

The “Voluntary” Adherence of Kabarda (Eastern Circassia) to Russia

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On May 25, 1955, Tass reported from Nalchik, the capital of Kabarda, that the Bureau of the Kabardinian Regional Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party had passed a resolution to celebrate in July 1957 the “400th anniversary of the voluntary adherence of Kabarda to Russia.”

The resolution said:

The adherence of Kabarda to Russia was of great importance for the historical destiny of the Kabardinian people. It provided them with the possibility of further national development, saved them from enslavement by the Turkey of the Sultans, and created favorable conditions for economic and cultural intercourse with the Russian and other peoples of the country. While the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the voluntary adherence of Kabarda to Russia is being prepared, a number of research works, articles, reviews, and documents will be compiled and published on the history of the Kabardinian people and their success in building socialism. At factories kolkhozes, MTS, sovkhozes and educational establishments of the republic, lectures and talks dedicated to this significant date will take place. The Kabardinian Dramatic Theater, the song and dance company, and the republican philharmonic will prepare special repertoires. A competition for the best songs, film scenarios, cantatas, and librettos devoted to the 400th anniversary of the voluntary adherence of Kabarda to Russia will begin shortly. A session of the Kabardinian Research Institute, with the participation of scholars from Moscow, Leningrad, and the fraternal republics, a republic exhibition of imitative art, amateur performances, and other events will be dedicated to the great national holiday of the Kabardinian people.

The “voluntary” nature of the adherence of Kabarda to Russia is a new notion for those to whom the history of Kabarda has always appeared one of a long fight for independence. Apparently this is a new attempt at interpreting the history of the non-Russian peoples on lines with which Soviet historiographers are gradually making us familiar. This type of approach to the history of Kabarda is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of the Kremlin’s “general historical line.”

Taking first the sources of Kabardinian history at the time of Ivan IV, during whose reign the “voluntary” joining of Kabarda to Russia allegedly occurred, it may be said that there are no such facts to prove this. The archives which could have confirmed the true situation perished in the famous Moscow fire of 1626. The Muscovite chronicles of the XVI century are merely official in tone and tendentious.

Public chroniclers, in using private chronicles, either deprived them of their individuality or changed them to suit their own purpose. In giving an account of events in their own way they strictly adhere to the government’s viewpoint.^[1]

To this should be added the low level of literacy of the copyists and of the writers themselves, who confused foreign, and particularly Cherkess names and geographical locations.

Similarly there are no reliable sources on the Cherkess side concerning this epoch. There are only verbal legends in various versions, which Kabardinian princes warring between themselves used each in his own way. In the XVIII century the princes were divided into two parties—the Kashkadau party (from the name of mount *Kashkatau*) and the *Baksan* party (from the river Baksan). One had a Turkish and the other a Russian orientation. The supporters of the first asserted during the Russian-Kabardinian war in the XVIII and XIX centuries that:

They had never been Russian subjects and if during the reign of Ivan Vasilievich they had relations with the Russian state it was not as subjects or inferiors, but only as friends.^[2]

The supporters of the other party, until they later became Russia's enemies, declared that their forebears had submitted themselves to the Muscovite tsar, that the Kabardinians came from the Ukraine to settle on the Terek, that they were called “Cherkasses” or “Cherkesses,” and that all of them were then Christian,^[3] i. e. they repeated the legend prevalent in Muscovy that the Cherkesses lived in the Ryazan region, whence they fled to the Caucasus.^[4]

To clear up the question of the “voluntary adherence” of Kabarda to Russia it is important to point out not only the tendentiousness of the sources and the absence of accurate data, but also to recall the state structure, the internal and external situation of Moscow and Kabarda of the time and likewise their geographical position.

Ivan IV was born when the new state order had triumphed. The independence of the principalities had disappeared, the Grand Prince of Moscow had become an autocrat, and the population of the country had acknowledged itself to be “bound” to the state. “The whole of Moscow's life had begun to be built on the idea of a state stronghold.”^[5] Gone were the days of the “fluid” state of the population, from which the central authority used to suffer, but from which the independent princes had profited. New conquests were accompanied, as before, by the mass expulsion of such elements as Moscow considered dangerous to itself from the defeated towns and their resettlement in Muscovy. Muscovites were settled in the conquered regions.

This was a tested method of assimilation. While Ivan the Terrible was still alive, Kazan was transformed within a few years into a Russian town, from which all the Tartars had been expelled.^[6]

At the time of the first relations between the Cherkess people and Moscow, from 1552 until 1557, when the Kabardinian delegation came to the tsar and “joined” their country to Russia, Ivan the Terrible had just had a spiritual break with the “elected rada,” i. e. the government, headed by Sylvester and Adashev, a childhood friend of the tsar's and a Cherkess by origin.^[7]

This break later turned into open hatred and the persecution of the “rada” and the remnants of the feudal class. Ivan the Terrible, having freed himself from the tutelage of Sylvester and Adashev, adopted a foreign policy which was opposite to that of the “rada.” The tsar considered that the aim of foreign policy should be to fight Livonia and for an outlet to the Baltic Sea.^[8] For trade links with the East the way was open through Astrakhan. Any further attempts at expansion in the South threatened a conflict with the Porte and the Crimea,

which were already hostile enough toward Moscow after its conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan. It was more important to think about the defence of the Southern borders than about any assault on the Caucasus, which lay close to the Crimea and Turkey.

These circumstances—the centralization of the tsar’s power, the system of ‘binding’ the population to the state, the struggle against the independent princes, their liquidation by the tsar, the western orientation in foreign policy, and the passively defensive attitude toward the South—should be borne in mind when considering the question whether Kabarda had indeed adhered to Moscow in the XVI century.

