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## **Conformity and Consensus in Southwestern Georgia after the Establishment of Russian Imperial Authority: the Role of the Russian Empire in the Resettlement of the Local Population (Muhajirism)**

**Abstract:** *The political history of the Caucasus is marked by enduring complexity and multifaceted contestation, driven by the region's pivotal position at the crossroads of empires. Over centuries, control oscillated between indigenous polities and successive imperial powers, engendering shifting allegiances and recurrent conflict. During the Russian Empire's 19th-century expansion into southwestern Georgia, these dynamics intensified, compelling local communities to choose between acquiescence to imperial rule or the precarious maintenance of autonomy. This article offers a comprehensive analysis of Muhajirism – the mass displacement and migration of predominantly Muslim communities from the Akhaltsikhe region – situating this phenomenon within broader imperial strategies. Employing a rich body of archival documents, including official correspondence, census records, land surveys, and contemporaneous local reports, the study reconstructs the administrative and military mechanisms by which the Russian authorities orchestrated population transfers and repopulated vacated territories with ethnically reliable settlers. The findings reveal a stark disjunction between the empire's official rhetoric of civilizing missions and its underlying objectives of demographic engineering, social control, and resource consolidation. Internal divisions among Georgian notables and local elites further facilitated imperial designs, while displaced communities experienced profound loss of property, identity disintegration, and cultural transformation. By critically reassessing the legacy of Tsarist colonial governance, this research illuminates how Muhajirism functioned as both a tool of power redistribution and a catalyst for long-term demographic and cultural change. The article contributes to scholarship on South Caucasian regional history, migration studies, and imperial policy, offering new insights into the processes by which empires sought to produce conformity and secure consensus among subjugated populations.*

**Keywords:** *Conformity and Consensus, Expansionist Empire Policy; Muhajirism; Ethnic and Religious Diversity; Demographic Policy.*

The political history of the Caucasus is complex and difficult due to its geopolitical location and ethnic diversity. For centuries, this re-

gion was the focus of various empires, which repeatedly led to the division of power between the local ruling elite and the conquerors. Compromises and conformities became especially relevant in the context of the expansion of Russian imperial power. Local ethnic and religious groups were often forced to accept the rules and norms of the Dominion or try to reach a common agreement to protect their interests.

The article deals with the dynamics of conflicts caused by the policy of the Russian Empire in the southern region of Georgia – Samtskhe-Javakheti; it analyzes and assesses the expansionist policy of the empire towards Georgian Muslims. The forced expulsion of Georgian Muslims from their homeland after the establishment of Russian authority is known in Georgian historiography as *Muhajirism*<sup>1</sup>.

Southern Georgia is the place of the Georgian state formation, the hotbed of the spread of Christianity and the flourishing of national culture. It was the area where the centralized feudal kingdom emerged, considered the ideal of Georgian statehood. Therefore, we believe, it is relevant to conduct a deep analysis and consistent scientific study of the processes that developed in this region. It is important to draw appropriate conclusions on the path to building an independent, modern European state, so as not to repeat the fatal mistakes that, due to objective or subjective reasons, led to the fragmentation of the single national organism of Georgians, the alienation of one part and their displacement as muhajirs to the Ottoman Empire, which in turn led to irreparable demographic problems and the weakening of state power.

Therefore, we consider it relevant to conduct a deep analysis and consistent scientific study of the processes that are associated with the region, rich in historical events. It is important to draw appropriate conclusions on the path to building an independent, modern European state, so as not to repeat the fatal mistakes that, due to objective or subjective reasons, led to the fragmentation of the single national organism of Georgians, the alienation of one part and their movement as muhajirs to the Ottoman Empire, what in turn led to irreparable demographic problems and the weakening of state power.

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<sup>1</sup> *Muhajir* is an Arabic word with mainly two meanings: originally, the word was used to denote the followers of Muhammad, the founder of Islam (al-muhajirun), although in the same language the same word, but without the suffix *-al*, meant any emigration (economic, social, political, religious, etc. See: Dudarev (2017); Vinogradov (2000); Bobrovnikov & Babich (2007); Baramidze (1996).

