




Discovering Diversity

An integrative approach to the history of migrants

Educational Material: Case Study

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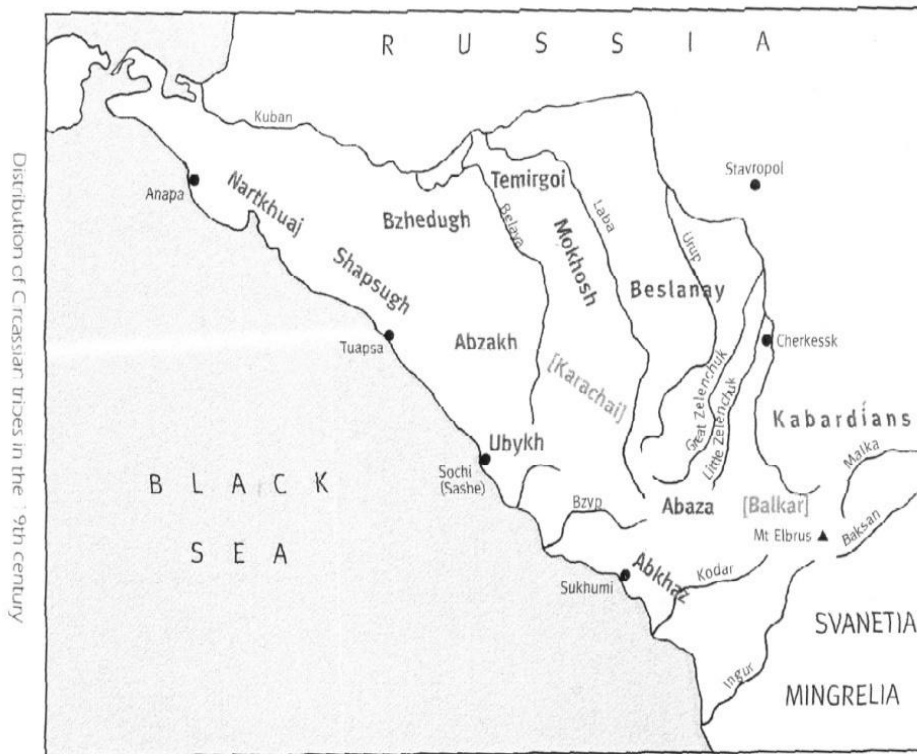


The Russian expulsion of Circassian peoples in the 19th century



The Context

The Circassian peoples



Map showing the distribution of Circassian tribes in the 19th century.
Source: Amijad Jaimoukh, *The Circassians: A Handbook*

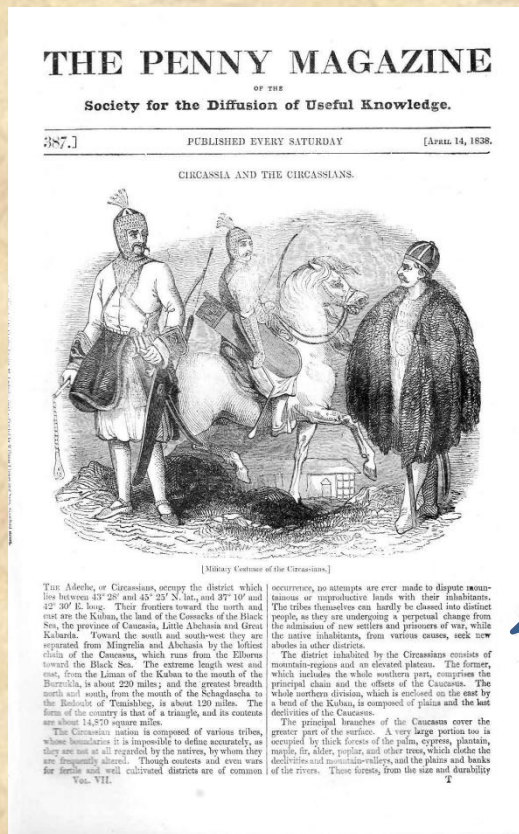
(Source: Amjad Jaimoukha, *The Circassians: A Handbook*, page 20)

People have lived in the Caucasus since at least the 8th BCE when the Greeks began to explore the region. A mountain range divides the region from north to south with the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian sea to the east. The Caucasus as a whole is ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. The indigenous peoples commonly referred to as 'Circassian' inhabit the coastal region and the inland mountain area in the north-western area of the Caucasus. They include the Adyghe, Abkhazian, and Ubykh tribes. They share a common language, culture and religion but rarely a united political culture.

Due to their location on the Black Sea coast, including the important ports of Anapa, Sochi and Tuapse, they were heavily involved in trade throughout the region.

For over a century, from 1763 to 1864, the Circassian people fought against Russian incursions but were gradually conquered in a series of battles and campaigns, referred to as the **Russian–Caucasian Wars**.

A Western journalist's description of the Circassian peoples in 1838



“The Circassian nation is composed of various tribes whose boundaries it is impossible to define accurately.....The tribes themselves ...are undergoing a perpetual change from the admission of new settlers and prisoners of war, while the native inhabitants, from various causes, seek new abodes in other districts.”

Source: THE PENNY MAGAZINE of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, April 14, 1838

The Russian-Caucasian Wars (1763-1864)



Scene from the Russian-Caucasian War, painting by the Russian artist, Franz Roubaud, circa 1866.

Russia's interest in the north Caucasus intensified during the reign of Catherine the Great. She appointed Prince Grigory Potemkin as viceroy of the Caucasus even though Russia only controlled a small part of it. Further military campaigns in the 1780s led to Muslim resistance in the north Caucasus and one of the resistance leaders, Shaykh Mansur declared a holy war.

In 1795 Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, a christian country with powerful Islamic neighbours, was sacked by a Persian army. In 1801, at the request of Georgy XII, Georgia was annexed into the Tsarist empire. This now provided Russia with a power base in the Transcaucasus to support any further incursions into the North Caucasus.

Resistance from tribes in Dagestan, Chechnya and Avaria increased but from 1801-1832 Russian campaigns in the region tended to be sporadic, mainly because of wars at that time with Sweden, France, Persia and the Ottoman Empire. In the 1830s Islamic resistance intensified under a new leader, Imam Shamil.

The Russian-Caucasian Wars



Imam Shamil, Imam of Dagestan from 1834 to 1859 when he surrendered to Russian forces.

Under his religious and military leadership, Imam Shamil quickly formed an alliance of tribes across Dagestan, Chechnya and Lezghian and, later the Circassian peoples as well. Relying on guerilla warfare he soon provided formidable opposition to Russian forces in the mountains where the Russians found it difficult to maintain their supply lines for any length of time.

In 1839 Shamil, along with his family and some of his supporters, were besieged by Russian forces at Akhulgo in Dagestan. Fierce resistance led to a stalemate and negotiations were opened between Shamil and the Russian commanders. He handed over his son as a token of good faith but the son was then sent back to St Petersburg as a hostage and the Russian troops launched another assault. Shamil and his family escaped through Russian lines.

In 1843 his forces captured all but one Russian outpost in Avaria. The Russian army had over 2000 casualties. Two years later his troops withstood a major Russian offensive and when the Tsar's army withdrew Shamil's forces harried and ambushed them back to their base.

He came to the attention of the international media in 1849 when he and his followers kidnapped Princess Anna of Georgia, a close friend of the Tsarina and offered her in exchange for his son. The first example of political counter- hostage taking in the modern era. The Russian campaign in the Caucasus was temporarily suspended in the autumn of 1853 so that the Russian regiments could fight in the Crimean War (October 1853-February 1856).

After the Crimean War Russia turned its attention to the Caucasus



Capture of Imam Shamil, painting by Franz Roubaud , 1886.

The Crimean War became a turning point for the peoples of the Black Sea region. Russia's defeat by the Alliance of Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire, meant that she could no longer threaten directly the interests of the Western Powers in the Balkans. So she turned her attention to the Caucasus in earnest, starting with the peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan.

In 1859 Imam Shamil was captured. By this time his exploits had made him famous in Russia and he was treated with respect by his captors. He was taken to St Petersburg to meet the Emperor, Alexander II. He then remained in exile, first in Kaluga, near Moscow, and then in Kiev. In 1869 the Russian government gave him permission to go on pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca and he then went to Medina where he died in 1871.

Following victory in Dagestan and Chechnya, the Russian forces in the eastern Caucasus moved westward to join up with other Russian troops confronting Circassian forces who, until this point, had been waging a fairly successful guerilla war.

Facing a much larger army the alliance between the different Circassian peoples began to break up as some of the tribal leaders started to negotiate independently with the Russian High Command. Those who chose to fight on were either killed or forced to migrate.

On May 21, 1864, Grand Duke Michael of Russia, commander of the Russian armies in the Caucasus, declared that the Russian-Caucasian war was over.

Circassian migration to the Ottoman Empire in 19th century



The Mountaineers by Pyotr Nikolayevich Gruzinsky 1872

Following the conquest of the north Caucasus, the Russian Empire implemented a policy of evicting the surviving Circassians from their ancestral territories. The Russian General, Yevdokimov, was given the task of driving the remaining Circassian inhabitants out of their mountain strongholds to face exile or become Christians and join the armies of the Tsar or settle around the Kuban where the Cossacks were now in control. This policy was enforced by mobile units of Russian infantry and Cossack cavalry.

“During May 1864 many Circassians gathered from all corners of the country to make a last stand in the valley of the Aibgo in the heart of the mountains. For four days (7-11 May 1864) Russian forces were repulsed with great losses. Heavy artillery was then brought up and strafed the valley. There were no survivors. The Russian capture of this little valley was the last act of the Russo-Circassian war.”

S.D. Shenfield, *The Circassians: A forgotten genocide?* in (eds) M. Levene and P. Roberts, *The Massacre in History*, New York 2006

Why was the Caucasus so important to the Great Powers in the 19th Century?

Tsar Peter the Great, from a painting by Nikolai Ge, 1871 in the Russian Museum, St Petersburg



CLICK HERE if you want more information about the strategic significance of the Caucasus.

By the beginning of the 19th century the Ottoman Empire was already in decline. The other Great Powers (Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Prussia and Russia) saw potential benefits for themselves in this decline but they also recognised possible threats to their national interests. A declining power could destabilise the delicate balance of power in Europe and the Near East.

At the same time the Russian Empire was seeking to expand its sphere of influence over Constantinople and the European lands controlled by the Sultan. As long ago as 1725 the Russian Tsar, Peter the Great, had expressed an interest in competing with Britain for control over India. As the eastern frontiers of Russia extended further east through the Caucasus the British Government became increasingly concerned that Russia still had plans for India.

Increasing tension between Russia and the Ottoman Empire dragged the other Great Powers into the Crimean War in 1853-56. The defeat of Russia forced her to reconsider her expansionist plans. She now concentrated on gaining control of the whole of the Caucasus.