It is also important to no less a degree to examine the situation in Kabarda at that time. After the death in 1453 of Prince Inal, justly called Inal the Great by Georgian sources, who had succeeded in uniting all of Cherkessia and Abkhazia into one state, the country had again split up into separate feudal principalities. Even Eastern Cherkessia (Kabarda) had split up into Great and ‘Pyatigorsk’ Kabarda. The Cherkess princes were fighting and rivalling each other. In its attempts to expand in the direction of Daghestan, Kabarda was clashing with Shamkhal, ruler of North Daghestan. The ‘Pyatigorsk’ and Western Cherkesses were being constantly harassed by the Crimea. While the Astrakhan Horde existed, either could sometimes appeal for aid, or occasionally help the Horde.^[9] But the fall of Astrakhan in 1556 left a vacuum, with no counterbalance, particularly against the Crimea, which in virtue of some sort of agreement between the Cherkesses and the Turkish Sultan Beyazit II (1481—1512),^[10] laid claim to Cherkessia and demanded Cherkess slaves with each new Khan.^[11] The Crimean Khans did not restrict their claims to the Western part of Cherkessia. They also looked upon the Beslens, i. e. the ‘Pyatigorsk.’ Cherkesses, as their subjects, although they should have maintained friendly relations with them, as the children of the Khans were usually sent to the Beslens for their education and returned only when they were grown up and had become completely Cherkessianized.^[12] In addition, the Khans and their sons used mostly to marry Beslen women.

The Beslens found it hard to endure the claims of the Crimean Khans and sought help outside, in the same way as the Kabardinians sought aid in their fight against Shamkhal. They could find this assistance only in the North, and not in Turkey, as the Crimea was Turkey’s vassal.

Geographically, the Moscow state and the Caucasus did not have a common frontier. They were divided by a vast ‘no-man’s land’ which began in the region of Ryazan, Tula, and Kaluga, and in which only robbers were active. It is only during the wars between Moscow and Livonia, which began in 1558, and particularly during the *oprichnina* terror, that people from the center turned their attention to this ‘no-man’s land.’^[13]

As a result of the severe economic crisis, Moscow in 1571 decided to occupy itself with the South. In that year the tsar decided to set up strongpoints on the southern frontier. The frontier was slightly advanced to the South to the fortified towns of Bryansk, Orel, Voronezh, and Kursk. This was an immense distance, a journey of 15 days.^[14] For this reason, relations between Cherkessia and Moscow had to be maintained in an indirect fashion, along the Volga. This geographical factor should also be taken into account in examining the question of the adherence to Russia of Kabarda.

1. MUSKOVITE-KABARDINIAN RELATIONS

The first Cherkess delegation, which came in November 1552 to visit Ivan the Terrible, was not from Kabarda. ‘The Cherkess sovereign princes’—Prince Mashuk, Prince Ivan Ezbuzluk, and Prince Tanashuk came to implore the tsar that he should ‘intercede for them

and take them arid their lands as serfs and free them from the Crimean Khan:”^[15] They spoke on behalf of the Cherkesses of the Beslen tribe, who then lived in the region of Pyatigorye^[16] and now inhabit the Cherkess Autonomous Region.

If the arrival of the delegation to “implore” the acceptance of “serfs” (the etiquette of the time called for such language, even if the tendentiousness of the record is left out of account) meant adherence, then the Soviet government missed an opportunity of celebrating in 1952 the “voluntary adherence” to Russia of the Cherkess Autonomous Region.

The delegation returned in August 1553 with the Muscovite Ambassador Shchepetev, who had orders “to seek out the truth.” A year later the Ambassador returned to Moscow to say that the Cherkesses had indeed promised to serve the tsar and Grand Prince forever. With the Ambassador, the Beslen princes sent Prince Sibok Atsinguk and other princes. These princes were called “Zhane” or “Zhane Cherkess sovereigns,”^[17] i. e. princes of the Cherkess Zhane tribe, who lived in the Taman peninsula and partly among the Abbasites.^[18]

Sibok and the others asked the tsar for help against Turkey, Azov, and the Crimea.^[19] The tsar refused aid against the Turks, saying that he was friendly with the Sultan. He entered willingly, however, into an alliance against the Crimean Khan, and promised the Cherkess people that “he wished to take care of them as far as possible.” Indeed, the alliance proved effective: several times the Cherkess and the Russians together fought the Crimea. At the same time Cherkess princes lived at the court of the tsar, surrounded with attention and honors. To make the ties closer, the princes adopted Christianity. Sibok’s son received the name of Alexander on being baptized and Prince Dudaruk Ezbuzluk became Ivan.

Seeing the success of the Beslen and Zhane princes in Moscow, the Kabardinian princes decided to follow suit and in July 1557 sent an Embassy to the tsar, headed by Prince Kanklych Kanuko. He implored the tsar on behalf of the princes of Temryuk (Kemirgoko in Cherkess) and Tazret to be well-disposed toward them, order them to serve him, “make them into serfs,” and order the Astrakhan governors to help them against their enemy Shevkal (Shamkhal).^[20]

The curious thing about this delegation is that it also spoke on behalf of the Georgian (Kakhetinian) King and declared that the Iverian prince and the whole Iverian land had “an understanding” with the Kabardinians and that if the tsar would only help them against their enemies, then the Kabardinians, the Georgians would also implore the tsar to be well-disposed toward them.^[21]

As the declaration of the Kabardinian Embassy on behalf of the Georgian King has since been confirmed several times, according to Soviet historians it should follow that Georgia voluntarily joined Russia at the same time as Kabarda and this event should be celebrated in 1957.

The tsar was very nattered by the arrival of the delegation and the message from the Georgian King. In 1558 the Ambassador to Sigismund Augustus was instructed to say that his Sovereign had learned two years earlier of the conquest of Iveria by Kizilbas (Persia) and that this news had highly disturbed him.^[22]

In January 1558 Kanuko was allowed to return to Kabarda. Moscow apparently did not want to assist against Shamkhal, as already in 1555 Shamkhal had requested the tsar to accept him as a “serf” and had repeated this request in 1557.

This is another example of “voluntary” adherence to Russia which went unnoticed as Daghestan failed in 1955 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of its adherence, in the same way

as the Cherkess Autonomous Region omitted to do so in 1952.

In this race for the friendship of the Muscovite tsar the winners were the Kabardinian princes and the marriage in 1561 of John the Terrible to Maria, the daughter of Kemirgoko, finally consolidated Russo-Kabardinian relations. Henceforth the tsar became interested in his father-in-law's situation alone and developed his relations with Kabarda on the basis of kinship.

Such a turn in events could not help but influence the behavior of the Beslen and Zhane princes, as the undisguised rivals of the Kabardinian princes. Prince Vyshnevetsky, who was sent in 1560 with Prince Ivan Mashuk and Vasili Sibok was recalled, apparently because he failed to give warning of the enmity of Sibok and Kanuko toward the tsar's father-in-law.