We would like to briefly examine the first attempts of the Russian Empire to annex the Akhaltsikhe Principality (the Akhaltsikhe Principality was an administrative unit created by the Ottomans in 1579, which also included the historical territory of Samtskhe-Javakheti). Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century (except for a short period), Constantinople has been the main object of the foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Due to its geopolitical position, the Caucasus (along with the Balkans) played an exceptionally important role in this regard. It is also clear that for various reasons Georgia was and remains the key to the South Caucasus. In turn, Georgia, especially its southwestern region, was of vital importance to the Ottoman Empire, and with the help of several naval and land military bases, the Ottomans protected the northern part of the southern coast of the Black Sea, bordering the Strait of Constantinople. It is obvious that the dominance of another political force (Russia, Iran) in the region not only posed a threat to the interests of the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus, but also called into question the political existence of the empire. The cornerstone of the policy of the Russian Empire in the 19th century was the liberation of Constantinople, thereby allegedly fulfilling its missionary role in relation to the Orthodox world.

On April 12, 1801, Emperor Alexander I signed a manifesto on the annexation of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti to the Russian Empire. This fact was recorded in the Akhaltsikhe Principality in 1802. On April 16, it became known that the Governor of Georgia, General Kroning, informed Sherif Pasha that from now on, instead of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, his neighbor was the Russian Empire (Berge, 1866, v. 1, p. 69-70). It became clear to the Ottomans that from now on, the annexation of the historical lands of Georgia became part of the Caucasian policy of the Russian Empire. The first attempt to join the Principality was made diplomatically. Governor – General Tsitsianov tried diplomatic tactics even in 1803. On February 26, 1803, Tsitsianov wrote to the Italian ambassador in Istanbul, asking him to somehow convince the Divan of the Ottoman Empire to transfer Samegrelo, Imereti, and the coastal areas of the Black Sea together with Poti to the protection of the Russian Empire. He also persistently asked if the Sublime Porte could make a similar concession to the principality of Akhaltsikhe. Tsitsianov emphasized that the territory of the Akhaltsikhe Principality historically belonged to Georgia (Berge, 1866, v. 3, p. 342). The Porte rejected the proposal of Governor-General Tsitsianov. Thus, the first attempt ended in failure.

The next effort to annex the Akhaltsikhe Principality was made during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1806–1812. There were opened two fronts – in Europe and in the Caucasus. General Gudovich was appointed commander-in-chief of the Russian army. Military actions in the direction of the Akhaltsikhe Principality began in March 1807. On May 3, Gudovich sent an appeal to the elders, begs and clergy of the principality. He wrote: "I am entering the Akhaltsikhe Principality as if for battle on enemy territory." Although Gudovich promised the population that if they did not resist, he would spare their lives and property – this was not a message from a liberator. His actions resembled the violence of an invader (Berge, 1866, v. 3, p. 580). On May 6 of the same year, the Russian corps approached Akhalkalaki – the administrative center of Javakheti. On May 8, the Russian corps went on the offensive. However, the attack was unprepared and soon failed. At the same time, the Russian corps also retreated (Berge, 1866, v. 3, p. 586).

The policy of the Russian Empire towards the Akhaltsikhe Principality changed significantly after Tormasov was appointed commander-in-chief of the Caucasian Army, because he believed that the annexation of the Akhaltsikhe Principality was necessary for the peaceful life of Georgia. This is what Tormasov wrote to Count Rumyantsev on September 20, 1809: "Until the Akhaltsikhe Principality is included in the empire, our right flank will not be protected from enemy encroachments" (Potto, 1902, p. 245). Tormasov saw two ways to annex the Akhaltsikhe Principality: the first was diplomatic; the second was through military action. Almost immediately after his appointment, Tormasov began working through diplomatic channels to annex the Akhaltsikhe Principality. Moreover, for this time the struggle for the throne of the principality began between Sherif Pasha Jakeli and Selim Pasha Khimshiashvili. It was precisely this political situation that Tormasov tried to use to achieve his goal.