The Black Sea and its surrounding lands, including the Balkans and the Caucasus, remained strategically important for all of the Great Powers right up to the end of the First World War.

Further information: Why was the Caucasus so important to the Great Powers in the 19th Century?



Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I met in Tilsit on 7 July 1807 to sign the treaty.

The Caucasus and the whole Black Sea region became more internationally significant after Napoleon defeated the Russian army at Friedland in Prussia in 1807. The two countries signed the Treaty of Tilsit and became allies. Russia agreed to come to the aid of France in its war with Great Britain and her allies. In return France would make sure that Russia acquired Moldavia and Wallachia, two territories in Europe controlled by the Ottoman Empire. Today these regions on the Danube are part of Romania and Moldova.

If the Sultan refused to surrender these lands France and Russia planned to attack the Ottoman Empire and divide up its European territories in the Balkans between them. This threat to the region concerned the other Great Powers, particularly the Habsburg Empire, and Britain became concerned when Napoleon proposed to the Tsar that France and Russia should join forces to seize India from the British. However before they could put this plan into action the two allies fell out when the Tsar opened up Russian ports to neutral shipping to promote more trade. This contravened the Treaty of Tilsit and led directly to Napoleon's armies invading Russia in 1812.

Further information : Why was the Caucasus so important to the Great Powers in the 19th Century?



“Save me from my friends!” Published in the British Magazine, Punch, 30 November 1878

The British regarded India as the jewel in their Imperial Crown. They had feared Russia's intentions towards India ever since Peter the Great had expressed an interest in the sub-continent in 1725. From that time onwards Russian influence had started to spread eastwards along the Black Sea and the gap between the south eastern border of the Russian Empire and the north western frontier of India had been gradually narrowing. Now the barriers to further Russian expansion were the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Afghanistan, China and Tibet.

This British cartoon, published in 1878, entitled “Save me from my friends!”, shows Sher Ali, the Emir of Afghanistan, in the middle with The Russian Bear on one side and the British Lion on the other. The British often referred to this strategic rivalry between themselves and Russia during this period as “*The Great Game*”. The Russians called it “*The Tournament of Shadows*”.

Further information : Why was the Caucasus so important to the Great Powers in the 19th Century?



Mahmud II who was Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1808-1839.

In the early 19th century both Russia and Britain were seeking to control the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mahmud II. Constantinople controlled the Straits (the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles) which the Tsar described as *"the key to the house of Russia"*. Whoever controlled the Straits could either blockade Russia's Black Sea fleet or restrict its access to the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Britain also wanted influence with the Sultan because Egypt was a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire and British ships used the Suez Canal to get to India.

By the 1830s the power and influence of the Ottoman Empire was in decline. In 1821 the Greeks had revolted against Ottoman rule. Russia supported her fellow Orthodox Christians against the Sultan. In 1833 there was a revolt in Egypt against the Sultan led by Mehmet Ali, the Sultan's own viceroy.

It is about this time that the world's media began to talk of the Ottoman Empire as the "sick man of Europe".

Although the British Ambassador to St Petersburg in his report to the Foreign Secretary in 1853 quotes Tsar Nicholas I describing the Ottoman Empire as "a sick man" the phrase "the sick man of Europe" was first used by the New York Times, 12 May, 1860.

Further information: Why was the Caucasus so important to the Great Powers in the 19th Century?

In 1833, Russian diplomats persuaded the Sultan to sign the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. In return Russia agreed to protect the Ottoman Empire from external attack and the Sultan agreed to close the Straits to foreign warships whenever Russia was at war.

The other Great Powers were deeply concerned about Russian expansionism. She had designs on control of the southern Caucasus which would increase the potential for a land invasion of Persia and Afghanistan and this threatened British interests in India. Russia was seeking more influence over those European lands held by the Ottoman Empire where the majority of the population were Orthodox Christians. This concerned Austria-Hungary, Prussia and France. Also the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi gave Russia free access to the Mediterranean through the Straits and this concerned all of the Great Powers.

Britain responded by invading Afghanistan to create a buffer state between India and the Russian army. They were the first but by no means the last foreign power to learn how difficult a military occupation of Afghanistan can be. The Great Powers also persuaded the Tsar to abandon his Treaty with the Sultan and in 1841 the Sultan agreed that the Straits should be closed to all foreign warships except those who were allies of the Sultan in wartime.

Competition between the Great Powers for influence over the Sultan continued to increase in the mid-19th century and eventually they clashed over the Ottoman lands in south-east Europe. Treaties negotiated in the 18th century had given responsibility to France for the protection of Catholics in the Ottoman Empire and responsibility to Russia for the protection of Orthodox Christians. Both clashed over which Church should control the holy sites in Palestine. Both appealed to the Sultan who decided in favour of the French. Russia retaliated by invading and occupying Moldavia and Wallachia. The Sultan declared war on Russia in 1853 and soon the other Great Powers were being dragged into what came to be known as the Crimean War.

Further information: Why was the Caucasus so important to the Great Powers in the 19th Century?



Battle of Sinop, painted by Ivan Aivazovsky in 1853. the painting is now in the Naval Museum in St. Petersburg.

The destruction of an Ottoman squadron of ships in the port of Sinop in northern Anatolia by Russian warships in 1853 provided Britain and France, allies of the Ottoman Empire, with the grounds for declaring war on Russia. Ottoman forces attacked Russian armies on the Danube and in the Caucasus and were defeated. An Ottoman fleet sailed along the Turkish coast of the Black Sea and was then trapped in port and defeated by the Russian Black Sea fleet. French and British battle fleets sailed into the Black Sea to support the Sultan. The Russian fleet was blockaded in its home port of Sevastopol and the Russian Crimean army was defeated in 1854 in the Battles of Balaklava and Inkerman. The Russians abandoned Sevastopol a year later.

The Treaty of Paris, which formally marked the end of the war, left Russia without a fleet in the Black Sea and she had also lost her protectorate rights over the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.

The mass deportations



The mountaineers leave the Aul, 1872 by Pyotr Nikolayevich Gruzinsky

The years that followed the Crimean War witnessed the deportation of people from the Caucasus, particularly the Circassians, on a massive scale.

Most attempted to cross the Black Sea to the Ottoman Empire. Many died during their journey because of starvation, shortage of water and disease.

Today, only a minority of Circassians continue to live in their ancestral homeland. Most live in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Germany and the United States.

The Caucasus:

painting by Ivan Aivazovsky, 1899



How many Circassians migrated at this time?

1828-1829

10,000 Abkhaz left the North Caucasus

Source 11: Numbers of Circassian people from different tribes migrated in different dates

1852-1858

Abkhaz population declined from **98,000** to **89,866**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circassian_Genocide#Migration_from_the_Caucasus_to_the_Ottoman_Empire (Accessed at: 20.09.2010)

1858-1860

Over **30,000** Nogais were expelled

1860-1861

10,000 Kabards were expelled

1863-1864

470,703 people left the West Caucasus (according to G.A. Dzidzariia)

1861-1863

4,300 Abaza,
4,000 Natukhais,
2,000 Temirgoi,
600 Beslenei and
300 Bzhedugs families were exiled

312,000 people left the West Caucasus (according to N.G. Volkova)

398,000 people left the Kuban oblast (according to N.G Volkova)

1865

5,000 Chechen families were sent to Turkey

400,000 people left (according to N.I Voronov)

493,194 people left (according to Adol'f Berzhe)

418,000 people left (according to the Main Staff of the Caucasus Army)

It is difficult to be precise about the numbers of refugees who left the Circassian homelands at this time. Official and unofficial estimates vary. The estimates are based on different timeframes. . Not all of the immigrants were Circassian. Some figures only relate to the period 1859-1866. Some estimates take a longer timescale. Some only focus on the numbers who went to the Ottoman Empire. As Alan Fisher points out, it is difficult to make accurate estimates when the situation was so chaotic at the time. However, as Sarah Rosser-Owen observes, while the overall numbers vary, they all confirm that the scale of the migration was massive.

McCarthy estimates that 1 in 3 Circassians died at this time and about 600,000 had left for the Ottoman Empire by 1864, with more arriving after this date.

Justin McCarthy, "Factors in the Analysis of the Population of Anatolia", in *Population History of the Middle East and the Balkans*, Analecta Isisiana LXII, Isis, Istanbul, 2002

Shenfield estimates that probably over half of the original Circassian population has not been accounted for and that at least one million perished in the exodus.

"The Circassians: A forgotten genocide?" in Leven & Penny (eds) *The Massacre in History*, Berghahn, New York 1999

"An accurate count of refugees from the Crimea and the Caucasus... is not possible to obtain. Most of those leaving the Caucasus did it in a hurry, in a disorganised fashion, without passing any official border point where they might have been counted or officially noted."

Alan Fisher, *A Precarious Balance*, Analecta Isisiana XL, Isis, Istanbul 1999

Stanislav Lak'oba has estimated that Circassian migration was around one million by the end of 1866.

History: 18th century-1917 in Hewitt (ed) *The Abkhazians: A Handbook*, Curzon, London, 1999.

Kemal Karmat has estimated that up to 2 million Caucasians, most of whom were Circassians, emigrated between 1859 and 1879, with only about 1.5 million of those actually reaching their destination. (He also estimates that a further 500,000 Circassians left for the Ottoman Empire between 1881 and 1914.)

Ottoman Population 1850-1914, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Whichever estimate one uses, it is nevertheless clear that the scale of the emigrations from Circassian territories to the Ottoman Empire was massive, and that the sudden influx of such large groups of refugees will have had no small impact on the Ottoman localities that received them.

Sarah Rosser-Owen, *The First Circassian Exodus to the Ottoman Empire 1858-1867*, unpublished MA Thesis, 2007



Why did they move?



Timeline: key events leading to the mass migration of the Circassian people

1763	Russians began building forts as springboards for invasion.
1785	The Chechens, under the leadership of Imam Mansur declared war on Russia.
1794	Imam Mansur killed
1829	In Edirne Treaty the Ottoman Empire accepted Russian rights over much of the eastern shore of the Black Sea .
1840	Circassian forces attacked and defeated Russian forces in the coastal areas
1843	Victory for Circassian forces led by Imam Shamil
1853-56	Crimean War
1859	Circassian leader, Imam Shamil, was captured.
1860-61	small scale migration to Ottoman lands
21 May 1864	Final defeat of Circassians by Russia and mass migration started
1876-77	Ottoman-Russian War

Establishing the facts of what really happened in history can sometimes be quite difficult. We saw earlier that there are different estimates of just how many Circassians migrated after 1859, and particularly after 1864. But all the sources seemed to agree that the numbers were high.

We can also see from the various accounts of what happened that most observers and historians agree about the sequence of events which led up to the final defeat of the Circassians in 1864.

Why is it so difficult to be precise about the numbers of Circassians who died or left their homeland after the Russian-Circassian War?