At Kemirgoko's request in 1563, the Tsar sent him governors and 1,000 *streltsy* in order to establish a fortress. The Crimean Khan is warned that "Temryuk has settled in the town and intends to go with the Muscovites against Sibok and Prince Kanuko."^[23] The relations between the Beslen and Zhane princes and the tsar became so bad that Sibok's sons—Alexei and Gavriil—left the tsar and went to the Lithuanian King. Sibok's brother had already been there with the intention of getting as far as the Crimea, which by that time was already allied with the Cherkess princes against Kemirgoko. Enmity between the Cherkess princes became acute in 1563 and 1566. As help from Moscow could not arrive in time because of the distance, Kemirgoko asked his son-in-law to build a town at the mouth of the river Sunzha with a permanent Russian garrison. In answer to this request the tsar sent Prince Babichev and Protasiev to Kabarda, at the beginning of 1567, "with many men and cannon."

The Crimean Khan and the Turkish Sultan watched with anxiety the appearance of Russians in the Northern Caucasus. When the fortress on the Terek near Sunzha had been built, they added to their former demands to return Astrakhan and Kazan a demand to demolish this fortress. When the first fortress on the Terek was being built, the Turkish Sultan demanded of the Crimean Khan that he should go into action against Astrakhan, but the Khan demurred on various pretexts and told the Cherkesses, when they informed him that the Russians were building a town, that he could not hinder the tsar if he wanted to build a town for his father-in-law. The laying of the foundation of the second fortress enraged the Khan who demanded from the Moscow government the demolition of the town. He complained to the tsar that he was sending expeditions to fight the Cherkesses—the proteges of the Porte—and the co-religionist Shamkhals. Primarily the tsar hoped to become their neighbor. Failing to receive satisfaction, the Khan declared war on Kemirgoko and invaded Kabarda. The Kabardinians suffered a serious defeat.

Flushed with this success, the Khan sent another note to the tsar, but this time it was an ultimatum. He demanded the demolition of the Sunzha fortress and the return of Kazan and Astrakhan. The note stressed the main object of the dispute—Russian influence in the Caucasus, the tsar being accused of trying to "separate the Cherkesses from His Khandyker Majesty" (the Turkish Sultan), and also the Shevkal lands. The boyars found that the Khan's note did not open the way to peaceful settlement and the tsar answered that the fortress had been established for defence purposes and at the request of the tsar's father-in-law.^[24]

After many arguments the fortress was demolished on the Sultan's demand. Wishing to be on terms of "brotherhood and love" with the Sultan, the tsar not only ordered the town to be demolished, but consented to the withdrawal to Astrakhan of all the Russians living in Kabarda.

It is up to the Soviet historians in Nalchik to explain how it happened that the Russians withdrew so fast under pressure from the Turkish Sultan from a country which had voluntarily

“joined” Russia.

This event greatly impressed the Kabardinians. The execution in Moscow of the innocent Prince Michael, Kemirgoko’s son, finally undermined the tsar’s prestige in the eyes of the Kabardinians.^[25]

However, John the Terrible did not stop even after this to take an interest in Kemirgoko’s fate. At the request of Prince Kambulat, Kemirgoko’s brother, he restored the fortress at Sunzha in 1578. Incidentally this fortress, the third of its line, did not last long. Thus, by the time John the Terrible died in 1584, Kabarda had no fortress and no Russians or its territory. The Ambassador who went to Constantinople to announce to the Sultan tsar Fedor’s accession, was charged to communicate this to the Ottoman government.

In 1588 the Kabardinian Prince Kambulat again asked the tsar to build a town. His Ambassadors Mamstryuk and Kudenek, sons of Kemirgoko, gave an assurance that Kabarda would not join the Crimea, Turkey or Shevkal. The links between Kabarda and Moscow must have been extremely slender, if the Kabardinians had to assure the tsar of their intention not to join the enemies of the Muscovite state.

Tsar Fedor then took under his protection all the Cherkess, Kabardinian land. He decided to build a town, but this time not in Kabarda, but at the mouth of the river Terek, on the Caspian Sea. In choosing this place the Muscovite government was guided by its own considerations and not by solicitude for the interests of the Kabardinian princes. The purpose of the new town of “Terk” (“Tyumen fort on the Terek”) included the establishment of a sea route to Persia, the strengthening of the Russian position in the approaches to the Caucasus, and the defence of the Georgian King, with whom relations had been revived.

Persia was at war with Turkey and the Shah sought friendship with the tsar. He even offered to cede Derbent and Baku to Russia in exchange for its action against the Porte and appealed in every way for help.^[26] Moscow, for its part, was interested in weakening Turkey and tried to help Persia. The Russian Ambassador accordingly explained to the Shah that the Turk fortress was intended to prevent the Turkish forces from invading Persia from the North. On the other hand, the Russians, and Europeans in general, were interested in Persia, not only as an ally against Turkey, but for trade purposes. This is evident from the attempts of Europeans to be allowed transit to Persia through Russian territory.^[27]

Through the establishment of the fortress, Russia achieved a simultaneous “declaration of submission” from the whole of Avaria and of Chechnya.

After the death in 1589 of Prince Kambulat, anarchy and feuds between the princes reigned in Kabarda. Relations with Moscow, already cool toward the end of John the Terrible’s reign, deteriorated completely. In 1601 the Turk governors reported that Solokh (Sholokh) the Kabardinian prince and all the Kabardinian Cherkasses were no longer loyal to the tsar. They also stated that Kazyi, the son of Shepshun, having killed the sons of Kemirgoko—Mamstryuk and Domanuk, pleaded not guilty to the Sovereign and that Solokh and Kazyi were “at peace and united” with the Kumyks (Shamkhal’s subjects). Things became so serious that another Kabardinian prince, AYTEK, did not even want to allow Boris Godunov’s Ambassador Tatishchev through his lands on the way back from Georgia.^[28] The influential Prince Solokh was friendly with Shah Abbas, Shamkhal, and the Crimean Khan, who was married to his daughter (another daughter was married to the Khan’s son). He finally broke with Russia and concluded an alliance with the Crimea. Despite his ability, however, he did not succeed in establishing his rule in Kabarda. The princes competed against each other. The time of the troubles in Muscovy had its minor counterpart in Kabarda, and the governors of Turk assiduously tried “to separate the princes and sow discord among them.” There was

no sign of Russian rule in Kabarda.

