

The peoples of the North Caucasus in the works of Russian writers of the first half of the 19th century

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Abstract. The paper deals with the problem of attitude of different strata of Russian society towards the North Caucasus and highlanders in the first half of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 19th century, Russia began to expand its influence in the North Caucasus region, yet Russian society had a vague idea of its peoples. The author focuses on the fact that a prominent Russian poet A.S. Pushkin showed the Caucasus as a ‘wonderful land’ inhabited not by ‘predators’, but by proud, freedom-loving, courageous highlanders. Pushkin’s poetry exerted an enormous influence on his contemporaries. M.Yu. Lermontov, A. Polezhaev, and K. Belevich, active participants in the Caucasian War, did even more in glorification of the liberation struggle of highlanders and condemnation of the policy of tsarism in the North Caucasus. A.S. Griboyedov, one of the brightest representatives of advanced Russia, made a great contribution to Russian-Caucasian social and cultural relationships when he served in the Caucasus. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, the Decembrist writer, also contributed to the formation of a positive image of a highlander as a knight gifted with noble qualities. His first works appeared in 1832 and had great success among the progressively-minded Russian people.

Keywords: advanced Russia, North Caucasian highlanders, Pushkin, Lermontov, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky

1 Introduction

Russia started to expand its influence in the North Caucasus in the middle of the 16th century. Since that time, it has been persistently strengthening in this region. By the beginning of the 19th century, Russia controlled a significant part of the North Caucasus up to the Terek, Kuban and Malka. Yet, the idea of the Caucasus in Russian society was controversial and vague. For most Russians, this was a little-known rebellious country with wild tribes who were constantly fighting, and there was a war, in which Russian soldiers died for no one knows what. In Russia, the Caucasus was called the ‘disastrous’ land or ‘warm Siberia’, where the convicted officers and officials were exiled.

The Russia of progressively minded people (including officers who fought in the Caucasus) sincerely sought to know the Caucasus and its culture, its ethnographic world, and sympathized with the highlanders’ liberation war. Some progressive editions of tsarist Russia in the 19th century reported the high level of development of agriculture and handicrafts in highlanders, and their success in the field of education.

2 Problem Statement

Since the second half of the 16th century, Russia has been using political and diplomatic methods to strengthen its influence in the North Caucasus. The study of relations between Russia and the North Caucasus in the first half of

the 19th century and the analysis of publications about highlanders of the North Caucasus in Russian periodicals of that period provide answers to questions that have not yet been sufficiently studied in Soviet and Russian Caucasian periodicals. The answers to these questions are both scientific and practical. The study of the problem of highlanders of the North Caucasus in the view of Russian society in the first half of the 19th century is relevant, especially in the light of the current state of Russian-North Caucasian relations.

3 Research Questions

There is an extensive historiography that sheds light on periodicals, articles published in Russian journals, and literary works by leading Russian poets and writers. Much attention was paid to the study of the characteristics of highlanders of the North Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century. Many Russian authors who wrote about the Caucasus, including participants in the Caucasian War, tried to objectively understand the nature of highlanders and the events that took place in the Caucasus in the 19th century.

The studies and newly identified documents provide an opportunity for an objective and comprehensive analysis of the formation of the Russian-North Caucasian socio-political, cultural unity, identification of the deep socio-political reasons for the national liberation movement of highlanders, and consideration of the degree of socio-

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economic development of the peoples of the North and North-Eastern Caucasus.

4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to consider the transformation of attitudes of different strata of Russian society in the first half of the 19th century to the North Caucasus and its population. It should be noted that at the beginning of the 19th century Russia began to spread its power and influence in the North Caucasus region, but Russian society had a very vague idea of its peoples. The authors focus on the fact that the advanced Russian intelligentsia considered the Caucasus as a 'wonderful land' inhabited not by 'predators', but by proud, freedom-loving, courageous highlanders.

In this context, it is necessary to trace the process of formation and development of cultural relations between Russia and the peoples of the North Caucasus.

5 Research Methods

The work uses general scientific (analysis and synthesis) and special methods (problem-chronological, historical-genetic, historical-typological). The problem-chronological method was employed to study the main publications about highlanders, their character, customs, traditional culture, and formation of Russian-North Caucasian relationships in a historical perspective. The historical-genetic method was used to establish causal relationships between Russia and the peoples of the North Caucasus. The historical-typological method was used to classify the motifs of regular periodicals and literary works by famous Russian writers and poets, and analyze their positive impact on Russian society.

