

# A Brief History of Kabarda

## [from the Seventh Century AD]

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**T**he Russians have been writing Kabardian (and Circassian) history according to their colonial prescriptions for more than a century, ever since they occupied Circassia in the middle years of the 19th century. Simplistic and oftentimes ridiculous accounts of this history were produced in the course of this time. Until this day, these historiographies, with added clauses to reduce the level of inanity and circumvent the rampant contradictions, constitute the official historical narrative in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (and with slight variations in the other ‘Circassian’ republics, namely the Karachai-Cherkess Republic and the Republic of Adigea).

For one, the Kabardians were deemed to have opted to join Russia in the 16th century (much more on this ‘Union’ in the course of this article). In 1957, big celebrations were held in Kabarda commemorating the 400th anniversary of the ‘joyful’ event that saved the Kabardians from perdition. A statue was erected as a symbol of the fictitious union of Kabarda with Russia in downtown Nalchik. The Circassian maiden with an uplifted scroll is exquisite Gwascheney (or Gwaschene; Гуашчэней, е Гуашчэнэ), daughter of Temryuk Idar (Teimriqwe Yidar; Идар и къуэ Темрыкъуэ), who was betrothed to Ivan IV (1530-1584) on 21 August 1561 AD, to cement the treaty between Temryuk, Prince of Princes of Kabarda, and Ivan the Terrible, ‘Tsar of All Russia’.<sup>1</sup> Tsarina Maria Temryukovna (Мария Темрюковна; 1544-1569), as was Gwascheney

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<sup>1</sup> The corresponding monument amongst the Western Circassians (Adigeans) was built in 1957 in Friendship Square in Maikop, the republican capital, “in honour of the 400th anniversary of the ‘Military and Political Union’ between the Russian State and Circassia”. ‘For ever and ay with Russia’ is the writing on the wall, as well. The imposing structure was sculpted by Evgeniy Manizer. Like its Kabardian counterpart, the Adigean shrine survived the rise and fall of Circassian nationalism in one piece.

baptised upon marriage, was married to Ivan for eight years until her early death at the age of 25 on 1 September 1569.<sup>2</sup>



Statue of Princess Maria (Gwascheney) Teimriqwe Yidar, second wife of Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible (betrothed in 1561). This is a controversial monument erected in Nalchik in 1957 to mark the fourth centennial of the 'Union' of Kabarda and Russia.

It is located in the vicinity of the Kabardino-Balkarian State Musical Theatre.

The inscription on the lofty pedestal reads:

'For ever and ay with Russia' [«НАВЕКИ С РОССИЕЙ»].

(Photo courtesy of Photoeurasia.com)

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<sup>2</sup> It is thought that it was Maria (in collusion with her brother Mikhail) who inspired Ivan to form the elitist (and terrorising) *oprichnik* fraternity. The insignia donned by the oppressive *oprichniks* – 'severed dog's head and broom' ('to sniff out treason and sweep it away') – was probably inspired by Maria herself, who was accused of witchcraft and vitriol by her many detractors at the imperial court. In pagan Kabarda witches riding dogs (and other domestic and wild animals) and strewing death and disease upon unsuspecting households following nocturnal revelry was one vivid folkloric image. A popular tale has it that it was Ivan himself who poisoned Maria.

What is more, the Circassian-Russian War was reduced to a class struggle between the princes and nobility on one hand and the lower castes on the other. Outside forces were also banally categorized into good and evil. Great Britain and the Ottoman Port, the 'reactionary' parties, sided with the oppressors [the princes and nobles], and the gallant Russians saved the masses from age-old tyranny. According to E. A. Eliseev, ex-First Secretary of the Kabardino-Balkarian Regional Party Committee, 'Devastating raids of hordes led by Turkish Sultans and Crimean Khans threatened the very existence of the peoples inhabiting the area and only voluntary unification with Russia in 1557 saved the Kabardians and Balkarians from complete enslavement and annihilation... The victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution was a turning point in the destiny of the Kabardians and Balkarians. It saved them from social and national oppression and opened the way to progress and happiness' (V. Vorokov, 1987, p20).

Some of the writings of Shora Negwme (Nogmov; 1794-1844, or 1801-1844, was the first published Circassian writer and historian) were twisted and turned to prophesy blissful life under the guiding hand of Russia. His famous utterance, 'I am sure that a day will come when love of knowledge will be engendered in the soul of every mountaineer. One day we will all take up learning and books,' was taken as a presage of the October Revolution! A few Circassian writers took up the propaganda theme to cloyment.



Present-day Kabardino-Balkaria, where about a million people live, 60% of whom are Kabardians. It has an area of 12,500 km<sup>2</sup> and is bordered by the Republic of North Ossetia (Alania) to the east, Georgia to the south, the Karachai-Cherkess Republic to the west, and the Stavropol Krai to the north.