When Mikhail Romanov became tsar in Moscow, the governor Golovin informed the Kabardinian princes of this and reported to Moscow that they would allegedly submit to him and had promised to send Ambassadors to Moscow.^[29] Subsequent events, however, show that this did not happen. Russia tried to maintain a slender link with Kabarda with the help of its friends among the Kabardinian princes and mainly through its own Cherkassky princes, who had become paramount Russian princes in the reign of John the Terrible and who were related to the tsars of the House of Romanov.^[30] Thus in 1655, Grigori Sunchelevich Cherkassky was appointed first governor of the Caucasian Cherkess and Astrakhan Tartars.^[31] Prince Kaspulat Mutsalovich Cherkassky was granted the Princesdom of Terk in 1661. In 1711 Prince Bekovich Cherkassky was sent to the Northern Caucasus with the task of embroiling Kabarda with the Kuban Cherkesses, against whom the Kazan governor Count Apraxin was waging war. However, all these attempts failed to establish longstanding and durable links between Kabarda and Russia.

From the time of Peter I, the interest in the Caucasus grew. In his search for outlets to the seas, Peter also had his eyes on the warm seas in the South. Progress in this direction met with the resistance of Turkey and the Crimea. The expedition against Azov and its capture in 1696, and also the trade between Russia and Persia, aggravated an age-old enmity. In this struggle the North Caucasus acquired particular importance. Turkey, through the Crimea, tried to consolidate its position there, particularly in Cherkessia. Thus the Crimean Khans Kaplan Girey in 1707 and Seadet Girey in 1726 undertook devastating raids on Kabarda. The brothers of Mangly Girey (1726—1730) also invaded Cherkessia, but suffered a major defeat. The defeat of the Crimeans provided Russia with a pretext to demand the recognition of its authority over Kabarda in a special message, in which the old thesis of the Ukrainian origin of the Cherkesses was repeated.^[32] The Crimean Khans, in their turn, pointed to the articles in the 1713 peace treaty, according to which the Cherkesses, including the Kabardinians, were recognized as dependent on the Crimean Khan. From time to time the Crimean Khans attacked Kabarda, in order to strengthen the Moslem faith there by force, as was the case in 1717, when the Crimean hordes waited outside Maikop. On other occasions, the wars between the Porte and Persia^[33] served as a pretext. When the Porte declared war on Persia, the Sultan ordered Kaplan Girey to advance on the Northern Caucasus and further on Persia (1733), which resulted in war between Russia and the Crimea.

This constant interference in Cherkess affairs by Turks and Crimeans on the one hand, and Russians on the other, was also facilitated by internal strife in Kabarda. Here, as has already been stated, from 1728 on two parties—the Kashkadau and the Baksan—vied for supremacy.

Kabarda remained in this uncertain international situation until the Russo-Turkish war of 1736.

It is natural that the Kabardinian issue should have been the object of negotiation and have found a place in the Belgrad peace treaty of September 18, 1739.

2. THE FIGHT OF THE KABARDINIANS FOR THEIR INDEPENDENCE

Peter I's campaign against Persia through Daghestan in 1722 showed that Russia's intentions in the East and Central Asia could not be fulfilled without Russia gaining possession of the Caucasian barrier. The Daghestan experiment also revealed that the conquest of this barrier from the Caspian flank was impossible as long as the Caucasus was not cut into two parts in the center. Kabarda happened to be exactly in this central position, at

the approaches to the Daryal pass—the shortest route to the Southern Caucasus. Peter did not have the time to try this plan. The conquest of Kabarda was the work of his successors in the XVIII and XIX centuries.

As Turkey and the Crimean claimed Cherkessia it was necessary to create a new diplomatic status, eliminating this obstacle and providing a transitory stage for the Russian assimilation of Kabarda. Such a status and transitory stage were provided by recognition of Kabarda's independence on the part of Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

Article 6 of the Belgrade peace treaty stated:

About the two Kabardas, i. e. the Great and Small, and the Kabardinian people, both sides agree that these should be free and not under the influence of either the one or the other Empire, but should serve only as a barrier between them; and that on the one hand the Sublime Porte Turks and Tartars should not enter the same or create disturbances there, and that on the other the AU-Russian Empire should leave the same in peace.^[34]

However, peace did not reign for long.

Fearing an alliance between the Kabardinians and Shah Nadir and anxious over the fate of Kizlyar, which had in 1763 been turned into a fortress, but above all “to incline them to remain true to Russia,” the Petersburg government sent to the Kabardinians, Lieutenant-General the Georgian Crown Prince Bakar, son of Vakhtang and kinsman of the Kabardinian princes. At the same time the Russians began to interfere in every way in the internal affairs of the country, to sow discord between the princes, showing particular favor to the nearest neighbors from Little Kabarda, and to undertake a number of actions whose purpose was most unequivocal. This purpose is quite frankly stated by the historian who supported the adherence to Russia of Kabarda, a representative of the Russian ruling class in the Caucasus. Discussing the events which followed directly the conclusion of the Belgrade peace, he wrote:

From all the events in Kabarda of which an account has been given and from the actions of the Russian government concerning the Kabardinians, it is apparent that although according to the 1739 Belgrade treaty Russia had recognized Kabarda as independent, it nevertheless tried by all available means to maintain its authority among the Kabardinians and if possible to restore its rights over them, which had been forfeited under the above-mentioned Belgrade treaty. Russia, once it set out to establish lasting supremacy in the Caucasus, could not act otherwise without harming its interests, and therefore the existence of Kabarda, as an independent adjoining country, exerting an influence on nearby peoples dependent on her—Ossetians, Ingushes, and Karabulaks, then considered to be the subjects of Russia—was unthinkable. All the aspirations of Russian policy in the Caucasus concerning Kabarda, as the strongest and richest nation in the Caucasus, had therefore to be concentrated on liquidating the Belgrade treaty.^[35]

Any further exposition of events might be considered superfluous because whether Kabarda was joined to Russia under John the Terrible or not was of no consequence. Russia, having set out to conquer the Caucasus, would in any case have annexed Kabarda. That the adherence was “voluntary” may in these circumstances be dismissed as false. However, it would nevertheless not be out of place here to examine the main stages of this “anti-voluntary” annexation by means of a long, bloody and most cruel war.