In 1809, Tormasov established diplomatic relations with Mamia Gurieli, with the help of which he hoped to obtain Selim Pasha's consent to recognize Russia's patronage (Berge, 1866, v. 4, p. 781). Things got to the point that on July 26, 1809, Prince Petre Orbeliani went to Akhaltsikhe as an ambassador plenipotentiary. He had to familiarize himself with the terms of the treaty drawn up by Tormasov for Selim. The treaty consisted of 11 articles. The main content was as follows: 1. The Akhaltsikhe Principality was under the protection of the Russian Empire; 2. A Russian garrison was created in Akhaltsikhe (Berge, 1866, v. 4, p. 784). Finally, as a sign of loyalty, Selim gave his son Abdi as a

hostage to Russia. Reliable historical data of that time indicate that Selim Pasha welcomed Tormasov's proposal. However, subsequent events, in particular the abolition of the Imereti Kingdom by the Russian Empire in 1810, completely changed Selim Pasha's political views on this issue. Ultimately, Selim Khimshiashvili rejected the articles proposed in the treaty (Potto, 1902, p. 248). Thus, the annexation of the Akhaltsikhe Principality in 1809 also failed. Tormasov's diplomacy suffered a complete failure. The issue of annexing the region of the Akhaltsikhe Principality again became the prerogative of military action.

In 1810, the Russian army stood at the borders of Akhaltsikhe and was ready to begin military action. Tormasov urgently requested permission from the imperial court to march on the Principality (Berge, 1866, v. 4, p. 767). The acceleration of the process was due to several factors: firstly, the military alliance between Iran and the Ottoman Empire against Russian rule in the Caucasus, was sealed by a treaty signed in the spring of 1810 (Lomsadze, 1975, p. 129), and secondly, virtually all the forces fighting against Russian rule in Georgia were concentrated in Akhaltsikhe. The king of Imereti Solomon II and his son Alexander were also here (Berge, 1866, v. 4, p. 127-128; Potto, 1902, p. 249).

Tormasov developed a plan to attack the Principality. An offensive was planned in three directions. All three detachments were to meet in the city of Akhaltsikhe on November 12 (Berge, 1866, v. 4, p. 801-803). According to the same plan, a large number of Georgian militias were to be involved in the hostilities. The Georgian militia was led by Major General Tamaz Orbeliani (Berge, 1866, v. 4, p. 803). According to the plan drawn up in 1810, by autumn the united army of Russians and Georgians moved towards Akhaltsikhe (Berge, 1866, v. 4, 805). On November 14, the united Russian-Georgian troops approached Akhaltsikhe. The assault began on November 18. Despite the great success, when the city was almost ready to surrender, on November 26, 1810, Tormasov lifted the siege (Lomsadze, 1975, p. 136). Despite the failure of the 1810 campaign, the empire did not cease military actions in the direction of Akhaltsikhe. However, the military expeditions did not yield significant results. According to the peace treaty signed in Bucharest on May 16, 1812, the Akhaltsikhe Principality remained part of the Ottoman Empire (Lomsadze, 1975, p. 144).

A new war between the empires began in April 1828. The state interests of the two empires once again clashed in the Balkans and the Caucasus. The main goal of the Caucasian Army was to alleviate the

situation of the Russian troops operating on the Danube and to capture the Akhaltsikhe region.<sup>2</sup> On July 24, 1828, the Russian army led by Paskevich captured Akhalkalaki, the center of Javakheti. 700 local residents died on the battlefield (Potto, 1902, p. 108). The next target of the military plan was the capital of the principality – Akhaltsikhe. On the way, Paskevich captured the fortresses of Khertvisi<sup>3</sup> and Aspindza (Berge, 1866, v. 7, p. 760). In early August, the main parts of the Russian army set up camp in the Akhaltsikhe region. On August 9, the Russians began the first attack on the city and achieved significant success. On August 12, the attack was resumed, and the battle for the city continued until August 16. At 8 o'clock in the morning of the next day, the Georgian Grenadier Regiment entered the inner citadel and raised the St. George flag over Akhaltsikhe (Potto, 1902, p. 97).