Why did they move? A summary of the main push and pull factors.

Many factors affected Circassian migration

Push factors: Russian invasion and war, forced assimilation into the Russian Empire, mass killings and the threat of further massacres, economic pressure and psychological pressure to leave their homeland. They had little choice but to leave.

Pull factors: Circassian immigrants were accepted by the Ottoman Empire, they shared the same religion with the Ottoman peoples, they hoped for a better life. They had more trust in the Ottoman Caliphate to protect them. Only a few Circassians agreed to settle elsewhere in the Russian Empire.

We can also make broad generalisations about the push and pull factors: the factors which forced the Circassians to emigrate and the factors which encouraged so many to choose the Ottoman Empire as their new homeland.



An Adyghe strike on a Russian Military Fort to free the Circassian Coast from the occupiers . 22 March 1840. By Alexander Kozlov, (1818-1884).

Why did they move?

“Some interest will naturally be manifested as to the causes which have led the Circassian people to abandon their hearths and property, and to take refuge, under fearful difficulties and dangers, in a foreign territory. On this subject it is rather difficult, as I have already stated, to arrive at the accurate truth. The privations, the hardships, and the loss of life which have attended the first stages of the emigration have not weakened the determination of those left behind to brave the same dangers, rather than remain on their native soil. There is ample ground for inference, therefore – and the Circassians so represent it – that the Russians’ rule in the Caucasus is of a nature which cannot be endured. The sacrifice of independence alone would surely not have induced 300,000 people to fly in a body from their country,”

The Times of London, Circassian Exodus, 9 May 1864

Although we can establish a lot of factual information about the people who moved, when they moved, how they moved and where they went, it can sometimes be difficult to establish the facts when examining the motives of people and governments, particularly when there are accusations of massacres and the use of excessive force. Written documents cannot always be trusted if the people writing them have something to hide or wish to influence international opinion. Sometimes, as the editor of the Times of London wrote in 1864, we may not have the full accurate account of why so many Circassians moved or were forcibly moved but there is sufficient information available to make a good inference about it.

Multiple perspectives on why the Circassian peoples were forced in to exile: The Push Factors

It is important to recognise that many historical accounts are constructed from evidence gathered from lots of different sources and these sources will not always agree with each other. The foreign ambassador based in St Petersburg, Russia will hear a different account from his colleague based in Constantinople. The journalist on the spot may have a different point of view from the military observer gathering intelligence for the High Command. The Doctor examining the immigrants at their port of arrival will have another perspective. Most will not only state the facts as they see them they will also seek to interpret these facts for their chosen audience. So, we need to compare and contrast these different perspectives and note the similarities and differences before drawing any conclusions about motives, reasons and causes.

In each case we need to ask:

- From whom might they have got their information?
- For whom are they providing this information?
- Why might they be selective with the evidence or biased in their interpretation?

Our answers to these questions will enable us to decide how credible and reliable each of these sources is as an objective account of why the Circassians moved .

As these different sources show the official position of the Russian Government is consistent although the position in the internal dispatches is more hardline than the one used in communications with foreign ambassadors. At the same time not everyone at the time or since agreed with the official policy towards the Caucasus.

“You cleaned up and destroyed the rebellious autochthon [native] nations in West Caucasia in the last 3 years. We can recover the cost of this long bloody war from this fertile land in a very short time.”

Tsar Alexander II in a dispatch to General Yevdokimov

At the end of the war, when Grand Duke Michael came to Caucasia, Circassian Elders visited him and they said that they were defeated, and they demanded to be allowed to live in their lands accepting Russian administration. The answer Grand Duke Michael gave was: “I give you a month. In one month, you either go to the land that will be shown to you beyond Kouban, or you go to the land of the Ottoman Empire. The villagers and mountaineers who are not leaving for the coastal region in one month will be treated as prisoners of war.”

“We should send the Mountaineers by force to the places we want. If we need, we should deport them to the Don region. Our main goal is to settle Russians in the regions on the skirts of the Caucasian Mountains. But we shouldn’t let the Mountaineers know about this.”

Head of General Staff Milyutin, Imperial Caucasus Armies

“The Russians say that a fair offer was made to all the mountaineers [Circassians] to move into the plain, and to enjoy there, with an ample donation of land, some of the privileges of local self-administration. If the tribes had accepted the offer, the settlement of the people would have cost a vast sum to the Russian Government”.

**Lord Napier , British Ambassador ,St Petersburg, 19 May, 1864
To Earl Russell, British Foreign Secretary**

“The things we did in Caucasia were very similar to the negative things that Spaniards did during the war in the American lands. I wish God almighty would not leave any blood marks in Russian history.”

N. N. Rayevski, a General in the Russian army at the time who refused to participate in this campaign.

The British had a particular interest in events in the Caucasus. Ambassadors, consuls, special envoys, military officers and independent observers were asked to keep the British Government informed of what was happening. As these quotes show, their views tended to be coloured by where they were based and who they were talking to.

“I took the liberty yesterday of calling the attention of Prince Gortchakoff to the painful statements in the English newspapers concerning the hardships to which the emigrants from Circassia were exposed in their passage to Turkey. ..[He] replied that the tribes had insisted on leaving the country; that the Imperial Government regretted it; that it was absolutely necessary to remove these people from their mountain fastnesses, where their predatory and martial habits would be incurable. His excellency added that the estimate of their numbers to which I alluded was probably greatly exaggerated. “

Lord Napier to Earl Russell, St Petersburg, 17 May 1864.

“The policy of Russia, though unrelenting, has not been deliberately sanguinary. There was no desire to exterminate the people; the object was to remove them. Repeated attempts have been made to negotiate a general surrender and emigration...It is an error, therefore, to suppose that all these people, or even the great majority before the last general movement, have preferred the alternative of emigrating to Turkey.”

Lord Napier to Earl Russell, St Petersburg, 23 May 1864.

The continued advances of the Russians in Circassia, and the ill treatment experienced by the natives from Russian troops, have led to an almost complete emigration from the country.....The Turkish Government is therefore about sending vessels to Trebizond to remove the emigrants thence, and place them in different parts of the Empire; and it is also in negotiation with the Russian Chargé d'Affaires here, in order to be able to adopt some measures by which those unfortunate people, who, after the most heroic attempts in defending the country where they were born, are at last obliged to abandon it, may be able to seek asylum with safety in the Ottoman dominions.

**Sir Henry Bulwer, British Ambassador,
Constantinople, April 12, 1864**

“A Russian detachment, having captured the village of Toobeh on the Soobashi River, inhabited by about 100 Abadzekh, and after these had surrendered themselves prisoners, they were all massacred by the Russian troops. Among the victims were two women in advanced state of pregnancy, and five children. The detachment in question belongs to Count Evdokimoff's army.”

Consul Dickson to Earl Russell, Soukoum-Kalé, 17 March, 1864

“The unanimity and precipitation with which the tribes have crowded to the shore probably took both Russians and Turks by surprise. As soon as the Emperor [Tsar Alexander II] was informed of the reports circulated abroad concerning the hardships and suffering to which the emigrants were exposed, His Majesty telegraphed to the Grand Duke Michael desiring him to send agents to the spot to inquire into the distaste of affairs and to provide the means of relief. Instead of sending an agent, the Grand Duke went in person....It would appear by these accounts that the distress of the Circassians on the Russian territory has been exaggerated. The Grand Duke affirms that they are in possession of live stock, that distributions of bread have been made to them, and that their sanitary condition is by no means as bad as has been represented. No epidemic disorder prevailed among them. The suffering of the emigrants had rather been on the voyage to Turkey, and after their arrival at Trebizond, where there was a deplorable accumulation, mismanagement and misapplication of the assistance sent by the Sultan”.

Lord Napier to Earl Russell, St Petersburg, 23 May, 1864

Why do you think British diplomats followed events in the Caucasus so closely?

“The principal inhabitants were summoned to present themselves before the commander of the [Russian] troops, and were told that the Emperor, instead of consenting to the general extermination they had merited, graciously ordered the evacuation of their country... Three days they were told, were granted to them to come to a decision, and to make preparations for the journey. On the fourth day fire was set to their dwellings, and their inhabitants who had manifested the intention of seeking an asylum in Turkey, was forthwith marched down to the nearest point of the coast. On their reaching the spot, a military cordon surrounded the encampment to prevent any further communication with the interior. The men-at-war and other sailing ships – which it is officially stated in Lord Napier’s dispatch, had been at the Grand Duke Michael’s request, placed at his entire disposal in order to facilitate the Circassian emigration – having never existed but on paper, the thousands of individuals congregated on the beach were doomed to remain there exposed to the inclemency of the elements for weeks and months, waiting for the providential arrival of a vessel from Turkey.”

Letter from a British observer, T. Milligen, based in Constantinople, which was included as evidence in the Journal of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Houses of Parliament, 3. August, 1864.

"It is true that we left the Circassians alone with their terrible misfortune. Yet we needed help from them and we used them."

Lord Palmerston, Minister for War, addressing the British Parliament, 1856



Lord Palmerston, British Prime Minister (1855-58 and 1859-1865). In his long political career he had also served as Secretary of State for War, Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary.

Throughout the mid-19th century British military and diplomatic advisers and spies were operating in the Caucasus and throughout the Ottoman Empire to keep their government informed about Russian activities in the region. During the Crimean War Britain was encouraging Circassian resistance to Russia particularly during the Crimean War. Two British military spies who were particularly active in the Caucasus in the 1830s and then in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan were Arthur Conolly (who travelled under the name of Khan Ali) and Charles Stoddart. Both were executed as spies in 1842 by the Emir of Bokhara.

In 1856, not long after the end of the Crimean War, Lord Palmerston, admitted in Parliament that in its attempts to frustrate Russian policy in the Caucasus the British Government had made use of the Circassians when it suited them but had not gone to their aid when it was needed during the Russo-Circassian War.

The views of the Circassians are also on the historical record. Petitions for help were sent to the rulers of the Great Powers, including the Sultan, the Queen of England and the Emperor of France.



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

Extract from petition:

“It is now more than eighty years since the Russian Government is unlawfully striving to subdue and annex to its dominions Circassia, which since the creation of the world has been our home and our country. It slaughters like sheep the children, helpless women, and old men that fall into its hands. It rolls about their heads with the bayonet like melons, and there is no act of oppression or cruelty which is beyond the pale of civilization and humanity, and which defies description, that it has not committed. We have not, from father to son, at the cost of our lives and properties, refrained from opposing the tyrannical acts of that Government in defence of our country, which is dearer to us than our lives. We therefore invoke the mediation and precious assistance of the British Government and people – the guardian of humanity and centre of justice – in order to repel the brutal attacks of the Russian Government on our country, and save our country and our nation together.”