Seeing the futility of the attempts to seize Kabarda from the rear, from within or through intrigues, the Petersburg government soon resorted to direct action. In 1763 Russian forces seized the Kabardinian town of Mozdok, founded four years earlier, transformed it into a fortress, and linked it to Kizlyar with a fortified line; 1763 may be taken as the beginning of

the Russian-Cherkess war, which lasted 100 years, i. e. until 1864.

The Kabardinians clearly understood the meaning of these actions on their northern frontier. The following year they sent a delegation to Petersburg to obtain the demolition of the fortifications at Mozdok and the return of the town to its owners. As was to be expected, this demand was rejected, but in order to soften the effect, the deputies were given a considerable sum of money to distribute among Kabardinian warriors who had fought in 1758 against the Chechens. The Petersburg court was stunned to hear that the Kabardinians had refused the money and had in reply decided to break off all relations with Russia. At the request of the Cherkesses, the Porte intervened and work on the fortification of Mozdok was halted.

Not content with this, the Kabardinians united with the Western Cherkesses and began to attack the Russian lines. Kizlyar was besieged several times. After some years of military operations the Kabardinians in 1767 abandoned their lands and migrated to the upper reaches of the river Kuma, close to the Trans-Kuban Cherkesses, with whom they entered into an alliance. In that year, when they were preparing to launch an offensive against Mozdok (the migration had been organized so that there should be no Cherkess settlements in the theater of war), war broke out between the Porte and Russia. Hoping that their independence would be confirmed in the future peace treaty, the Kabardinians adopted a waiting position. The Russian government had other thoughts: In the instructions to General de Medem commander of the Russian forces in Kuban, it was stated that whatever the future peace treaty with the Porte. Kabarda was to be annexed to Russia. Actions bore out those words: in May 1769 de Medem invaded Kabarda with all his forces and took up position near Mount Beshtau. The battle ended with the defeat of the Kabardinians. After this de Medem sent his forces against the Kuban Cherkesses, the allies of Kabarda.

That same year Kabarda sent a new delegation to Petersburg, consisting this time of representatives of both parties—Baksan and Kashkadau, united now in their enmity toward Russia. The delegation again demanded the demolition of the Mozdok fortifications and recalled that relations between the two countries should be founded on the Belgrade treaty. In reply, in 1771, the well-known deed to the Kabardinian people was presented. It was stated in this document that the Empress did not agree to the demolition of the fortresses and that she looked upon Kabarda as a part of the Empire.^[36]

The Russian government could not but foresee the reaction of Kabarda to the deed and therefore, besides military measures, intensified action to weaken the country from within. In August 1771 de Medem was instructed: “It is essential that two parties of equal strength should always exist in Kabarda.”^[37]

Kabarda hoped for Turkish success in the war against their common enemy. She concluded a military alliance in 1774 with Turkey, reinforced by alliances with the Crimea and Western Chekessia for joint action. The Crimean Khan with a force of Cherkesses, “Nekrasov” Cossacks, Turks, and Crimeans advanced on Mozdok to help the Kabardinians. Simultaneously, the Chechens and Kumyks attacked the Russians. However, these operations do not yield a decisive result.

Soon peace was concluded at Kuchuk-Kainardji on July 10, 1774. It was unfavorable to Kabarda. It was stated that the adherence of Kabarda to Russia must take place in agreement with the Crimean Khan. However, as according to the 1772 Karasu treaty, the Kabardinians were already recognized as the subjects of Russia, of course without the Kabardinians having been asked, it was considered that the question of adherence had already been settled. Incidentally, the Crimean Khan did not recognize Russia’s rights to Kabarda. Khan Devlet Girey informed de Medem accordingly in 1776. Thus thanks to diplomatic moves by two

countries who had no rights at all over the country whose fate they were deciding, one of these powers obtained freedom of action in Kabarda without fear of counter-action by the other.

The Kabardinians reacted to this agreement by intensifying the war. The Russians also began to be more aggressive. They erected fortifications between Mozdok and Azov, a distance of 500 versts, under the guidance of Suvorov. In 1777—1780 a number of fortresses were built and garrisoned by Volga Cossacks. The Kabardinians, in alliance with other North Caucasian peoples, began to display feverish activity in the spring of 1779. Nearly all of the Northern Caucasus, except South Daghestan, was involved in this struggle. At the end of September, 1779, the bloodiest of all battles was fought between the Kabardinians and the Russian forces. Taken unawares, most of the Kabardinians perished. About 50 princes and over 350 nobles fell in this battle, refusing to surrender. This rout, known to Cherkesses as the “Kabardinian nightmare,” is nationally mourned by them all.

The hard, uneven fight prompted in the population the wish to migrate to Georgia, with the knowledge of the Georgian King Irakly, who sent a military detachment to the Daryal pass to receive the emigrants. The Russian command learnt of the scheme and barred the route to Georgia (1781).^[38]

After these events and also after the establishment of the Russian protectorate over Georgia and the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, Kabarda turned all her attention to internal affairs. The authority became centralized. Prince Bamat Mishost was elected leader of the people. Various laws were passed concerning administration, land tenure, taxes, etc., and the lot of the peasants was improved.

This lull was exploited by the Russians for the construction of new fortresses, particularly in the upper reaches of the Kuban, to cut Kabarda off from Western Cherkessia. The foundations were also laid in 1784 of the fortress of Vladikavkaz at the entrance to the Daryal pass for better communications between the Caucasian line and Georgia. The Caucasian governorship is created in 1786.^[39] At the same time Suvorov destroyed the Nogays in the Kuban steppes and the Caucasian line was strengthened.