6 Findings

Russia reached the borders of the North Caucasus in the middle of the 16th century and from that time on, stubbornly and persistently strengthened itself in this region. By the beginning of the 19th century, Russia controlled a significant part of the North Caucasus up to the Terek, Kuban, and Malka. However, the idea of the Caucasus in Russian society was very vague and vague. For most Russians, this was a little-known rebellious country, where wild tribes constantly fought among themselves, the war was always in full swing, in which Russian soldiers died for no one knows what. In Russia, the Caucasus has been nicknamed the "disastrous" land, "warm Siberia", where the guilty and convicted officers and officials were exiled. "Russian society ... for more than half a century looked with indifferent surprise at the endless Caucasian struggle and got so used to it that it no longer expected a denouement," General R.A. wrote in the middle of the 19th century: "Fadeev – Russian society looked with indifference, even with inattention, to the bloody mountain war, without realizing its purpose and meaning ..., it considered only material sacrifices and showed only fatigue..." [1].

In the last third of the 18th century, publications about the Caucasus and its population began to appear in Russia. The majority of publications were written by the military authors, who were unfamiliar with the Caucasus and had a

very biased attitude to highlanders. They could see highlanders only during military clashes 'through the smoke of gunpowder, in exceptional, unnatural conditions.' Under war conditions, the authors were unable to show an objective and impartial attitude towards highlanders. The war imposed 'its own bloody coloring' on their works [2].

As a result, by the end of the second decade of the 19th century, there was a stereotype of a highlander as a 'predator', 'robber' and 'swindler', who is not engaged in creative work at all, but lives solely on raids and robbery. A number of prominent Caucasian researchers such as S.M. Bronevsky and I.F. Blaramberg wrote that highlanders live in 'savagery' [3], robbery and capture are 'their only occupation, the only way to get food and weapons' [4]. I.N. Berezin called the North Caucasian highlander 'cruel predator' [5]. M.N. Pokrovsky noted that 'at the beginning of the 19th century, all the peoples inhabiting the Caucasian ridge and its foothills were similar: they were all 'swindlers and villains' for the Russian authorities. In the eyes of the Russian inhabitant they were all 'Circassians' and, of course, 'treacherous predators' [6].

The lines of the poem by the famous poet Zhukovsky 'Message to Voeikov' show the attitude of the Russian intelligentsia of that time to the North Caucasian highlanders (1814):

*You were mature, like Terek in a fast run
Rustling between the vineyards
Where often, hiding on the shore,
Chechen or Circassian sat
Under a cloak, with a fatal lasso.*

In the poem, Zhukovsky lists the peoples that, in his opinion, 'nest' in the Caucasus mountains:

*Both the Balkar and the Bakh,
Both Abazeh and Kamukinean,
Both Karbulak and Albazin
Both the Chererean and the Shapsug* [7].

The names of the Caucasian peoples listed by Zhukovsky show that he was not aware of the Caucasus: there were no such nationalities as Kamukinean, Chererean, Bakh in the ethnographic map of the Caucasus.

Official St. Petersburg and official authors did not understand and did not want to understand that they were facing an independent world, an independent civilization, with a different cultural phenomenon, which could not be evaluated from Eurocentric views.

It should be noted that such an approach to assessing the culture of the peoples of the East was characteristic of almost all of Europe at that time. From the point of view of European authors, practically all countries and peoples of the East, including such centers of world civilization as China and India, were "semi-savage" and backward.

Of course, such ideas and views of European (including some Russian) authors were incorrect and fundamentally vicious. The very approach to evaluating the culture of the peoples of the East (and the Caucasus) was also wrong when they tried to evaluate it according to the standards of European culture. The stage reached by one nation was evaluated in accordance with how much its culture, way of life, and spiritual development approached European ones, and how much they resembled European ones.

Of course, the European colonies in the East were at different levels of socioeconomic and cultural development,

from the most primitive (in several areas of Tropical Africa) to highly developed civilizations. One cannot speak of the culture of the peoples of India, China, Iran, and others, for example, as backward.