On September 2 (14), 1829, Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed a peace treaty in Adrianople. Under the terms of the armistice, the Turks in the Caucasus lost fortresses located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea and ten sanjaks of the Akhaltsikhe Principality: Kvabliani, Abastumani, Akhaltsikhe, Atskuri, Aspindza, Khertvisi, Akhalkalaki, Chacharaki, Potskhovi and Childiri. According to the Treaty of Adrianople, ten sanjaks of the Akhaltsikhe Principality, in fact the whole of Samtskhe-Javakheti, went to Russia. According to the above-mentioned peace treaty, the warring parties took the demographic factor into account from the very beginning. According to Article 13, the population of the border territories was granted the right to free movement and resettlement for a period of 18 months. The above-mentioned Article of the peace treaty was equally beneficial to both parties. Russia would get rid of an ethnic group that was undesirable for it, and the Ottoman Empire would correct its unstable demographic situation. The Russian Empire played a major role in the expulsion from the native places and the resettlement of the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti, as well as the entire Caucasus. It should also be noted that the *muhajirs*, as a historical phenomenon emerged after the establishment of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus.

The forced eviction of indigenous peoples from their lands had already taken place in the policy of the Russian Empire. After the annexation of Crimea in 1783, by order of Potemkin, most of the inhabitants were sent to camps beyond the Volga (Esadze, 1914, p. 3). By the decree of the Empress of June 30, 1792, the Zaporozhian Cossacks were

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<sup>2</sup> CHAG (Central Historical Archive of Georgia), Fund 1018, Inventory 3, File 34.

<sup>3</sup> CHAG, Fund 1018, Inventory 3, File 73.

allowed to settle on the right bank of the Kuban (Esadze, 1914, p. 5). Thus, before entering the territory of Georgia captured by the Ottomans, the Russian Empire had accumulated considerable experience in resolving the national question in its favor. It acted on the conquered territory according to a clearly defined and pre-thought-out plan. It tried to create such an ethnic picture in the new territories that would ensure its centuries-long dominance.

The main contours of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in Samtskhe-Javakheti were already outlined during the war. On March 9, 1829, General Muravyov decided to burn several villages in the Potskhovi Sanjak. Such punitive operations were carried out quite often. The goal of such actions was clearly to intimidate the locals and get rid of them before a truce was reached (Berge, 1866, v. 8, p. 779). A similar event is mentioned in one of the documents we found in the archive, which says: After the capture of the city, many of us, intimidated by the Russians, fled to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup>

A study of scientific literature and archival materials has shown that before the war with the Ottomans, the Russian Empire had a clear understanding of how to act with respect to the peoples living in the annexed territories. For example, on July 26, 1828, the correspondence between I. Paskevich and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs revealed that planning began long before the territory of Southern Georgia became suitable for new Russian construction. The governor spoke enthusiastically about the fertility of the land and the similarity of the climate with the interior regions of Russia (Berge, 1866, v. 8, p. 291; Potto, 1902, p. 199).

After the capture of Akhaltsikhe, descendants of Georgian nobles, who fled after the establishment of Ottoman rule, approached Paskevich. They presented documents issued by the Georgian kings on the ownership of property in Meskheta and demanded the restoration of their former rights, since they were already subjects of the Russian Empire. The commander-in-chief refused to let them go and, moreover, insulted them, calling them enemies and traitors of Russia (Berge, 1866, v. 8, p. 291; Potto, 1902, p. 775).

In early 1829, the Field Marshal wrote to the imperial official Nesselrode: In the areas we occupy, resettling Armenians is very difficult, since there are few uninhabited places suitable for living, but I will do everything possible to make it happen. Paskevich also noted that the main difficulty in this matter was the local population, since, despite

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<sup>4</sup> CHAG, Fund 77, Inv. 1, File 13.

military actions and the establishment of a new government, they did not intend to leave their homeland. Z. Chichinadze and I. Nebieridze also pointed to this fact in their journalistic notes (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 69-70; Nebieridze, 1948, p. 10). From the documents provided (similar material is abundant in the historical archives of Georgia and in scientific literature), it is clear that the plan for the eviction of local residents had been developed before the war, so neither the conformist nor the conciliatory attitude of local residents towards the new administration had any significance. Tsarism was not concerned with the fate of the population of the annexed territories, but with the appropriation of as much fertile land as possible, abandoned by the population.