**Signed by the people of Circassia
29 Sheval, 1280 (April 9, 1864)**



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

“The tyranny of the Russians was not confined to capturing our cattle, burning our dwellings, and temples, and other unheard-of atrocities, but in order to starve us on the mountains they destroyed all our growing crops in the plain, and captured our land. In fact, they have treated us in an unbearable and barbarous manner, unprecedented in the annals of war. Driven to despair, we resolved to make a last firm stand against our enemies with all the energy we possessed.....Russia by brute force, is trying to conquer us; on the neutral Black Sea she is capturing, whenever she can, every ship carrying any of our countrymen, so that we have no home on land, no means of travelling or refuge by sea. Still we would rather die than submit to the yoke of Russia. If we were to emigrate, abandoning our homes, for ages protected by our forefathers, who shed their blood for them, our poverty would prove a great obstacle to our doing so; in fact, how could we take away our own wives and children, and the widows, orphans, and helpless relations of those slain in this war? Such an undertaking would decimate the emigrants, and blot out for ever our Circassian name from the face of the earth.”

Address of the Circassian deputies (Hadji Hayden Hassan and Kustar Ogli Ismael) to the Queen of England, London, 26 August 1862 (published in the Journal of the British Houses of Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee; 7 January, 1863

Finally, it is also possible to look at how historians have viewed the events since that time.

“There are no words to describe the situation of the Mountaineers in those days. Thousands of them died in the roads, thousands of them died due to illness and hunger. The coastal regions were full with people who are dead or on the verge of dying. The babies who are searching for milk in their mother’s cold dead body, mothers who didn’t leave their kids from their laps even they are already dead from cold, and people who are dead while they got closer just to keep warm, are examples of the scenes that were normal in the coasts of the Black Sea.”

Y. Abramov , Caucasian Mountaineers . Materials for the history of Circassian People, Moscow 1990.

“In the course of May 1864 these tribes were annihilated almost to the last man, woman and child. Seeing this, Circassians...in a frenzy of despair threw themselves into the valley of the Aibgo. For four days the Russians were repulsed with great losses. Heavy artillery was then brought up and began to belch fire and smoke into the little valley. Not one of the defenders survived. The Russian army rounded up people, driving them from their villages to ports on the Black Sea, where they awaited ships provided by the neighbouring Ottoman Empire. The explicit Russian goal was to expel the groups in question from their lands.”

S.D. Shenfield, The Circassians: A forgotten genocide? in (eds) M. Levene and P. Roberts, The Massacre in History, New York 2006.

“Both the British and the Ottoman Empire encouraged and supported resistance in Caucasus. They were intended to keep hopes of resistance alive, to harass a potential enemy and to preserve options for more vigorous future action if international developments made it desirable and circumstances favoured it. The Englishmen who were active among the Circassians in the 1830s tried to develop a sense of common purpose among all the North Caucasus in resisting the imposition of Russian Rule. Britain traditionally regarded the Russian presence in the region as a potential threat to its domination in India, and hence consistently tried to influence Caucasian affairs in its own interests..... in the later stages of the Crimean War, the British supplied arms and intelligence to the Circassians, who reciprocated by busying the Russians and returning with intelligence of their own. [The Russians alleged that] the freedom struggle of the Caucasian Mountaineers owed its intensity to propaganda, arms shipments, and money supplied by Turkish and British agents.”

P.B. Henze, Circassian Resistance to Russia, St Martin’s Press, London 1992.

“the absence of all political cohesion between the northern tribes...and those inhabiting other parts of the Caucasus and, indeed, the almost utter impossibility of bringing about such a consummation. Each and all cannot be made to forget their blood feuds, still less to unite in a common cause.”

Consul Dickson, Soukan-Kalé, 22 February 1864
To: Earl Russell, Foreign Secretary.

There may be one other ‘push factor’ which contributed indirectly to the mass migration of the Circassians. They were divided amongst themselves and this made it easier for Russian forces to isolate different tribes and communities and defeat them.

This extract from a dispatch from a British Consul to his Minister in London reflects the his and his colleagues’ experience during and after the Crimean War when trying to organise resistance to Russia across the Caucasus.

Why did so many Circassians go to the Ottoman Empire? The Pull Factors

The Turkish Government is willing and anxious to receive the fugitives, and incorporate them into their own population, but the movement has been so sudden and so extensive that it has been impossible to make provision for the hosts that are daily pouring in.

It is calculated that no less than 300,000 will, within the next two or three months, seek shelter in this country, and half that number are now seeking the means of transporting themselves to the Turkish coast of the Black Sea.

The Times of London, June 13, 1864

The first pull factor here was that the administration of the Ottoman Empire reacted very quickly to the emerging situation in the Caucasus and made it clear that they would offer refuge to Circassians.

Why did so many Circassians go to the Ottoman Empire?

“When the ultimate defeat and surrender of the Circassians become apparent the Russian Government made overtures to the Porte, in view of ascertaining whether the Sultan would receive into his dominions such proportion of the Circassian tribes as would desire to leave their country.

The Turkish Government consented to receive them on the condition that the emigration should be gradual and should not commence before the fine season. It was then believed that 40,000 or 50,000 would avail themselves of this refuge. The progress of events, however, has been so rapid that these stipulations have been totally disregarded, and the successive victories of the Russian army in the Caucasus produced the panic and the flight which have been recorded above.”

The Times, 9 May, 1864

The evidence suggests that the Ottoman administration made a commitment to take the Circassian exodus before they had a clear picture of just how many migrants would seek refuge within the Empire, or how urgent would be the demand for transportation away from the Caucasian shore.

Why did so many Circassians go to the Ottoman Empire?

At this time it was not just the Circassians who were



At this time it was not just the Circassians who were seeking a new life in the Ottoman Empire. Crimean Tatars, the Nogai and Muslims from the Balkans were also migrating westwards. Why did the Empire welcome so many immigrants at this time?

The Empire had just experienced a series of disastrous wars, nationalist movements were emerging in the Balkans seeking independence from Ottoman rule and the Ottoman economy was badly in debt particularly to the Western powers.

The newly-arrived Circassians were seen as a source of recruitment for the army and as settlers in areas of the Empire where there was unrest or the populations were difficult to control.

At first many Circassians settled in Rumeli (see map), in the European part of the Empire but after the Russian-Turkish war of 1788 many re-settled in Anatolia in the southern Marmara and in the middle east.

[At first] the Circassians were settled in Constance, Varna, Sofia, Pristina, Kosovo, Plevne and surrounding regions.

Marc Pinson, "Ottoman Colonization of the Circassians in Rumili after the Crimean War", *Études Balkaniques* 3, *Academie Bulgare des Sciences, Sofia*, 1972.

Why did so many Circassians go to the Ottoman Empire?

“If a proper system of succour be established, the Turkish Government might make considerable capital of this movement. There are vast and fertile plains and tracts of land in Asia Minor, and other parts of the empire, comparatively denuded of population, to which the Circassians may be drafted with advantage. The rapid development in the growth of cotton, which only requires hands for its further extension, could bring into immediate requisition and profit the employment of a vast number of the people; but something must be done immediately, and the most practical and useful mode of proceeding is to provide abundant means of transport. “

The Times, June 13, 1864

What do these two extracts from The Times tell us about the indirect consequences of Circassian migration to Ottoman Empire?

“There is a project also of drafting some 20,000 of these men into the Turkish army: the Grand Vizier and Minister of War, Fuad Pasha, has sent a military commission to the Black Sea, with this object, headed by Ali Pasha, a general officer of Circassian origin, who is said to have weight and authority with them. The execution of this measure will enable the War Department to relax considerably the system of recruiting, which would be an incalculable boon to the country at large; and judging by the past exploits of the Circassian race, neither the army nor the general population of the empire will suffer by the infusion of this new blood into their ranks. This is certainly an excellent idea, and one that may work well in time, but the urgent, the almost imperative want of the moment is to obtain immediate relief, and by the adoption of stringent sanitary measures to check the progress of the disease which is destroying these unfortunate creatures in the proportion of twenty per cent., and is spreading itself among the indigenous population.”

The Times, June 13, 1864

Why did so many Circassians go to the Ottoman Empire?

What is striking with the locations of settlements of Circassian diasporic groups is that they preferred to settle down in places, which then resembled those lands left behind in the homeland. Those who left their villages, for instance, by river in the homeland, found a new place by another river in diaspora; or those who used to live in the outskirts of a green mountain found a new home in a similar geography in diaspora. It is not only the selection of the place to settle down, which displays the commitment of the Circassians to construct a diasporic home, or space, away from the homeland, but also the way they reified their culture poses the same tendency.

Ayhan Kaya, Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Ethnic Relations in Nedret Kuran-Burçoğlu and S. G. Miller (eds.). *Representations of the Others in the Meditarrenean World and their Impact on the Region*, Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2005: 217-240

The Sublime Porte also appreciated the agricultural skills of many of the newcomers. As Rosser-Owen has observed, they brought with them agricultural skills that were greatly in demand.

The geographical size of the Ottoman Empire also enabled many Circassians to settle in places that were very similar to home.

“the Circassians showed themselves to be skilled agriculturalists, helping in the introduction of new machinery and cultivation methods, and for the most part developing flourishing settlements out of previously uncultivated land.”

S. Rosser-Owen, The First Circassian Exodus to the Ottoman Empire 1858-1867, unpublished MA Thesis, 2007

Why did so many Circassians go to the Ottoman Empire?



Deputation of Circassian chiefs to the Sultan, 1856

It is not surprising that Circassians, as Muslims, were drawn to the Ottoman Empire. Only a relatively small number agreed to exile in Russia. For Circassians the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire was not only the secular ruler of the Empire but also the Caliph, the direct successor of the Prophet Mohammed.

Another pull factor was that the Caliph's mother was Circassian and many Circassians already held important positions in the Palace administration.



Experiences before, during and after the exodus

The Lament of the Exile

We leave the fatherland with broken hearts!
We run into the morning train,
We rush in, bewailing our bleak destiny.
Oh, how the road out of our hamlet twists and turns!
We shed tears of blood as we are forced away from our homeland,
With heavy hearts we bid farewell to our country!
The officer in the Consulate is red-moustachioed,
Our hearts sink as we scrutinize our children's dark fate.
The beautiful Zul Balhqe is sounding the pshina (*Adyghe accordion*)
We call our kith and kin, but, alack, they are nowhere to be found,
We leave our fatherland against our will!
Our beautiful caps lie on the edge of our foreheads,
The steeds we ride, alas, we shall also have to leave behind.
Woe, our forefathers and foremothers are weeping over us!
Wailing and mourning we are exiled from our motherland,
We utter our farewells to the fatherland with bleeding hearts!
The crafts are sailing across the Black Sea,
Sobbing and lamenting they herd us to the moored vessels.
Our lot is verily to be in the Italian ship,
You cannot divine the country they are exiling us to,
We depart from our homeland with broken hearts!