Having completed these measures, the Russian command began to demand that the Kabardinians break off trade relations with the Kuban Cherkesses on the grounds that Kabarda is part of Russia and that Trans-Kuban belonged to Turkey. The new war started by the Porte against Russia revived the resistance of Kabarda, who accepted with the greatest fervor the invitation made in the summer of 1790 by the Turkish general Batal Pasha to operate jointly against the Russians.^[40]

After the Porte's unsuccessful war and the conclusion of peace in Jassy on December 29, 1791, the situation of Kabarda and of Cherkessia in general deteriorated. True, Catherine II, an admirer and friend of the French Encyclopedists, made a humane gesture in disapproving the action of General Gudovich, commander of the Caucasian army, who had compelled some Cherkess tribes to swear the oath of allegiance as Russian subjects. She told them that she released them from this oath and had “ordered them to be accepted as free peoples, dependent on no one.”^[41] She wrote to Gudovich in 1792: “It is not only by force of arms that you should conquer people who live in inaccessible mountains and who have safe shelters there from our troops, but rather through justice that you should win their trust in you, and through mildness that you should assuage bitterness, win hearts, and teach them how to behave toward Russians,”^[42] but this did not prevent the Russians from continuing to use force of arms. The building of fortresses on the line and in the upper reaches of the Kuban continued. The break in communications between Eastern and Western Cherkessia became permanent. Black Sea Cossacks were settled on Taman peninsula in 1792. Discord was sown industriously between

the Caucasian tribes: the Russians attempted to convert the Ossetians and Ingushes to Christianity and thereby to provoke a conflict between them and the Kabardinian princes, on whom they depended. The introduction of courts of justice in Kabarda incensed the population even more.

So sharp a turn in the life of the Kabardinians made them seek the return of their, lost independence and they began to look for the protection of the Porte.^[43]

However, Kabarda's reliance on Turkey produced nothing more than empty promises. For example in 1793, the representative of Sultan Selim III, in an address to all the Caucasian peoples, wherein he stated that the Sultan had sent an Ambassador to the Russian court to demand Russia's renunciation of Kabarda and the Crimea, and that in the event of a refusal he would declare war on Russia.^[44] Such acts merely produced greater confusion in the minds of an already incensed people. In 1794 the Kabardinians staged a mass revolt because of their displeasure with the courts introduced by the Russians and several prominent princes were exiled to Ekaterinoslav.

The annexation of Georgia in 1801, one of the reasons for which was the need to safeguard Russia's interests in the North Caucasus,^[45] the construction of fortifications at Mineralnye Vody (Kislovodsk) in 1803, and the building of the Georgian military road in 1804 completed the isolation of Kabarda. The moment was considered ripe to deal a final blow to this refractory country. The new commander of the Caucasian army, Prince Tsitsianov addressed a severe proclamation to the Kabardinians. It produced the reverse effect: 1804 was the hardest year for Russia in its fight against Kabarda. It did not dispose of sufficient forces because they had to be diverted for the war against Persia and to deal with the constant troubles in Georgia. As a result of the challenge thrown down to the Kabardinian people, all the tribes which Russia considered as its subjects joined the fray. Chechens, Ossetians, Western Cherkesses, and Kabardinians were all fighting the Russians at the same time. The plague, brought from the South, mowed down Russians and Caucasians. Individual incursions into Kabarda were accompanied by the devastation of the country. General Glazenap burnt down 80 settlements in 1805. The situation did not change until 1810, when the bitter struggle abated. In 1811 a delegation traveled to Petersburg. It sued for peace and asked that the rights and privileges granted to the Kabardinian people by Catherine in 1771 be confirmed. In January 1812 the delegation was handed an answer in the form of a deed, in which the privileges granted by the Empress were confirmed. As a sign of special consideration on the part of Emperor Alexander I, the Kabardinians were given the right of creating a special guard of princes and nobles on the same lines as Russian life-guard regiments. The Kabardinians did not pay much attention to this expression of "monarchical grace" and on various pretexts failed to send to Petersburg the young men from among whom it was proposed to form the guard.

When General Ermolov was posted to the Caucasus in 1816, Kabarda did not at first experience the terrorism of this severe general, whose motto was "My sword is the natives' law." He was engaged in actions against Chechnya and Daghestan. But in 1821 he turned his attention to Kabarda and ordered the mountain Kabardinians to migrate to the plain so that they could be kept under observation. The population did not submit to this unexpected order and Ermolov appeared in Kabarda in 1822. His first action was to lay the foundations of several fortresses. He then prescribed numerous severe administrative and judicial measures and left without taking any notice of the complaints of the population.^[46] However, even Ermolov could not break the Kabardinians. There were troubles in the country, which were suppressed only in 1825. From then and until 1846 there was relative calm in Kabarda. "For a long time the Kabardinians reconciled themselves with their position of dependence on the Russians only when necessity drove them to this."^[47] The last convulsion of Kabarda's agony occurred in 1846, when it tried to revolt for the last time.

Thus ended the long, embittered fight of Kabarda for independence and against union by force with Russia.

3. CONCLUSIONS

From this analysis of Kabardinian history the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The internal structure of the Muscovite state, resting on centralized tsarist rule, the abolition of the class of independent princes and members of the *vetche* (popular assembly), and the attachment of the population to the state organism, on the one hand, and the internal situation of Kabarda, with its feudal order, rival princes, absence of a centralized authority, responsible for the whole people on the other hand—show that Moscow did not have and could not have authority over Kabarda. There were no Russian governors here. The Kabardinian princes not only retained their rights, but enjoyed unrestricted freedom in all other ways. Kabarda did not have to provide soldiers or pay taxes, nor was it attached to the Muscovite state.

2. The first Cherkess delegation in 1552, which, according to official Russian Records, recognized the tsar's authority, repeated delegations from Shamkhal with the same declaration, and the Georgian mandate to the Kabardinians to declare the same to the Tsar—did not become lawful state acts establishing the voluntary adherence of Cherkessia, Daghestan, and Georgia to Russia. The declaration by the Kabardinian delegation in 1557 in no way differs from the enumerated declarations and it is strange that it is interpreted that Kabarda alone had voluntarily joined Russia in 1557, whereas neither Georgia nor Daghestan are considered to have joined on the basis of similar declarations.

3. Kabarda was not dependent on the tsar because of any personal ties: the Kabardinian princes continued to rule as before over their people and Moscow sent ambassadors to them.

4. The international situation of Kabarda, as a country independent of Moscow, was stressed in the demolition of the Sunzha fortress and the withdrawal of the Russian *streltsy* under pressure from the Ottoman Porte.