In general, Europe owes a lot to non-European peoples - the literature and art of India and China, the science of the Arabs, the towering and handicraft art of the peoples of the Caucasus, the fine arts of black Africa, etc.

The notion of the North Caucasian peoples as "savages" devoid of culture was also far-fetched (for example, A.P. Liprandi wrote that even by the end of the 19th century the mountainous region was "almost in complete cultural savagery and civil unbridled ness" [8]. there are no savages in the world in the truest sense of the word, i.e. people without any culture. Even backward peoples have their own culture, the whole point is its originality. Moreover, as science shows, the culture of the so-called backward peoples is by no means simple, its forms are not simpler than European ones.

When, at the end of the 20th century, certain forces in Russia launched an anti-Caucasian hysteria, the vast majority of the Russian intelligentsia (and Russian society as a whole) condemned this Caucasian phobia. In the same way, Russian society was not united in the first half of the 19th century in relation to the Caucasian peoples and to the Caucasian policy of tsarism [9].

The advanced Russia (including officers who fought in the Caucasus) sincerely sought to know the Caucasus and its culture, its ethnographic world, and sympathized with the highlanders' liberation war. In the 19th century, some advanced editions of tsarist Russia reported the high level of development of agriculture and crafts among highlanders, and their advancements in the field of education [10].

The great Russian poet A.S. Pushkin showed the Caucasus as a 'wonderful land' inhabited not by 'predators', but by proud, freedom-loving, courageous highlanders. V.G. Belinsky wrote that 'a grandiose image of the Caucasus with its warlike inhabitants is reproduced for the first time in Russian poetry. Only Pushkin's poem for the first time showed Russian society the Caucasus, which had long been known to Russia in arms' [11].

In 1820, A.S. Pushkin, together with the Raevsky family, arrived at the Caucasian Mineral Waters. Here he wrote the poem 'Prisoner of the Caucasus', which impressed Russian society by a brilliant description of the Caucasian image and the life of highlanders. This talented work laid the foundation for the emergence of progressive Romanism in Russian literature. A.S. Pushkin for the first time showed the peoples of the Caucasus not through the prism of official Russia, but through the eyes of the Russian people, who had nothing to quarrel with highlanders.

A.S. Pushkin in a respectful way describes the manners, customs, peaceful working life of highlanders (it was still believed that highlanders do not do creative work at all, that these 'predators' have neither faith nor upbringing).

Already in his first "Caucasian" work, A.S. Pushkin expresses sympathy for the liberation struggle of the highlanders and protests against the cruel policy of the tsarist autocracy. In the draft manuscript of *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, he writes:

*So violent liberty laws are oppressed,
So a rare tribe under the rule yearns,
So now the silent Caucasus is indignant,*

So alien forces weigh on him. [12]

E.G. Weidenbaum wrote that the "Caucasian" works of Pushkin "brought into fashion the view of the highlanders as the "proud sons of the Caucasus", howling not for the sake of predation, but in defense of their "wild liberty" or chivalrous love for abusive amusements" [13].

Part of the Russian intelligentsia sharply hostilely met the praise of A.S. Pushkin of the North Caucasian highlanders in his works. I.N. Berezin, who spoke extremely negatively about the highlanders, wrote: "What grave accusations, before which the ideal of chivalry created by the readers of *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* pales ... No! From the night killer, from the insidious kidnapper of babies, from the vile merchant of his blood, far even from those small industrialists who always want to know what is in someone else's pocket, there are no only ideals of honesty and nobility [14]. The famous Russian writer and critic P.A. Katenin accused Pushkin of glorifying "thieves" in his poems.

In 'Journey to Arzrum' (1836), A.S. Pushkin wrote: 'The Circassians hate us. We drove them out of free pastures; their auls were devastated, numerous tribes were destroyed' [15].

Creativity of A.S. Pushkin had a strong impact on his contemporaries: M.Yu. Lermontov, A. Polezhaev, K. Belevich.

The Caucasus plays a special role in the works of M.Yu. Lermontov, who poetized mountain liberty. M.Yu. Lermontov collected North Caucasian folklore, studied the legends of antiquity, beliefs, and modern customs and mores of highlanders. Serving in the Russian army, being involved in military events in the North Caucasus, Lermontov observed the relationship between the tsarist government and the peoples of the region from the inside, and saw the cruelty and oppression of the tsarist troops. Almost all the works of his 'Caucasian Cycle' are imbued with sympathy to highlanders' struggle for freedom and protests against the cruel policy of tsarism.