This song is one of a number of laments upon the theme of the Great Circassian Diaspora (Yistambilak'ue; Going to Istanbul). It was composed by a Turkish Circassian but was then adopted by the Circassians still living in the Caucasus.

The Movement of the Circassian People



Source 13

- Blue arrows show the migration by land of the Circassians and Abkhazians.
- Red arrows show the migration to the Middle east and Anatolia of the Circassians and Abkhazians who settled initially in the Balkans

Emigrants' experiences before leaving their homeland

Correspondence from Constantinople (28.04.1864)

"Official intimation has been received here of the capitulation of Vardar, the last stronghold of the Circassians, and of the consequent submission of all the tribes. I had occasion in a previous letter to refer to the flood of immigration which was pouring into the Turkish dominions from the Caucasus, and to the defeats which had been experienced by these gallant mountaineers; and although there could be no doubt at that time that the cause of the Circassians was hopeless, there was not sufficient ground for anticipating the extraordinary movement which has since developed itself, and which threatens, unless immediate relief and succour be obtained, to degenerate, as regards these poor people, into an awful disaster. Whether this movement is to be attributed to a panic consequent on defeat, or to the hatred inspired by the Russians, it is rather difficult to determine; but there is no doubt that the three tribes known as the "Shabsoukhs," and "Oboukhs" and "Abazeys" have determined to abandon their country to a man, and take refuge on Turkish territory.

The Times of London, 9 May, 1864

As Russian forces moved through the North Caucasus forcing the inhabitants off their land the indigenous tribes were faced with three options: move to Siberia or Russian-controlled lands to the east; go to the Black Sea coast and find a ship to take them to Ottoman lands or take the 3000 km overland route to Romeli in Western Turkey on foot or by ox cart. All three options were extremely hazardous.

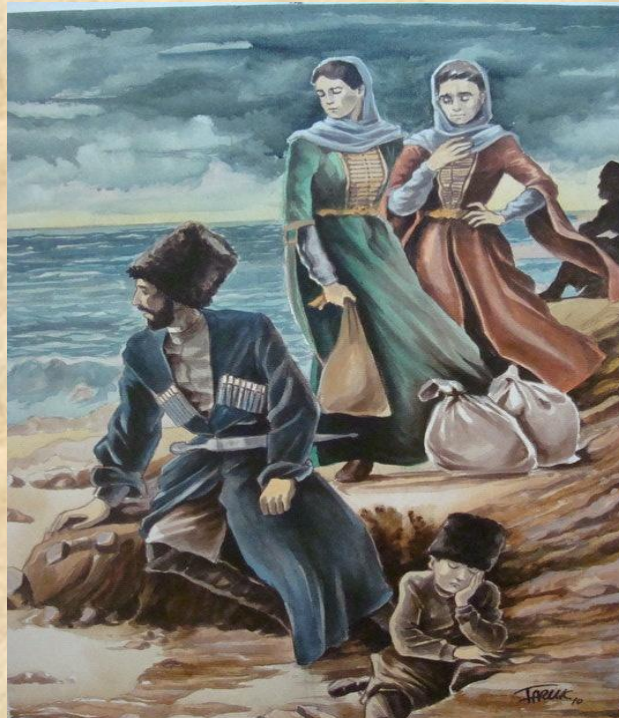
The Circassians who were driven from their homes in the years 1859-1864 mostly opted for the sea route to the ports of the Ottoman Empire, particularly Samsoun and Trabzon and also Cyprus, which was part of the Empire until 1878.

The migrants from Chechnya, Dagestan, Asetin and Kabardinos who left between 1865-1866 and after the Ottoman-Russian War, 1878 mostly took the land route.

Emigrants' experiences before leaving their homeland

People waiting on the shore of the Black Sea for a ship to travel to Turkey.

Faruk Kutlu



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

"It is calculated that no less than 300,000 will, within the next two or three months, seek shelter in this country, and half that number are now seeking the means of transporting themselves to the Turkish coast of the Black Sea. Unfortunately, it is found most difficult to obtain transports for this purpose. The Turkish Government has offered every pecuniary inducement for obtaining it, without avail. It is now their intention to disarm some of their men-of-war, and employ them for this service; but even this resource will not be sufficient to meet the difficulty.....

Negotiations [by the Porte] are in progress with the Russian Government to induce them to open their ports in the Black Sea, so as to give a regular and systematic course to the movement, instead of driving the unfortunate emigrants to the unprotected beach in search of small coasting vessels, which are crowded to excess."

The Times, 9 May, 1864

Emigrants' experiences before leaving their homeland



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

A Circassian woman waits on the shore for a ship while the men look out across the Black Sea .

The Ubikh and Fighett tribes are fast embarking for Trebizond. In fact, after their land having been laid waste by fire and sword, emigration to Turkey is the only alternative allowed to those mountaineers who refuse to transfer themselves to the Kouban steppes and contribute periodically to the militia. The condition of these poor people is described by eye-witnesses as most distressing. In the hurry of departure the overcrowding of boats is so little heeded as to lead to frequent disasters, while such of their horses and cattle as war and famine have spared are being sold for a few paper roubles. In some instances the emigrants, sooner than see their weapons (may be heir-looms in the family for centuries) exchange hands with the enemy, have flung them into the sea.

With a view of introducing Russian colonization in the conquered districts the Government offer grants of land and other privileges to the Azoff Cossacks who may desire to settle there. Government employés indiscriminately, who may have served ten years in the Caucasus, will be entitled to claim an allotment of the land.

Consul Dickson to Earl Russell. – (Received May 17)

Soukoum-Kalé, April 13, 1864

Emigrants' experiences before leaving their homeland

Women, children and the elderly were most at risk while waiting for a ship to take them to the Ottoman empire.

Faruk Kutlu



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

“The thousands of individuals congregated on the beach were doomed to remain there exposed to the inclemency of the elements for weeks and months, waiting for the providential arrival of a vessel from Turkey. The scanty supply of provisions they had brought with them, once exhausted, hunger drove them to have recourse for subsistence to roots and the bark of trees within their reach. Hundreds of women and children died from either starvation or from the effects of food so noxious to the constitution; for in no instance was the slightest assistance afforded by the Russian authorities. It stands to reason that the mortality grew from day to day at the most frightful rate, and that the survivors were, at the moment of their embarkation, looking more like walking spectres than living beings.”

Journal of the British Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, 3 August, 1864

Experiences during the journey

Source 54: The privations of the voyage. A woman nurses her sick baby



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

“Already the outflowing tide of emigrants it to great as to place the Turkish Government in the greatest embarrassment. 27,000 of these unfortunate creatures, in the most utter destitution, have poured into Trebizonde [*Trabzon*]. The privations of the voyage in a most inclement season have produced disease of the very worst kind among them, which is not only committing fearful ravages in their own famished ranks, but it is extending to the local population. Typhus and smallpox are raging at Trebizonde, and the place is threatened with a famine. The Turkish Government is willing and anxious to receive the fugitives, and incorporated them into their own population, but the movement has been so sudden and so extensive that it has been impossible to make provision for the hosts that are daily pouring in.”

The Times, 9 May, 1864

Experiences during the journey

Folk memories of the Circassian Exodus



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

"My mother was very beautiful. I remember her vaguely. She was tall and had big, green eyes. She had long dark hair coming down to her waist. During the Great Circassian Migration my mother and father, together with their two children, set sail for the unknown. They were forced to abandon their homeland, leaving behind their roots, memories and everything they possessed. In spite of all the suffering they had gone through, they never lost their hope. Because, they knew that losing hope was synonymous with death. As they sailed for the unknown, trying to hold on to life in boundless seas, diseases arose in their vessel. Hunger, misery, diseases and death were following them." "I was only four years old but I remember them throwing her into the sea... Her long dark hair entangled with the waves... Those on the ship watched her lifeless body until it disappeared... I remember weeping with my brother on our father's lap...I was furious and outraged, crying 'Why did you throw my mother into the sea?'"

The recorded memories of the grandmother of **Dr. Sibel SİBER**, Member of Parliament, Republican Turkish Party (CTP), North Cyprus

Experiences during the journey

The hazards of the journey by sea.



Contemporary painting by Faruk Kutlu

“Sailors were acquisitive. They were letting 200-300 people on to the ships that have a capacity of 50-60. The people left with a little bread and water. In 5-6 days these were all consumed and then they caught epidemic illnesses from starvation, they were dying in the way to Ottoman Empire, and those who die were dumped into the sea. The ship that started the trip with 600 people ended up with only 370 people alive.”

French Military Adviser, A. Fonvill, “The last year of the Circassian War of Independence 12863-64: From the notes of a foreign party”, reprinted in the Nalchik edition of the Journal, Adyge, 1991.

Experiences during the journey

“When 2718 people who left from Samsun to come to Cyprus arrived, 853 of them were dead and the others were not very different from being dead. The daily dead toll is about 30-50.”

British Consul in Cyprus, R.H. Lang to the Foreign Secretary, London

Some idea may be formed of the mortality raging among them when it is known that out of 600 Circassians who took passage in a steam transport, after a voyage of three or four days 370 only arrived at their destination. The accounts that are received of the helpless and destitute state of these unhappy beings surpass in misery and horror anything I have ever seen recorded in connexion with suffering humanity. Women in childbirth exposed to the inclemencies of a Black Sea journey, without assistance or the bare necessities of life, enveloping their newborn in a corner of their own ragged garment; sturdy warriors who had achieved many a gallant deed lying prostrate in the agonies of a horrible death, decks swarming with the dead and dying.

The Times, 9 May, 1864

July 6th – A telegram from Gallipoli announces the landing of 3340 Circassians.

The total of the immigrants hitherto landed on various points of the coast of the Sea of Marmora, 21,703.

Letter dated Samsoun 30th ult., report 100,000 immigrants, and 300 deaths daily. Fresh arrivals from Circassia balance the departures.

Reports from Batoom, 26th ult., announce the arrival of 8500 Circassians from Ardilar. June 30th, Varna. 530 Circassian passengers from Theodosia.

A report from Widdin says that the 35,000 emigrants had been distributed between Zohmpalanka, Sofia, and Nich, 664 deaths after their departure from Widdin. They spread typhus and small-pox wherever they settle. Nearly 200 men from the crews of Turkish vessels which convey the emigrants, have had the typhus fever, and have been sent to the Naval hospital. This circumstance does not deter the Government from sending as before the vessels appointed to transport the immigrants.

