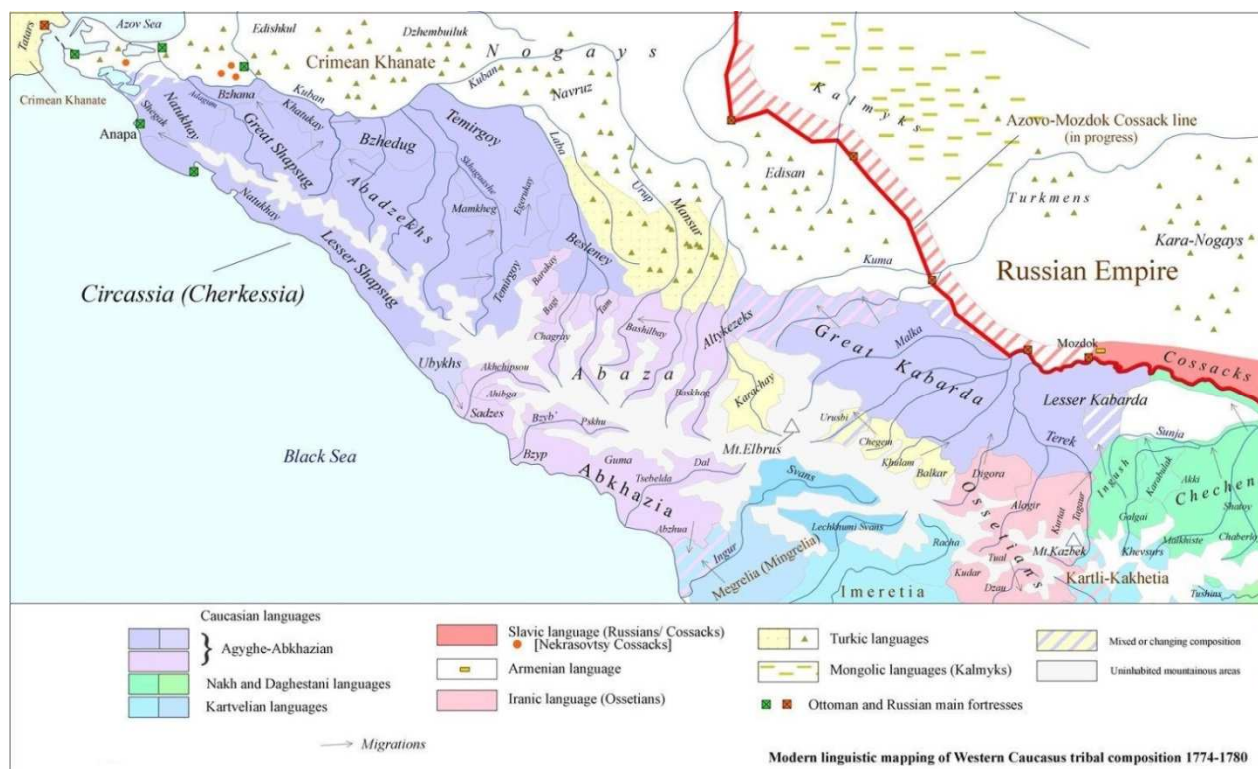
## 5. Research Methods

The research methods used are the principles of historicism, scientific objectivity and consistency, and the analysis of historical sources. The work is structured on a problem-chronological basis.

## 6. Findings

The social term Sala, specific to the northern group of Kumyks, was originally a designation of the Chechen ethnic group living in the Terek-Sulak interfluvium. The penetration of this term into the social nomenclature of this Kumyk group is due to active military and political support of Sultan-Makhmud (Sultan-Mut), who succeeded in laying the foundations of the Endirean principality. It was under Sultan-Makhmud that the term Sala began to acquire the character of a social term for the Kumyks – Sala-uzdeni.

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**Fig. 1.** Map of the nationalities of the North Caucasus in 18 century.

The personality of Sult-Makhmud (Sultan-Mut) has received sufficient attention in Dagestan historiography. However, several scientific conferences on his life and work have been held in Dagestan, and the proceedings of these conferences have been published [1, 2]. We should especially note Sh. B. Baimurzaeva's dissertation, *The Role of Sultan-Mut in the Formation and Development of Feudal Statehood in Zaslak Kumykia in the late 16th – first half of the 17th Century* [3]. There are also several documentaries and fiction by writers B. Ajamatov [4, 5] and B. Ataev [6].

In 1577, one of Dagestan's largest feudal rulers, the Kazikumukh Shamkhal Chopan, died. His heirs, Eldar, Mohammed, Andi and Girei, start dividing up their father's property, depriving their brother Sultan-Mut of his share on the grounds that he is a chanka, born of an unequal marriage. However, Sultan-Mut was not about to stay meekly in the shadow of his brothers. This is how D.-M. Shikhayev describes further events. M.M.Shikhaliyev: "Sultanmut, offended by this refusal, together with his brothers, born from his mother, Mutsal and Ahmetkhan, moved to Chir-Yurt, where he found several families of Salas or Salatovs, probably having arrived from Salasu river, where was their main settlement, and was received by them with hospitality, and, judging by their services, we must assume that they were friends or atalyks of this prince before. Sultanmut accompanied them to Kabarda, to his relatives Anzorovs, from where he brought numerous retinue" [7], started struggle for his inheritance in the paternal inheritance. Eventually the brothers were forced to make a concession: "he received the right bank of the Sulak River, from the Hot Springs, between Chir-Yurt and Myatly, along the Sulak River to the Torkali-Ozen River" [8].