In the 'Caucasian' works by M.Yu. Lermontov, the most noticeable and striking is the 'Chechen trace'. The relationship between Chechens and Cossacks is described in his poems "Prisoner of the Caucasus" (imitation to A.S. Pushkin), 'Cossack lullaby', 'Gifts of the Terek', and the poem 'Izmail Bey' presented as a story of an old Chechen.

On July 11, 1840, a bloody battle between Russian troops and Chechens took place on the Valerik River. One of Lermontov's best anti-militarist poems 'Valerik' is dedicated to this event. The poem 'Valerik' presents the image of the Chechen Galub-friend (kunik) as a denial of enmity between people of different nationalities and religions, and a guarantee of the possibility of peace and brotherhood between peoples.

In the extreme condemnation of the cruel policy of tsarism in the North Caucasus (especially in Chechnya), M. Lermontov and A. Polezhaev reach the philosophical heights of denying wars in general. In the poem 'Valerik', Lermontov writes:

*With secret and heartfelt sadness
I thought: a pitiful man;
What does he want? ... The sky is clear;
Under the sky, there is enough space for everyone,
But incessantly and in vain
He is alone at enmity ... but why?* [16].

In the poem 'Chir-Yurt' written before Lermontov's 'Valerik' (1823), A. Polezhaev writes:

Cursed be the wicked
Who first unsheathed the sword of war
To those blessed countries
Where the peace-loving people lived [17].

Modern Russian readers know little about the work of K. Belevich, the talented Russian poet and writer. In his poems and prose, he shows not only sympathy for highlanders in their struggle for freedom, but also understanding of the reasons for this struggle, and protests against the cruelty of the tsarist troops in the conquest of the North Caucasus. He destroyed the image of a Chechen engaged only in predation and robbery. 'Chechens are industrious and gifted with practical sense,' he wrote. 'The characteristic features of Chechens include hospitality, remarkable cleanliness, tidiness in homes, and solid pride without swagger' [18].

The work of the Decembrist writer A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky exerted a huge impact on Russian society in shaping the image of a highlander not as a predator and savage, but as a knight gifted with noble qualities. A number of his works appeared in 1832. His works were great success, and the second edition of his works was published during the life of the author. A. Bestuzhev, who spent many years in exile in the Caucasus, became a great expert on the Caucasus. He was fluent in several Caucasian languages and spent a lot of time studying languages, folklore, ethnography, economics, the history of highlanders and nature of the Caucasus.

The themes discussed in the works by A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky ('Ammalat-bek', 'Mulla-Nur', 'Letter to Dr. Erman', etc.) attracted Russian readers: idealization of the strong and passionate nature of romantic heroes, an excited form of expressing thoughts, landscape and battle scenes, genre, ethnographic elements, amusement of the plot [19].

In his works, A. Bestuzhev tries to study the world of highlanders and objectively and fully understand the positive and negative aspects of their life, character, and relationships of highlanders. He appreciates their pride, physical strength, dexterity, courage, and love of freedom.

A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, one of the most educated people of that time, happened to be in the Caucasus and passionately dreamt of returning to his homeland, Russia (he died in the Caucasus), but he remained true to his ideals to the end. In his Caucasian writings, stories, notes, letters about the life, customs and character of highlanders, he showed respect and sympathy for them, and sometimes admiration for heroism, love of freedom, 'knighthood', devotion to the country, and striving for independence [20].

7 Conclusion

The works by Pushkin, Lermontov, Polezhaev, Belevich, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, and many others contributed to the spread of objective ideas about the Caucasus and its peoples. Despite some inaccuracies and contradictions, they were profoundly progressive for that time. They were among the first to treat highlanders as people in need of help and education, called for peaceful contacts and friendship, development of education and culture. They were sympathetic to their struggle for freedom, and they

supported the annexation of the Caucasus to Russia. They were against the cruel policy of tsarism in the conquest of the region and believed in the annexation of the Caucasus through the development of trade, education, and cultural rapprochement between highlanders and the Russian population.

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