Extract taken from intelligence received by the Board of Health of the Ottoman Empire

Experiences on arrival in a strange land

Report to the Board of Health of the Ottoman Empire by the Sanitary Inspector, Samsun, May 20, 1864

"Gentlemen,

I arrived at Samsun six days ago. No words are adequate to describe the situation in which I found the town and the unfortunate immigrants.....Everywhere you meet with the sick, the dying and the dead; on the threshold of gates, in front of shops, in the middle of streets, in the squares, in the gardens, at the foot of trees. Every dwelling, every corner of the streets, every spot occupied by the immigrants, has become a hotbed of infection. A warehouse on the seaside, a few steps distant from the quarantine office, hardly affording space enough for 30 persons, enclosed until the day before yesterday 207 individuals, all sick or dying. The encampments present a picture hardly less revolting. From 40,000 to 50,000 individuals in the most absolute state of destitution, preyed upon by disease, decimated by death, are cast there without shelter, without bread, and without sepulchre (i.e. burial). There is no one to take care of the immigrants, no service organized for the burial of the dead, no horses, no carts, no boats, nothing."

Reproduced in The Times, 13 June, 1864.

The Circassians who were able to arrive in the Ottoman lands experienced great difficulties, many died or became sick on the journey. Epidemic diseases were widespread among those who waited for months for ships at Black Sea ports, often without food and money.

This and the following extracts from historical sources highlight the plight of the immigrants arriving in Turkish ports such as Samsun, Trabzon and Gallipoli.

Experiences on arrival in a strange land

“There are at present here from 70,000 to 80,000 individuals without bread, and there is no one to keep them down in case of disorderly conduct. I wish it were possible that his Highness the Grand Vizier could come here and witness the spectacle which this ill-fated town and the encampments present..... In a few days hence this number will be doubled. How is it expected that such a mass of men should be kept in order? How is it to be fed and provided for? This immigration thus left to itself is an actual calamity..... if we had here an adequate supply of flour the number of ovens would be insufficient; we need biscuits. There are individuals who die from starvation, and the number of those who have been four days without receiving their rations is very large.”

Dr Barrozzi, an Italian medical doctor was asked by the Board of Health of the Ottoman Empire to report on the health and welfare of the Circassian immigrants currently in Trebizond and Samsoun. Here is an extract from his report on the immigrants in Samsun, May 20, 1864

“I was anxious – knowing how strong an impression Dr. Barozzi’s official report from Samsoun had produced throughout England – to forward the one he presented, on his return from his sanitary mission, to the Board of Health; convinced as I am that the facts he has brought to light are such as not only to keep up, but increase tenfold, the interest displayed in favour of the Circassian exiles. I deeply regret, however... that the author....when enumerating the various causes which engendered the diseases which have occasioned and still continue to occasion the most awful mortality, among the Circassians, has not said one word concerning the principal among these causes – i.e., the barbarous treatment these exiles met with on the part of the Russian military authorities....The question to be dealt with at present, is whether the measures adopted by the Russian Generals to accomplish the ‘pacification’ of the conquered provinces, were not calculated to occasion the diseases which have already destroyed upwards of two hundred thousand of their inhabitants, and continue yet to decimate the ranks of the survivors, after finding a refuge in Turkey?

Extract from letter from T. Milligen, which was included as evidence in the Journal of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the British Houses of Parliament, 3. August, 1864.

Experiences on arrival in a strange land

“The situation of the exiled people was turning into a catastrophe. Hunger and epidemics were at their peak. The group who came to Trabzon decreased from 100,000 to 70,000 people. 70,000 people arrived at Samsun. The dead toll per day was about 500 people. This number was about 400 in Trabzon. 300 people in Gerede Camp, the daily death toll in Akcakale and Saridere is about 120-150 people.

Colonel Teophil Lapinsky, Polish eye witness

“I will never forget the 17,000 people I saw at the Novorossisk Bay [on the Russian northern coast of the Black Sea]. I am sure those who saw their situation couldn't bear it and would definitely collapse no matter what religion they belonged to, Christians, Muslims, or atheists. In the cold winter, in the snow, without a house, without food, and without any proper clothing, these people were in the hands of typhoid, typhus and chicken pox diseases. The babies were searching for milk in their mother's dead body. This terrible black page in the Russian history caused great harm to the Adygean history. The exile caused an interruption in the history of social, economic and cultural developments and in the process of becoming one political union/confederation.”

A.P. Berge, Russian eye witness

Is there anything which the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France could have done differently to prevent this tragedy?

Experiences on arrival in a strange land

No. 1.

Consul Stevens to Earl Russell.—(Received March 12.)

(Extract.)

Trebizond, February 17, 1864.

THE agglomeration of Circassian emigrants in this town has become a serious matter, and ought to occupy the immediate attention of the Porte. During the last three days fresh arrivals have taken place, and circa 3,000 have been landed; some 40,000 more were preparing to quit their country. Amongst those who have reached, hundreds are labouring under disease, superinduced by famine and misery which they suffered previous to embarkation. Emin Pasha, Governor-General of the Province of Trebizond, has done all he could to alleviate the condition of these unfortunate people, but the means at his disposal are very limited. Meanwhile disease is spreading fearfully amongst the Circassians and natives; the mortality from typhus is on the increase; the panic is great and general, and every one is making arrangements to quit the town. Of three European doctors in whom confidence was placed, one, a French subject, died to-day of typhus; another, a British subject, attached to the Quarantine Department cannot attend the sick, the functions of his office absorbing all his time. A number of the Pasha's employés, whose duties brought them in contact with the Circassians, became infected, and several have died.

The Porte recently sent to this place a quantity of old military clothing, and some drugs for the use of the emigrants; the former has been distributed, the latter proved useless.

The quarters in the vicinity of the cemeteries are rendered uninhabitable owing to the careless manner in which the dead are buried, and the offensive consequences thereof; and whole families are abandoning their dwellings. The chief aqueduct which feeds the fountains of the town is tainted, a Circassian corpse having been found floating therein a few days ago. The streets and squares are in a wretched filthy condition; provisions are getting scarce and dear, and fuel is completely wanting, all which augments the misery and tends to the spread of disease. If some measure is not immediately taken to remove the various inconveniences alluded to, it is to be feared that directly the spring sets in, the public health will suffer considerably.

From the best information obtainable, the mortality must have exceeded 3,500 between December and this date, of which, emigrants 3,000, Turks 470, Greeks 36, Armenians 17, Catholics 9, and Europeans 6.

**Sir H. Bulwer to Earl Russell , Constantinople,
May 3, 1864**

“One mode of granting hospitality to these unhappy exiles is by dividing them amongst different Turkish villages in different districts, and allotting to four Turkish families one Circassian family in these districts. This is undoubtedly the cheapest mode, but the worst: it adds to the miseries of the already miserable condition of the Turkish peasant; it affords but a wretched chance of existence to the poor Circassians; whilst the strength of these almost invincible warriors is divided, dissipated, and lost.”

Experiences on arrival in a strange land

“Circassians were at first considered by the Ottoman political elite to be a kind of balancing instrument and a new stock of military potential for the future of the Empire. They were often used as security detachments and pioneers in remote and uncontrollable areas. As a reliable, countervailing force used to interdict and discipline Kurds, Turkmen, Druze, Bedouin and other nomads, they were an asset to the Empire from a demographic and military standpoint.”

Ayhan Kaya, Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: Stereotypes, Prejudices and Ethnic Relations in
Nedret Kuran-Burçoğlu and S. G. Miller (eds.). *Representations of the Others in the*
Mediterranean World and their Impact on the Region, Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2005: 217-240



What were the consequences?

Consequences: An overview

“Ultimately, we have to ask whether the Circassian refugees proved to be a blessing or a curse for the Ottomans. Apart from the initial strain felt by the provincial economies and their local communities, the refugee crisis also had severe financial consequences for the Ottoman Empire, leading them to default on their loan repayments in the early-1870s. However, in the longer term, there is evidence that the Circassians did produce some benefits for the Ottomans. They contributed towards the modernisation of the Empire, with many of them working on the construction of the new roads and railways. The reforms of provincial government, with their emphasis on improving efficiency and on the facilitation of public works and institutions, were also at least in part likely to have been introduced at this stage as a result of the refugee crisis. The increase in manpower was valuable in the extension of the armed forces and in the provision of provincial policing, however problematic.”

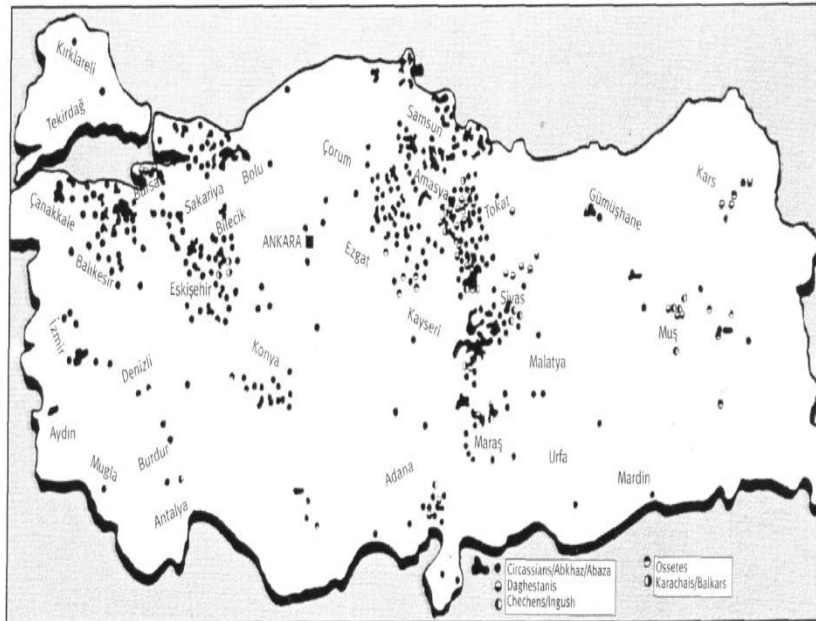
Sarah Rosser-Owen, The First Circassian Exodus to the Ottoman Empire 1858-1867, unpublished MA Thesis, 2007 pp.54-55

CONSEQUENCES: HOW MIGRATION INFLUENCED OTTOMAN SOCIETY

The settlement of the immigrants on a large scale had profound effects on the Ottoman Empire. A new and profoundly different Anatolia emerged over time; nearly all provinces were now home to substantial number of immigrants. They were given lands and animals on the vast plains of Anatolia.

Taken from a broader perspective, the settlement of the immigrants from the Caucasus brought about not only a demographic change in the population of Anatolia it also transformed the Anatolian heartlands into a land dominated by a Muslim population.

There are today millions of Turkish citizens of Caucasian origin whose ancestors settled at Marmara, Central-Anatolia, East-Anatolia and Black Sea regions of Turkey.



Source: Jaimoukha, Amjad, *The Circassians: A Handbook*,
Curzon: Caucasus World, London, 2001, p.24
Taken from: <http://www.circassianworld.com>

CONSEQUENCES: Circassians in the Ottoman Army

Finding no choice except to settle in the lands of the Caliph, the immigrants quickly adapted to their new environment. They not only revitalized the agriculture of Anatolia and countered the separatist tendencies of some of the other ethnic minorities within the Empire, they also joined the Ottoman establishment itself, particularly within the army. They became a key element within the armed forces of the Ottoman Empire and provided a backbone of unquestioned loyalty and service.