5. In diplomatic negotiations about the fortress in Kabarda, John the Terrible did not advance any arguments in support of his interest in this country, other than his kinship with Prince Kemirgoko and his wish to meet his father-in-law's request for aid.

6. The relations between Moscow and Kabarda were in the nature of a military alliance which is beneficial to both sides. The alliance was mainly directed against the Crimea and, indirectly, against the Porte. Economic and trade interests did not play any role in this alliance.

7. Tsar John the Terrible, occupied with the struggle against Livonia, could not seriously think of asserting his authority in the Caucasus, as he thereby risked coming into open conflict with the Crimea and the Porte. For the purpose of trade ties with the East a sufficiently good way for Moscow lay open through Astrakhan.

8. Geographically there was no common frontier between Muscovy and Kabarda. There was a vast uninhabited “no-man's land” between them, which took 15 days to cross.

9. The inclusion in the title of Tsar Fedor of the expressions: “Sovereign of the Iverian

land of the Georgian Kings,” “of the Kabardinian land of the Cherkess and Highland Princes,” etc. was a fictitious, decorative title, intended to produce a diplomatic effect. It was no more important than John the Terrible’s claim that the Cherkesses, as refugees from Ryazan, had always been Russian subjects.

10. Even if it is admitted that Kabarda had adhered to Russia under John the Terrible, her independence was restored under the 1739 Belgrade treaty. The forcible, unilateral violation of this treaty by Russia does not restore the annulled act of “adherence” under John the Terrible, if this act in fact ever took place. Even Russian authors cannot deny that Kabarda was free and fought for its independence until broken by force. Here, for instance, is what N. Grabovsky wrote about the days of John the Terrible:

The friendly relations thus established between the Kabardinians and Russians, were of a purely fictitious nature. There were no common and durable bonds between these peoples: neither language, religion, nor national interests had anything in common with each other. Moreover the remoteness of the places which the Kabardinians inhabited from Russia’s center and frontiers of the time could not, for natural reasons, bind common interests with any durable ties. Any trade or industrial links were out of the question.^[48]

On the whole it would appear to be a gross mystification to speak of the “voluntary adherence” of Kabarda to Russia, when the latter had to resort to nearly one hundred years of bloody and cruel war in order to really conquer that country.

Note

It is characteristic that in the textbooks on the history of the USSR published in 1951-52 the “adherence” of Kabarda to Russia is not mentioned at all, and has only achieved prominence very recently.

Thus, for example, no comment is made about it in the “History of the USSR” by K. V. Bazilevich, S. V. Bakhrushin, A. M. Pankratova, and A. V. Fokht, edited by A. M. Pankratova (11th edition). This silence is hard to explain if the joining with open arms was a historical fact as claimed by the Soviets recently.

The authors of this textbook, dealing with events in the Northern Caucasus in the XVI century, merely remark that “profiting by the feuds between the princes of the North Caucasus, Ivan IV ordered a town to be built on the river Terek, but under pressure from Turkey decided to abandon it” (p. 141).

In volume 17 of the Large Soviet Encyclopedia (BSE, 1952 edition), nothing is as yet said about the “adherence” of Kabarda to Moscow. The BSE merely notes the fact that the Kabardinian and Cherkess princes had recognized themselves as the vassals of Ivan IV (p. 267).

Contrary to this assertion, volume 19 of the BSE (1953 edition) in a description of the Kabardinian ASSR, speaks quite definitely of “the Kabardino-Cherkesses becoming Russian subjects” (p. 209).

The conquest of Kabarda and her union with Russia under the Kuchuk-Kainardji peace (1774) is already interpreted in this volume of the encyclopedia as “the return to Russia of Kabarda, which had been torn away from her” (p. 209).

An interesting map is included In this Review, a “Map of Caucasian territory, showing political frontiers at the end of the XVIII century, compiled by the Chancellery of the Governor of His Imperial Majesty in the Caucasus, Tiflis, 1915.”

This is one of a number of maps available which show the year of Kabarda’s adherence differently in each case. Such differences are quite understandable to us, as in fact “voluntary adherence” is a Soviet myth and the struggle for independence continues to this day. If one speaks of adherence in general, many other dates could also be found, such as 1846, which is what some Russian scholars choose, or earlier, for instance 1812, when the Kabardinian delegation in Petersburg received confirmation of Catherine II’s deed after it had sued for peace.

Nevertheless the false interpretation of Kabarda’s links with Moscow in the XVI century, asserting that Kabarda had adhered to Russia in the XVI century, appeared only in 1953.

(See map at end of this Review)

The Editorial Board (North Caucasian Section)

Additional Literature

Collection of articles on the history of Kabarda, issue 1—3, Kabardinian Scientific-Research Institute, Nalchik, 1951—1954 (three issues).

K. V. Bazilevich, S. V. Bakhrushin, A. M. Pankratova, and A. V. Fokht, Istorija SSSR (History of the USSR), edited by A. M. Pankratova, 11th edition, Moscow, 1952.

Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsyklopedia (BSE—Large Soviet Encyclopedia), vol. 17, 1952 edition, article on Kabardinian ASSR.

BSE, vol. 19, 1953 edition, article on Kabardinian ASSR.

1. S. Platonov, “John the Terrible”, Berlin, 1924, p. 7.
2. N. Grabovsky, “The adherence to Russia of Kabarda and its fight for independence” (Collection of data on the Caucasian mountain peoples), IX, Tiflis, 1876, p. 152.
3. S. Belokurov, “Russia’s relations with the Caucasus”, Moscow, 1889, p. 38.
4. Moscow’s Ambassador to the Polish King Sigismund Augustus was instructed toward the end of 1554 to answer the question why the Pyatigorsk Cherkesses were fighting together with the Russians against the Crimea by: “The Cherkesses are old serfs of our Sovereigns and had fled from Ryazan”—S. Belokurov, op. cit., p. 46 quoting G. Karpov, “Diplomatic relations of the Moscow state with the Polish Lithuanian state”, vol. II, Collection of Russian Historical Society, vol. LIX, p. 449, and Karamzin, vol. VII, note 251. In the instructions of Tsar Fedor in 1594 to the Ambassador to the Persian Shah, it is also stated that: “The Kabardinian Cherkesses have for long been serfs of the Sovereigns and, having abandoned the Sovereign, fled from Ryazan to settle in the mountains,” S. Belokurov, op. cit., p. 569. The presence of the Cherkesses not only in Ryazan, but also in the Kursk principality, is mentioned by Russian sources. Thus in 1282 the Tartar Baskan at Kursk allegedly summoned the Cherkesses from Pyatigorye and resettled them under the name of Cossacks. Their turbulence and indiscipline provoked the anger of the Kursk prince Oleg, who punished them,

with the permission of the Khan of the Golden Horde. The remnants of these Cherkess Cossacks, together with Russian fugitives, appealed to the Kiev Baskan. He settled them along the Dnieper, where the migrants founded the town of Cherkassy. Some Russian authors say that the Zaporozhye Cossacks are the descendants of these Cherkesso-Russian migrants. (S. Bronevsky, “Recent geographical and historical information about the Caucasus”, Moscow, 1823, vol. II, p. 79.)