As we see from primary sources, there is no talk of "secession of the Andriean principedom from the Shamkhal district" and "obtaining control over Zaslak Kumykia" as modern Dagestan authors write about this event. As a result of an armed confrontation with his brothers, Sultan-Mut acquired the rights to a particular plot of land that was part of the shamkhaliya – land on the right bank of the Sulak River from the Hot Springs (Isti-Su) to the Torkali-Ozen River.

Abbas-Kuli Bakikhanov writes that Sultan-Mut, with the help of mercenaries, "forced his brothers to give him all the lands lying between the Sulak and Terek rivers, with the lower part of the Michikich and the Salatav district, up to the Kerkhi mountain, which is on the border of Gumbet. Then, having gathered the Kumyk tribe, scattered in different places, he settled them in Chir-Yurg, which he chose as his place of residence" [9]. According to Hasan Alkadari, "after his father's death, the brothers give Sultan Butu (or Sultan-Mut) of the "inherited possessions of Chopan Shamkhal only between the Sulak and the Terek, as well as the outskirts of the Chechen Magal. Sultan-Mut settled in the village of Chir-Yurt, took those lands and population under his authority and established for himself an administration separate from the other brothers" [10].

The semi-legendary information of A.-K. Bakikhanova and G. Alkadari raises a number of questions.

As is known from all sources, Sultan-Mut was a chanka, i.e. born of an unequal marriage. The Adat of the Kumyk Plain Residents states: "Male and female princely chunks have no right to inherit their fathers' movable and immovable estates, and if a deed of gift (nazru) is made in favour of chunks or princely

daughters, then the male nearest relatives cannot take over that estate" [11]. On this basis, A.A. Adilsultanov asks reasonable questions: "Sultan-Maghamut did not receive an inheritance during his father's lifetime and could not, therefore, claim land and property. This begs the question: can it be accepted as true that Sultan-Maghamut subsequently received not just a plot of land, but an incredibly large area, several times the size of the area left to his other brothers?"

In the second place: Sultan-Maghamut, having forced his brothers to allot him an allotment, settled in Chir-Yurta (Chil-Yurte), making it "his residence", from where, as early as the early 17th century, he moved to Enderi; Sultan Maghamut settled "by gathering the Kumyk tribe, dispersed in different places". Again the question arises: where were the Kumyks at that time? If they lived between Terek and Sulak, then why did Sultan-Maghamut gather them in a foothill village? The only explanation for A. K. Bakikhanov's explanation is that Sultan-Maghamut brought together those representatives who lived on the right bank of the Sulak River and who were his supporters. Subsequent events have confirmed our view" [12].

Besides, if one understands Bakikhanov's message literally, – "all lands lying between Sulak and Terek rivers, with lower part of Michikitch and Salatav district", then it turns out that lower part of Michikitch, like Salataviya, was in Tersk-Sulak interfluvium. Alkadari's text shows that Sultan-Mut was in charge of those lands of the region whose inhabitants were vassals of the Shamkhal, "as well as the outskirts of the Chechen Magal", which, judging by the text, were not subject to him but had joined Sultan-Mut somehow. All these contradictions and inconsistencies can only be resolved by a comprehensive approach to the problem. It requires a detailed analysis not only of the texts themselves, but also of the specific historical situation in the context of which the sources must be interpreted.

So, according to the available data, somewhere in the last third of the 16th century Sultan-Mut managed to settle in Chir-Yurt. However, Sultan-Mut did not last long in his new position. As M.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky writes, "fed up with the constant quarrels with his brothers, who would not stop oppressing him, he decided to leave them and sent an offer to the Andreevites to admit him into his society. The Andreevites agreed with joy, and Sultanmut [...] with his family and all his adherents, went to live permanently in Andreevo". This transition "took place peacefully, without violence and not by conquest, as the present-day Kumyk princes try to persuade" [8].

Russian documentary sources generally corroborate Lobanov-Rostovsky's information. Thus, in 1610–1611, Sultan-Mut's adversaries, having called in reinforcements from the Russian army from Tersk town, opened hostilities against him. The opponents managed to win, after which Sultan-Mut together with Batay Shikhmurzin from Okots found a refuge and protection in Chechen villages: "And that Sultan-Maghamut Murza with his brother, and with your sovereign traitor Batay Murza [...] from that ruin would dwell in the mountains in Okots taverns" [13]. In 1612,

at the request of Tarkov Shamkhal Girei, the governor of Tersk town P.I. Golovin sent against Sultan-Mut streltsy and cossacks again, who attacked and burnt all his taverns [...] and driven him out of his taverns" [13].