The Empire, having created a provisional government in the region (August, 16, 1828), meticulously and with zealous energy began to implement its sophisticated plan. V. Bebutov, a representative of an old and very noble Armenian family, was appointed the first governor of Principality. On August 25, 1825, I. Paskevich gave the government general rules of governance, according to which the government was obliged to return the fleeing population; maintain order; control the activities of local Muslims and, if necessary, suppress them; describe the treasury territories; the local population can use the customs existing in this area.<sup>5</sup> The above-mentioned document and the rule of V. Bebutov caused great joy among the local population; as V. Potto wrote, the population returned because all its crimes were forgiven, joy reigned in the ranks of the local residents, they were greeted everywhere with open arms as true subjects of Russia, people returned to their homes and work. The Emperor thanked the soldiers of the army operating in Asia for such activities (Potto, 1902, p. 101).

We do not know what materials the aforementioned chronicle is based on. In fact, the more confidential materials reveal how “Great Russian” chauvinism skillfully disguised itself as selfless concern for other nations and messianic phraseology. The reality was completely different, what was evidenced by numerous documents and ethnological records. In this regard, it is interesting to examine a story by a resident of Akhaltsikhe, recorded by Z. Chichinadze: “When the Christians of Akhaltsikhe came to Bebutov to ask for help, he answered: Go away from here, Tatars, so that not a single person remains here... You cannot stay here. You are Tatars, Russia will not accept you, you are enemies of Russia (Chichinadze, 1912, p. 69). As we can see, Russia welcomed

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<sup>5</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv. 1, Geo. 3988, File 20.

the local residents with excessive “openness and open arms.” Here it is also necessary to emphasize the fact that such an action was not a whim of individual officials, but represented the main line of the empire’s policy.

The tsarist officials had tried to reduce the number of Georgian Muslims by any means possible before the terms of the truce were clarified. L. Dzhaniashvili writes: General Bebutov intimidated the population with his army, the frightened people hid in the forest, and he settled foreign tribes on their lands (Janiashvili, 1995, p. 12). At the same time, V. Bebutov, of course, with the consent of the highest authorities, allowed local Muslim nobles to sell their property and flee to the Ottoman Empire. The new administration was well informed that loyal begs would refuse to be exiled after peace was established. One of the documents states: Immediately after the capture of Akhaltsikhe, representatives of our rank, with the permission of the highest authorities, had the right to sell their estates and emigrate abroad.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the new administration widely introduced the practice of illegal and accelerated transfer of lands to the treasury. In 1828, the Russian governor of the Khertvisi Sanjak reported to the Provisional Government: Although the local begs died in the war, they left heirs, so the fulfillment of your request to transfer the remaining lands to the treasury does not seem possible at this time.<sup>7</sup> The document clearly shows that the empire did not even try to understand the attitude of Georgian Muslims to the new government. They did not care what intentions the nobles had towards the Russian authorities, whether they were compromise-loyal or conformist-minded, the main thing was to get rid of them.

On September 2 (14), 1829, the warring parties signed a peace treaty in Adrianople. According to it, Russia's colonial policy was officially formalized. The government accused the local Georgians of being Turks because of their religious beliefs. This is evidenced by numerous documents, for example, A. Fronel writes: Samtskhe-Saatabago was captured by Count Paskevich... The government calls the local residents Tatars, not Meskhetians<sup>8</sup> (Proneli, 1991, p. 131). E. Weinbaum also speaks of the same fact: We must not repeat the mistakes we made in 1829 in Akhaltsikhe. We called the Muslimized Georgians Turks (Veindemvaum, 1901, p. 122). Calling the Georgian ethnic group Turks

<sup>6</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv. 1, Geo. 3083, File 7.

<sup>7</sup> CHAG, Fund 77, Inv.3, Geo. 1, File 2.