In 1918 Anatolia was occupied by Allied forces after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the first World War. A Turkish national resistance movement emerged, led by the youngest general in the Ottoman army, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk dedicated to the creation of a modern, national republic of Turkey. The movement was led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), who had been the youngest General in the Turkish army. Many of the leading figures supporting Kemal Atatürk in the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) were of Circassian descent.



Circassian soldiers with Atatürk during the Turkish War of Independence (1920)

Consequences: The Circassian Diaspora

The Circassians have been in a state of Diaspora ever since their migration to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. During the last decades of the tsarist regime, their Circassian lands were resettled by Russians, Ukrainians and Armenians. Today, only a minority of Circassians still live there, mainly in three republics of the Russian Federation (Kabardino- Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea).

Today, many people of Circassian origin live in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Germany and the United States. According to estimates, some 120,000 Circassians live in Jordan, 45,000 in Syria, and 4,000 in Israel, but the bulk of the diaspora - 3.5 million - live in Turkey.

This figure is four times more than the population living in the Circassians' traditional homeland in the North Caucasus.



A display of Circassian horsemanship in Transjordan during a visit by the High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel in April 1921.

Consequences: assimilation and loss of culture and language

Caucasians did their best to preserve their Caucasian customs and traditions. Full preservation of cultural identity and language of origin, have been possible only in isolated rural areas. Inescapable internal assimilation has taken place.

For example, the last speaker of the the Ubykh language died in 1992. Before the Russian-Caucasian Wars the Ubykh had inhabited an area just northwest of Abkhazia in the Caucasus. By 1864, as well as other Muslim people of Caucasus, the Ubykh left their homeland . By May 21, the entire Ubykh nation had departed from the Caucasus. They eventually settled in a number of villages in western Turkey around the municipality of Manyas (Balıkesir). In order to avoid discrimination, the Ubykh elders encouraged their people to assimilate into Turkish culture. The Ubykh language was rapidly displaced by Turkish. The last native speaker of Ubykh, Tevfik Esenç, died in 1992.



Tevfik Esenç (1904 - October 7, 1992) was a Circassian exile in Turkey and the last known speaker of the Ubykh language. As a civil servant based in Istanbul, he was able to do a great deal of work with the French linguist Georges Dumézil to help record his language. He was also the primary source of the mythology, culture and customs of the Ubykh people.



What is the legacy?



Circassians in Turkey



A family of Turkish-Circassian descent
in a Circassian village in Turkey, 1975

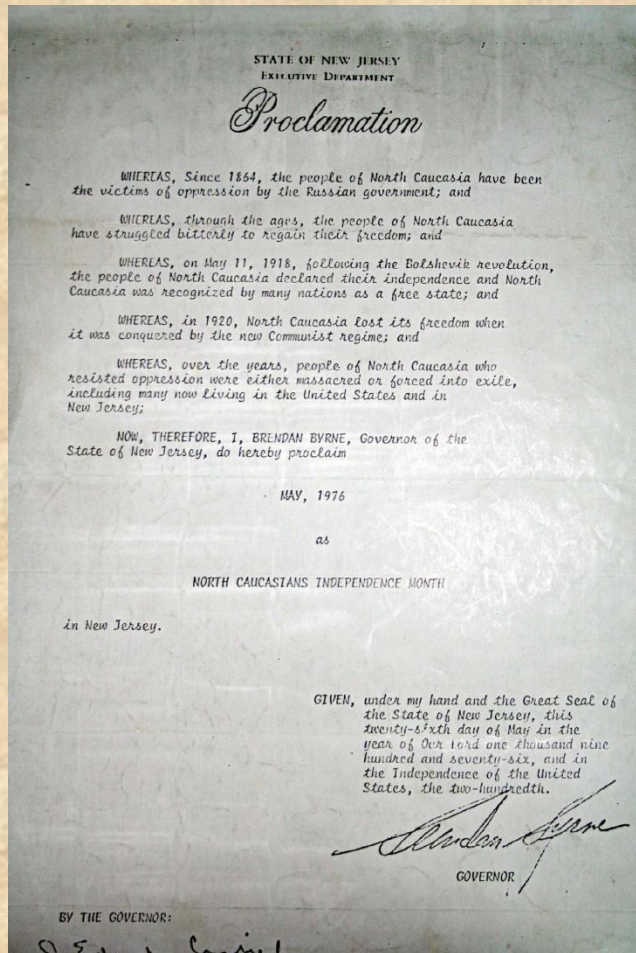
“Over time the exiled ‘Circassians’ tended to become ‘Turks (or Jordanians, etc.) of Circassian descent’. Nevertheless, even in Turkey the younger generation still speak Circassian - albeit only poorly, as a second language - and profess a sentimental pride in the Circassian heritage. In Jordan, Palestine-Israel, Saudi Arabia and other countries that formed part of the Ottoman empire, compact communities of Circassians still exist. In Jordan Circassians exercise important functions as military officers and businessmen”.

Stephen D. Shenfield, The Circassians, A forgotten Genocide? The Massacre in History’ kitabı içinde der. Mark Levene & Penny Roberts, Oxford: 2006.



A family of Turkish-Circassian descent
in a Circassian village in Turkey, 1970

Circassians in the USA



STATE OF NEW JERSEY EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT: PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Since 1864, the people of North Caucasia have been the victims of oppression by the Russian government; and

WHEREAS, through the ages, the people of North Caucasia have struggled bitterly to regain their freedom; and

WHEREAS, on May 11, 1918, following the Bolshevik revolution, the people of North Caucasia declared their independence and North Caucasia was recognized by many nations as a free state; and

WHEREAS, in 1920, North Caucasia lost its freedom when it was conquered by the new Communist regime; and

WHEREAS, over the years, people of North Caucasia who resisted oppression were either massacred or forced into exile, including many now living in the United States and in New Jersey;

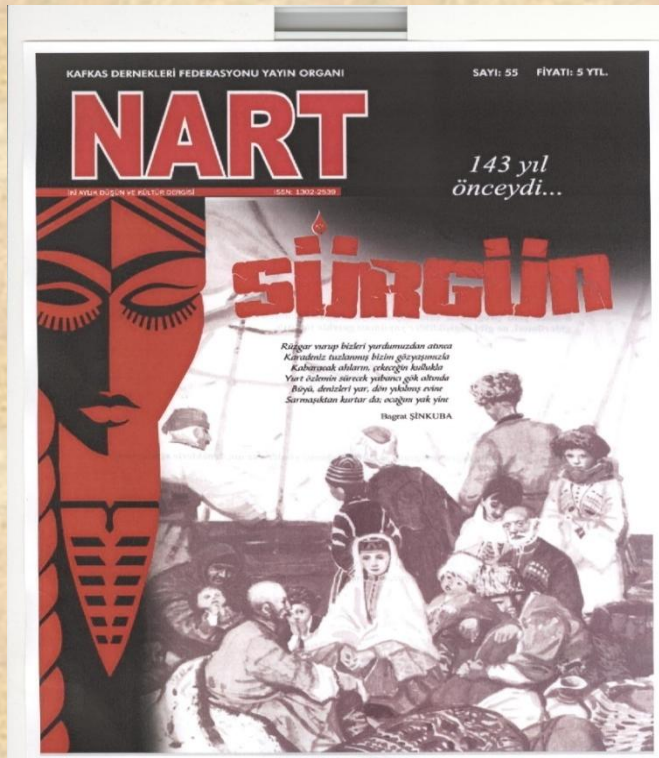
NOW, THEREFORE, I, BRENDAN BYRNE, Governor of the State of New Jersey, do hereby proclaim MAY, 1976 as NORTH CAUCASIANS INDEPENDENCE MONTH in New Jersey.

GIVEN, under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey, this twenty-sixth day of May in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and seventy-six, and in the Independence of the United States, the two-hundredth.

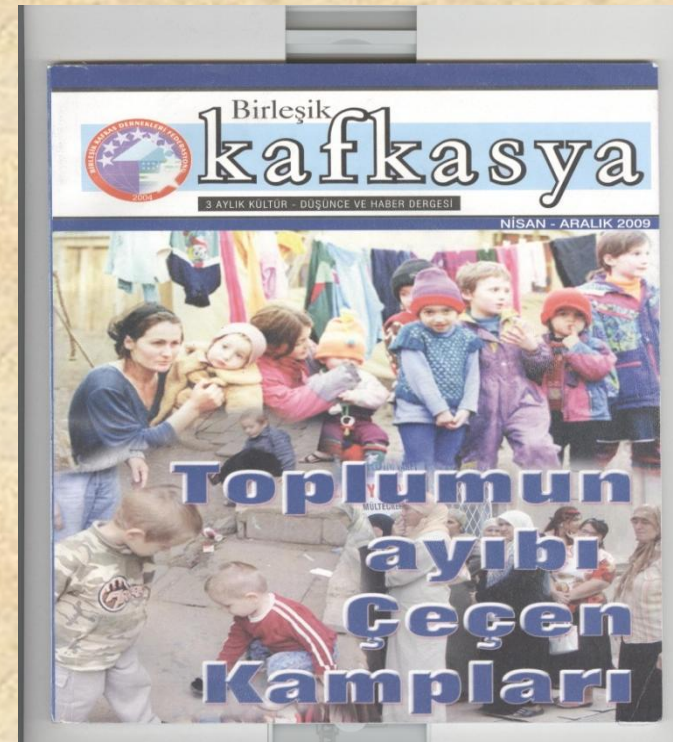
Signed
GOVERNOR

<http://www.circassianworld.com/new/general/1363-proclamation-byrne.html>

Circassian associations in Turkey. There are over 100 associations and foundations established by the people of North-Caucasian origin in Turkey to keep their culture alive . They are very sensitive to all problems in modern Caucassia and active regarding the issue of Chechnya and the Russia Federation. Here are just two of the journals published by these associations.



The Journal 'Nart' which is the publication of the Federation of Caucasian Associations in Turkey. The title is: It was 143 years ago: EXILE



the Journal 'United Caucasias' which is the publication of the United Caucasian Associations in Turkey. The title is: The shame of the society: Chechen refugee camps (in Turkey)

Remembrance day 21 May

Poster: Lets meet at Kefken on 23 May



The 21 May 1864 is conventionally seen as the beginning of “The Great Circassian Exile”, when Circassians were forced to migrate to Ottoman territories by the Russian Empire.

Circassians in many countries annually commemorate May 21 in remembrance of the mass deportations of their ancestors

This poster calls Turkish Circassians to meet at Kefken, a small port where some of the first Circassians to arrive in the Ottoman Empire landed.

The following two sources also relate to memorials of the exodus and the tragic events of 21 May 1864.