5. S. Platonov, op. cit., p. 24.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

7. N. Likhachev, “The Sovereign’s Geneologist and the Adashev family” (Chronicle of the work of the archeographical commission), XI.

8. Valishevsky K., “John the Terrible”, translation from the French, Moscow, 1912, p. 182; S. Platonov, op. cit., p. 82.

9. The last Khan Yamgurchay, deposed in 1552, was reinstated with the help of the Cherkesses.

10. Smirnov V. D., The Crimean Khanate under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Porte until the beginning of the XVIII century, St. Petersburg, 1887, pp. 247—248.

11. It was not only personal greed which prompted the Khans to do this, but “the necessity to present the potentates of the Ottoman Porte with Cherkess men and women slaves”, V. D. Smirnov, op. cit., p. 348

12. *Ibid.*

13. S. Platonov, op. cit., pp. 100 and 125.

14. S. Belokurov, op. cit., p. 51, note 72.

15. Chronicle according to Nikon’s List, vol. VII, St. Petersburg, 1791, p. 197; Karamazin, vol. VIII, note 416.

16. In other documents Mashuk and his brothers are called “Abeslin princes”, S. Belokurov, op. cit., p. 47.

17. “The Chronicle of Nikon VII”, p. 246, N. M. Karamzin VIII, note 416.

18. That the Zhane lived near the Black Sea may, for example, be seen from the writings of the Turkish historian, Hezar-Fenn, see Hammer-Purgstall, Geschichte des Osmanischen Reichs, Vienna, p. 184; V. Smirnov, op. cit., pp.347—348.

19. “The Chronicle of Nikon”, op. cit. Although it is not stated here which Turkish towns are meant, we know from other sources that these were disputed points, which Turkey had built on the Cherkess coast of the Black Sea in the XVI century.

20. Belokurov, op. cit., p. 49.

21. “The Chronicle of Nikon”, vol. VII, p. 289; N. Karamzin, vol. VIII, note 416; S. Soloviev, vol. VI, p. 136.

22. G. Karpov, *op. cit.*, p. 541.
23. Belokurov, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
25. Michael, together with others was suspected by the tsar of having poisoned his wife (Maria Temryukovna died in September 1569). Regarding the relations between John the Terrible and Michael, who lived with the tsar the greater part of the *opzichnina* —relations which deteriorated sharply, see the curious “Recent information on the Russia of the time of John the Terrible”, translated by A. I. Malenin, “The narrative of Albert Schlichting”, pp. 23—24, Leningrad, 1934.
26. See negotiations between the Persians and Georgians and the tsar in 1586—1588 in Sir Jerome Horsay’s “Notes on Muscovy in XVI century”, translation from the English by Belozerskaya N., St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 75.
27. E. Zevanin, “The Persian question in Russo-European relations in XVI century”, Historical notes published by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Institute of History, vol. 8, 1940, p. 129.
28. Belokurov, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
30. Ivan Borisovich Cherkassky, grandson of Karabulat, cousin of tsar Mikhail. *Russkii biografiicheski slovai* (Russian Biographical Dictionary), St. Petersburg, 1905.
31. Prince Grigori was the great grandson of Zhelegot, Kemirgoko’s brother. Gri-jori’s son, Daniil, was married to the sister of Field Marshal Boris Sheremetev, and his daughter to Prince Yuri Trubetskoy (Russian Biographical Dictionary, St. Petersburg, 1905).
32. See memorandum in Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschidite des Osmanischen Reichs*, Vienna, VII, p. 596, *ibid.*, p. 419.
33. Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschidite des Chans des Krim*, Vienna, 1856, pp. 201—206.
34. Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire, vol. X, pp. 899 and 901, No. 7, 900.
35. N. Grabovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
36. For text of deed, see P. Butkov, “Materials for a New history of the Caucasus,” part I, p. 323; N. Grabovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 135—143.
37. Butkov, *Ibid.*
38. Grabovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
39. Composed of 6 districts: Kizlyar, Mozdok, Georgievo, Alexandrovo, Stavropol, and Ekaterinograd—N. Dubrovin, “History of Russian wars and rule in the Caucasus,” vol. 11, St. Petersburg, 1886, p. 227.
40. Batal Pasha was the governor of Anapa and Sundzhuk (Novorossisk), ceded by the

Cherkess Prince Zanoko to Turkey in order to prevent Russia from seizing them. Anapa was ceded in 1781 and Sundzhuk (Tsemez in Cherkess) in 1789, Anapa fortress was built by French engineers in the very year it was ceded.

41. N. Dubrovin, pp. cit., p. 276.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

44. N. Grabovsky, op. cit., p. 177. Turkey was being incited to break with Russia -by certain European powers, notably France, who was displeased with the second partition of Poland.

45. Its [Georgia's] annexation safeguarded the Caucasian Line and this in turn kept the mountain peoples in check from two sides and made it possible, if they turned hostile, to pacify them through hunger, as they obtained all their food either in Georgia or in Mozdok.' N. Dubrovin, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 336—337.

46. These complaints, outlined in a document, which is interesting because of the tact and diplomatic skill with which it was drawn up, was handed in 1825 to General Dibich. See text of this document in N. Grabovsky, op. cit., pp. 198—205.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Circassian World is an independent non-profit web site dedicated to create an informational resource for Circassians and non-Circassians who wish to learn more about the heritage, culture, and history of the Adyghe-Abkhaz people. For more information regarding Circassian World, please contact info@circassianworld.com



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