<sup>8</sup> An analysis of the historiographical debates about Meskhetian (Ahıska) Turks see: Ангелова (2021, p. 164-166)

was part of a carefully thought-out plan to expel Georgian Muslims from their homeland. In this regard, the most notable is one of the Russian documents, which states that migration will cleanse the Caucasus Mountains of unwanted populations, so they need help in this endeavor.<sup>9</sup>

Having consolidated its position in the newly annexed territories, the empire used its powerful apparatus to further intensify the process of evicting Georgians from the region. Instead of helping the war-ravaged, impoverished population, they were forced to pay off old debts left over from the Ottoman rule. The government did not consider the plight of the taxable population worthy of attention, which, like the settlers from Arzrum, demanded a number of benefits (Lomsadze, 1975, p. 416). The fact is that the population that emigrated from the Ottoman Empire to the Russian Empire was exempted from any duties for a period of six years.<sup>10</sup> The Russian government was not going to compromise. It was not interested in the economic situation of the population; it was focused on the large number of exiles. Documents show that the local population was exempted from taxes only in 1828, but in the following years they had to fulfill all duties in full.<sup>11</sup> The list of people in debt was compiled with particular care. The document, created in 1827, lists the names of those Georgian Muslims who failed to pay the state debt in 1831–1832. The above document obliges the heads of the sanjaks to collect the debt by any means.<sup>12</sup> It should also be noted, that documents describing such activities of the empire can be found in numerous historical archives.<sup>13</sup>

Based on the above, it can be concluded that an openly discriminatory policy was carried out against the indigenous peoples. Tsarism provided all possible assistance to the foreign peoples who settled on the original Georgian lands, creating practically ideal living conditions for them (Berge, 1866, v. 7, p. 832). However, all this was done at the expense of denying the basic interests of local Georgian Muslims. The Russian administration made their living conditions extremely unbearable, a clear proof of which, among many other things, is the extremely premature collection of taxes.

<sup>9</sup> CHAG, Fund 11, Inv.48, Geo. 1, File 40.

<sup>10</sup> CHAG, Fund 77, Inv.1, Geo. 48, File 40.

<sup>11</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv.1, Geo. 3083, File 45.

<sup>12</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv.1, Geo. 4579, File 129.

<sup>13</sup> CHAG, fund 2, Inv.1, Geo. 2930, File 30; Fund 77, Inv.1, Geo. 48, File 41.

One of the reasons for the expulsion of the inhabitants of Samtskhe-Javakheti should be considered the extremely negative attitude of the Russian administration towards the begs and nobles. It is well known that representatives of this rank adapt to the new government much easier than other social groups. Those who owned large estates, property and privileges and at the same time participated in the governance of the state always tried to compromise with the invader. Compromise and submission would allow them to preserve their property and various privileges (Vakradze, n.d., p. 150-157). During the establishment of Ottoman rule in this region, the Georgian nobility, in exchange for significant concessions, retained their old Georgian rights and simultaneously received new privileges from the Ottoman nobility. Therefore, it can be assumed that during the establishment of the Russian administration, most of the nobles (aghas and beys) preferred to remain in their homeland rather than emigrate abroad, while retaining privileges and property from the new government. But the reality was different. Tsarism did not need Muslim nobles, who had become too burdensome. The aim of the empire was to seize their property. The government understood perfectly well that, in addition to numerous territories, the Georgian nobles enjoyed great authority among the general population (authority was determined by a number of objective reasons). Therefore, by having got rid of them, the empire would have caught "two birds with one stone". Firstly, they would transfer large areas of fertile land to the treasury, and secondly, together with the begs, thanks to their authority among the population, the local peasantry would move abroad in large numbers. That is why the empire did not grant the local nobility – the *begs* – the rights of the Russian nobility (Umarov-Gozalashvili, 1994, p. 42). Sh. Lomsadze wrote about the fact of the refusal to identify the local feudal class with the Georgian nobility in his work (Lomsadze, 1975, p. 421). Deprived of the title and privileges, begs became an easy target. The empire treated the local nobility and, of course, their property at its own discretion and in its own interests. The administration transferred the property of the begs to the treasury without any disputes, be it individual plots of land or entire villages.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the empire did not take into account the documents confirming the rights of ownership, regardless of whether they were issued by the sultan or the Georgian kings. Moreover, the Russian

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<sup>14</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv.1, Geo. 4218, File 4.

administration simply confiscated the existing documents and handed them over to the archive.<sup>15</sup>