Legacy : Remembrance day, 21 May



A memorial stone in the Adygheya Republic commemorating those who died in the Russian-Circassian War .



Ceremony of remembrance held in Sochi in 2010 for the Adyghe people who died during the Russian-Circassian War.

Multiple perspectives on commemorations of tragic events such as the Circassian Exodus

“21 May is a Day for remembering our tragic losses as a nation and for looking back into our history closely. **Yes we should remember, but not with hate and bitter feelings; rather with opened minds, and with understanding of the historical facts, so we can learn from the mistakes that were made in the past.** And this is the message I want to give to the young generation. We should learn to appreciate our own culture, our own language, each other... and have a belief in our future. Don't open your hearts for hate or a new conflict, but open it for love for your motherland and your nation, who survived despite all the tragedies and hardships.”

Dr. Mohydeen I. Quandour, Author, Film Director, Composer.

“Much has been written by historians and social scientists about the nature and importance of commemorations for nations: they are simultaneously symbols and events; collective and personal; political and cultural. Most importantly however they are both about the past and the future. The way in which the past of a nation is remembered is instrumental in the making of its futures. Therefore, while marking with grief the dispersal of the Circassians from their homeland, let May 21 also represent the joy of a nation that is coming to know itself.”

Seteney Shami, Eurasia Program Director, USA.

[All sources from:](#)

<http://www.circassianworld.com/new/war-and-genocide/1465>

May 21 in 1864 was celebrated by the Russian imperial society as a day of joy marking the end of the so-called Caucasian Wars. The festivities held in Akhchipskh in order to commemorate this ‘historical event’ consisted of a church service thanking god for bestowing victory upon the Russian troops, a military parade and a banquet in honor of the royal family and those responsible for the ‘final subjugation’ of the Caucasus.”

Irma Kreiten, Southampton University, UK

“I do not think such commemorations are a good idea because the memory of yesterday's miseries can lead to tomorrow's. Warfare is one of the engines of history – people live in this place and not that, speak this language and not that, have this religion and not that as the consequences of victory or defeat in war. The Circassians lost a long and brutal war and many of them went into exile as miserable refugees. But all peoples have the same past; all have been losers, all have been winners. ...Therefore, commemorations of past tragedies can fuel present disputes that will lead to future tragedies. They should be matters of history to be dispassionately remembered and assessed. These events happened and, in most cases, had the losers been the winners, they would have done the same to their enemies.”

Patrick Armstrong, Political analyst, Canada.



What is the bigger picture?



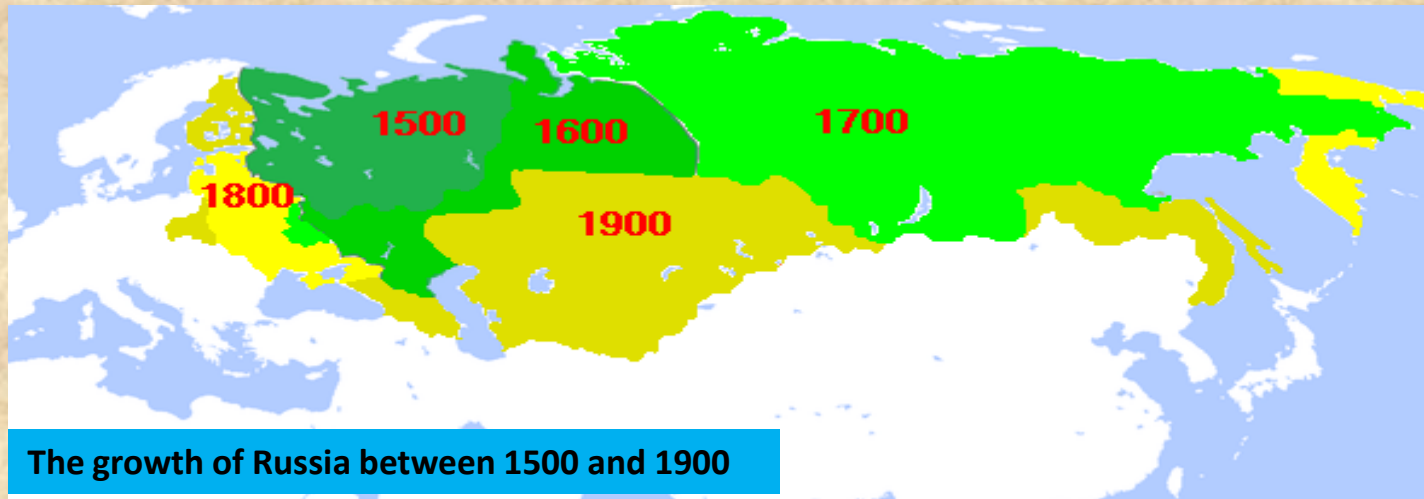
The bigger picture: introduction



The Caucasus is a region lying between Russia to the north, Iran and Turkey to the south, the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the East. The Greater Caucasian mountains are perceived to be a physical dividing line between Europe and Asia.

For centuries much of this region was part of the Persian Empire. But as a crossroads between Europe and Asia it was strategically important to Russia, particularly the North Caucasus, while the South Caucasus (Transcaucasia) gradually came under the control of the Ottoman Empire. There are more than 50 ethnic groups in the region and since the 8th century it has been an area where Christians and Muslims have lived alongside each other, sometimes peacefully, and sometimes in conflict. By the mid-18th century Islam was the predominant religion in the region. A long process of Russian expansion into the region led to the Russian-Caucasian Wars and then to outward migration by the Caucasian peoples and inward migration by Russians and other Slavic groups. These population movements and internal ethnic conflicts created territorial disputes which have continued to this day.

The bigger picture: Russian expansionism



The period of Russian expansionism begins with the accession of Ivan IV (Ivan the terrible) in 1533. Under his rule Russia expanded south eastwards down the River Volga to annexe the khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan which blocked the trade routes to the Middle East through the Caspian Sea. By the early 16th century the process of colonising Siberia was underway and Russia then turned its attention to the west and south west. It encroached into the eastern territories of Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Estonia, Livonia, and the eastern Ukraine. It also gained control of the Khanate of Crimea in 1783. By the late 18th century Russia had become a massive Eurasian empire and still expanding into the territories of the Ottoman Empire to the south.

The bigger picture: the continued decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the republic of Turkey 1.

By the 17th century the Ottoman Empire controlled much of the eastern Mediterranean, central and eastern Europe, North Africa and south west Asia. A long period of expansion in Europe came to an end with the siege of Vienna in 1683 where a large Ottoman army was defeated by an Alliance of German, Habsburg and Polish forces led by Jan Sobieski, the King of Poland. Defeat was followed by 16 years of intermittent warfare culminating in the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) through which the Ottoman Empire lost control of some of its European territories.

The end of the expansionist era was followed by a period of stagnation where a number of attempts to introduce modernization and administrative reforms failed and conservative forces held sway in the Caliphate. A number of wars between the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia further weakened the capacity of the Caliphate to control its European territories. By the early 19th century a number of nationalist movements were emerging within the Ottoman European lands, particularly in the Balkans. The prolonged Serbian revolution (1804 – 1833) and the Greek War of Independence (1821) served to further fuel the flames of nationalism across the whole south-eastern region of Europe.

During the 19th century a number of reforms were introduced including a reorganisation of the army, a new legal system along French lines and reforms in administration and education. Railways were constructed, the telegraph was introduced and other elements of modernization. Reformists pressed for a constitutional monarchy and the first Ottoman Parliament met in 1876. It sat for two years until the Sultan suspended it indefinitely.

The decisive victory of the Russian forces in the Russian-Ottoman War further weakened the Ottoman Empire led to the independence of Bulgaria, Wallachia and Moldavia and confirmed the independence of Serbia and Montenegro. Fearing further destabilization in the region, the Great Powers convened the Congress of Berlin in the summer of 1878 and took steps to restore some of the territory which the Porte had lost as a result of the war. On the other hand the Congress also created resentment in the region which ultimately de-stabilized the region even more and led to the First World War.

The bigger picture: the continued decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the republic of Turkey

2.

The Congress of Berlin succeeded in temporarily shoring up the weakened Ottoman Empire but Imperial Russia, the victors of the Russian-Ottoman War in 1878, felt that they had been treated as if they were the losers by the other Great Powers. The nationalist movements in the Balkans continued to grow and become increasingly active. Austria unilaterally occupied Bosnia Herzegovina and Novi Pazar in 1878 although Ottoman troops also continued to be stationed in both provinces for the next 30 years and both powers continued to contest each other's occupation of these territories. Through the Congress of Berlin, Britain took control of Cyprus in 1878 and gradually took control over Egypt, while France occupied Tunisia.

The old regime in the Ottoman empire was further weakened by the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, organised by a coalition of army officers, liberal reformists, nationalists and secular modernists was triggered by discontent within the 3rd Army garrisoned in Macedonia. Rebellion spread rapidly and on July 24 1908 Sultan Abdülhamid II restored the Constitution and the Parliament. A year later he was deposed in favour of his brother, Mehmed V, although power lay with the Government.

In 1914 the Empire entered the First World War on the side of Germany and the Central Powers. After some early successes the tide began to turn against the empire in 1916 with the Arab Revolt. Following the armistice in 1918 and the Treaty of Sèvres, French and British troops occupied Constantinople and the Black Sea ports, Italian forces landed in Antalya and Greek forces occupied Smyrna/Izmir.

A Turkish national resistance movement emerged, led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), initially to oppose the Greek-British occupation of Izmir and its hinterland. Victory enabled the nationalists to demand a revision of the peace treaty through the new Treaty of Lausanne. In 1921 Kemal established a provisional government in Ankara, a year later the Sultanate was abolished and in 1923 Turkey became a secular republic with Mustafa Kemal as its first president.



Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)

The bigger picture: the North Caucasus today

The history of forced migrations from the North Caucasus continued into the 20th century. In the 1930s many of the Cossacks were forced from their homes by Stalin's policy of collectivisation. Then in 1943-44 whole communities of Ingush, Chechens, Balkars, Karachais, Turks and Kurds living in the region were forcibly deported to Siberia and Central Asia having been accused of collaboration with the Nazis during World War II.

The long period of inward and outward migrations within the region, the re-locations and re-settlements, have led to territorial disputes. Since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 there have been numerous such conflicts, including the Abkhazian War (1992-93), the Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-94), the Ossetian-Ingush conflict (1989-91), the two Chechen wars (1994-96 And 1999-2009) and the South Ossetian War in 2008.

In May 2005 Chechen activists announced the formation of the Caucasus Front: a coalition of Chechen, Dagestani, Ingush, Ossetian, Adyghe and other groups of militant activists to oppose Russian rule in its southern republics.



Memorial to the 334 dead children and teachers of School Number 1 in Beslan, North Ossetia after 1100 children and adults had been taken hostage on 1 September, 2004 by a group of Ingush and Chechen separatists.