In 1614, after the Russian administration of Terek refused to accept his amanata on the ground that he was "a man without yurt" [14], Sultan-Mut settled in Sala-Yurt.

In early 1615, Sultan-Mut seized the Kabardian and Michkiz roads, supported mainly by Chechens and Kumyks who had moved towards him, and renewed the struggle with his political opponents. At the ultimatum of nine Dagestani feudals, the Terek voivode sent them a detachment of 400 streltsy with cannons to help [14]. In February of that year, a decisive battle took place between the forces of Sultan-Mut and a combined coalition of his opponents.

Subsequently the voivode P.I. Golovin wrote in his official report to Moscow: "And your soldiers served during that fight against the Kumyks, Sultan-Maghamutovs and Michkiz and Okotsk men, and fought against them. And by the grace of God, sire, during that fight Sultan-Maghamutov and Turloff-prince and Michkiz people killed 140 men, and some were slaughtered and captured alive. In the same battle your sovereign's troops killed Turlov's son, the prince from Gorki, and his son Surkai-Murza from Kazikumuk, and prince Kastrov's son, and killed his son-in-law Albir-Maghamutov and beat many men from Michkiz" [14].

Sultan-Mut's confrontation with the Tarkha Shamkhal Eldar lasted until the latter's death in 1635. Thus, a year earlier, in 1634, at Eldar's request, a detachment of Russian streltsy from the Terek town was sent against Sultan-Mut, but the latter went back to his familiar "strong places in the mountains" [14]. After Eldar's death, Sultan-Mut was elected shamkhal, despite Russian and Persian intrigues, but he ceded the title to his son Aydemir, and he remained to live and rule in what had become his native Endirea.

It was this bloody struggle of Sultan-Mut and his brothers that gave birth to the Endirean principality, and not the Shamkhal possessions of "Zasulak Kumykia", as some Dagestan authors write about. The support he received from Chechens, particularly those populating the Terek-Sulak interfluvium, played a decisive role in Sultan-Mut's victory in this struggle, alongside his Kumyk subjects. The documentary evidence above confirms that our words are correct.

Since the social term sala-uzdeni was encountered only among the Kumyks of Susulak (the rest of the Kumyks, subject to Shamkhal Tarkovsky, called them ullu-uzdeni), It is clear that numerous rights and privileges were conferred on the Sala ethnic group, from whom Sultan-Maghamut found support and encouragement in his difficult time. And this was the foundation of a new higher nobility, the Sala-uzdeni, subsequently expanded to include representatives of different ethnic groups. In this case we see an example of an ethnic term becoming a social status term (similar to the Georgian *eristavi*).

D.-M. Shikhsaidov writes about Sala: "The Sala, or Salatov people, are the ancestors of the present-day Kumyk Sala-uzdeni, who came from the village of

Rikoni, located beyond the Gunbetovsky mountain range; they lived by the Salasu River, which flows into the Aktash, they are believed to be related to the Aukhovs and belong to their Vashandroev family; like the Tumen and Guen, Sala now form a separate quarter in Andreev". According to some sources, Rikvani was allocated to the Vashkhandaroi "as a personal mulk" by the Avar nutsal Sultan b. Bayar for military assistance rendered to him.

Russian authors of the 19th century who wrote about the Sala-uzdenis, noted that they were divided into two groups: Sala-uzdenis proper and princely Sala-uzdenis. The former constituted "a special class, the first in the nation after the prince" [15]. They were the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the Terek-Sulak interflaves, second only to the princes. A. Beloborodov calls them "independent nobles", "ancient masters of the land", "free owners" [16]. They were also atalyks (tutors) of princely children [15].

The Sala-uzdenis were not personally dependent on the princes, and were free to pass from one prince to another. They "from the beginning were free from any tribute to the princes, paying no tribute whatsoever, neither were the common people who belonged to them", "they were the leaders of military undertakings" [17].

The second group of Sala-uzdenis was formed from "eminent clans of Kabarda, Crimea and Avaria" [18]. The land rights of this group of Sala-uzdenis were based on vassalage. Kovalevsky wrote that the relations of the Sala-uzdenis to the prince resembled those "in which medieval vassals stood to their suzerain. The prince bestows them with inhabited estates and in return, requires them to be constantly present at his person, accompanying him on all his journeys and campaigns" [19]. M.B.Lobanov-Rostovsky refers to the Uzdens of this group as minor or princely.

In conclusion, we should note that the socio-legal (analysis of status, their rights and duties, privileges) and economic (sources of income and wealth) situations of the Sala-uzdenis are considered in many publications by Dagestani historians, which in one way or another concern the history and social structure of the northern (Asulak) Kumyks. Most authors address the problem of the origin of the Sala-uzdenis briefly and incidentally, in connection with the formation and development of the feudal possessions of the northern Kumyks – the Endirean Principality of Sultan-Mut. They ignore the well-known facts that Sala originally stood for the Chechen ethnic group living in the Terek-Sulak interfluve and supported Sultan-Mahmud (Sultan-Mut), the founder of the Endirean kingdom, under whom the term Sala acquired the character of a social term – Sala-uzdeni.

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