In order to increase the treasury assets, the administration even denied the authenticity of the documents it issued. For example, the villages purchased by the Aspindza bey were confiscated because the purchase and sale document, executed in 1831-32, was drawn up incorrectly. The confiscated village was transferred to the treasury.<sup>16</sup>

The nobles, finding themselves in a hopeless situation, addressed the government with a letter: After the capture of Akhaltsikhe, the government announced to us that our property would never be taken away, and our rights and customs would be preserved. Now, Your Excellency, you demand from us documents confirming the right of ownership. We cannot dispute your decision, but despite this, we will not be able to give you the original documents, but we will provide you with copies, because if you keep the original, we will lose our property, and then we will be forced to move to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>17</sup>

As we see, the empire ignored the loyal and compromising moods of the nobles in every possible way. The main line of its policy was different: as many local residents as possible should be resettled from Russian territories as far away as possible.

As can be seen from the above materials, the lion's share of the expulsion and resettlement of the indigenous population of Samtskhe-Javakheti from their homeland belongs to the Russian Empire. However, it is fair to note that the other side – the Ottoman Empire – also played a important role in this matter. As mentioned above, according to Article 13 of the peace treaty, the population of the border territories was granted the right to freedom of movement and settlement for 18 months.<sup>18</sup>

The Ottoman Empire categorically demanded the fulfillment of this point of the peace treaty. On the issue of the fulfillment of this point, Paskevich wrote to Nesselrode: I had the good fortune to hand the Emperor a card. His Majesty recognized the legitimacy of the Turkish side's demand regarding the provisions of Article 13 of the peace treaty.

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<sup>15</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv.1, Geo. 2930, Files 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> CHAG, Fund 77, Inv.3, Geo. 7, File 2.

<sup>17</sup> CHAG, Fund 2, Inv. 1, Geo. 4218, File 42.

<sup>18</sup> This deadline was extended several times, which was completely acceptable to both sides.

Therefore, we must support them in this endeavor in every way until the expiration of the period established in the treaty.<sup>19</sup>

Such support from the Russian Empire contributed to the intensification of Ottoman activities in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The activities of Ottoman emissaries and fanatical mullahs assumed large proportions. Al. Proneli describes this story as follows: “Mullah, what are you saying, didn’t you die of hunger abroad, in that huge city where you have no relatives or acquaintances? And Mullah argued, how can it be abroad? Aren’t all our people there? The country is big, strong [...] How can a Muslim die of hunger there?” (Proneli, 1991, p. 58). The author also points to the fact that the mullahs took their flock with them. Samson Pirtskhalava writes about the same fact: “The clergy took advantage of the situation and began to preach that they should go to Turkey. People sold everything and fled to Turkey” (Pirtsckhalava, 1915, p. 40). There are many documents of similar content preserved in the historical archive. One of them states: A significant part of the resettled population belongs to the Muslim clergy. This also brings us great benefit, since together with them, the broad masses of the population move to live in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup>

As can be seen from the above material, the Ottoman Empire also contributed to the expulsion of Georgian Muslims from their homeland. However, it should be noted that they did not have to make great efforts for this, unlike the Russian government, which spent so much energy and effort on this matter that the residents of Samtskhe-Javakheti left their native places without agitation and propaganda.

In conclusion, it should be noted that according to the Treaty of Adrianople, the ancient region of Georgia Samtskhe-Javakheti was liberated from Ottoman rule and, together with the rest of Georgia, found itself in a single development environment - the Russian Empire, what in itself was a progressive event.

However, due to the differences in the geographical, religious and economic conditions of most of the local inhabitants, the Russian Empire classified them as Turks, considered them as hostile, unreliable elements and declared an uncompromising war on them. Of course, the indigenous inhabitants of this region, the Georgian ethnic group, had no

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<sup>19</sup> CHAG, Fund 11, Inv.1, Geo. 55, File 3.

<sup>20</sup> CHAG, Fund 11, Inv. 1, Geo.55, File 12.

chance of winning this battle. As a result of Russia's colonization policy, the joy of returning to their homeland in this region was somewhat overshadowed by the tragic events that unfolded there.

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