Sizeable Kabardian communities are also found in the Mozdok region of North Ossetia, the Karachai-Cherkess Republic, and in the Stavropol Krai.

[Courtesy of [msn. encarta](http://msn.encarta)]

### **Kabardians celebrate their ‘Union’ with Russia**

In the two years leading to the 400th celebration of Kabarda’s ‘Union’ with Russia in 1957, all the Circassian cultural institutions were put into high gear to produce high-quality works fit for show on the prestigious stages of Moscow. In this task, these institutions were helped by a group of Russian cultural workers sent to Nalchik for this purpose. At the time the Balkars were still in exile, so they did not have the chance to be party to this event.

Putting aside the objections to the validity of the basis of the celebrations, this period witnessed an efflorescence of Circassian music and other aspects of culture and folklore. In addition, many seminal publications on a number of aspects of Kabardian history, language, literature, culture and folklore were timed to see the light in 1957. Amongst the dozens of events that took place and works staged and published in this period:

- One of Hesen Y. Qarden's (Kardanov) – one of the best known Circassian composers and musicians of the second half of the 20th century – best vocal works *Light of Friendship*, a cantata for soloist, chorus and orchestra, was premiered in Moscow on 20 June 1957, on the 400th anniversary of the 'Union' of Kabarda with Russia. He also composed the cantata *Shardzhas* («Шарджас»; 'Circassian') for the occasion.
- The composer and conductor Truvor Karlovich Sheibler's (1900-1960) opera-ballet *The Narts* was staged at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow on 1 July 1957. The libretto was written by Beit'al Kwesh. This work was composed of 15 musical numbers and it featured as its principal heroes Sosriqwe, Baterez, Ashemez, and Satanay. Bilal Qashirghe sang and danced the role of Sosriqwe and Valentina Sosmaq (Sosmakova) played the role of Satanay.
- Zalimx'an Dischekh' (ДыщэкI Залымкъан) composed the song 'Glory Road', celebrating 400 years of the 'voluntary' joining of Kabarda to Russia. He was duly awarded the Medal for Heroic Labour by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. The legacy of Dischekh' is best preserved in the still popular song 'The Dawn *Wij*' (НЭХУЩ УДЖ; *Nexwsch Wij*).<sup>3</sup>
- The Soviet Georgian composer Vano Muradeli (1908-1970) composed the choral work *Kabardinka*.
- Amirx'an As-hed Нех'wрасч'е (Асхьэд ХьэхьупащIэ и къуэ Амырхъан; Khavpachev) (1882-1972), one of the greatest Circassian bards of the first half of the 20th century, was decorated with the highest Soviet accolade, the Lenin Order.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> An audio file of the song 'The Dawn *Wij*', sung by the famous Circassian baritone Zawir Tut (Тут Заур), Honoured Artist of the Russian Federation and the Minister of Culture of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

<sup>4</sup> A recording of 'The Song of the Qereqeschqetaw Battle' («КЪЭРЭКЪЭЦКЪЭТАУ ЗАУЭМ И УЭРЭД»; 'Qereqeschqetaw Zawem yi

### **Apogee of Kabardian nationalism**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Kabardians started to reassess their history. The struggle of the Kabardians to keep their independence in the 18th and 19th centuries had been properly documented by the mid-1990s. Some facts in the section on Kabardian-Russian War below are consequences of this revision.

Non-governmental newspapers began to appear in the last years of ‘Glasnost’ (‘Openness’). Already by 1991, the media and literary journals had jumped on the nationalist bandwagon. Even Kabardian State newspapers joined the rising crescendo. The Circassian language newspaper *Adige Psathe* (Адыгэ Псалъэ; ‘Circassian Word’), the Organ of the Parliament and Government of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, started to espouse nationalist issues. In December 1991, the writer and journalist Muhemed Hef’its’e (Хьэф’Иыц’Иэ Мухьэмэд; Хафицев) founded the Circassian-language newspaper *Sherjes Xexesxer* (Шэрджэс Хэхэсхэр; ‘Circassian Diaspora’), in response to thenceforth latent desire on the part of the Circassians in Circassia to reconnect with their vast diaspora.

The first casualty of the rising nationalism was the myth of the ‘Voluntary Union’ (of Kabarda with Russia), which ended up in the rubbish heap of history (that was what we thought then).

In the Yeltsin era following the end of the Soviet Union, this kind of historical interpretation – that non-Russian groups happily joined the empire, rather than being conquered – went out of fashion. In 1996, academics from Adygeia and Moscow held a meeting at which they concluded that the 1557 Treaty was nothing but a temporary union between two equal parties. (M. Marshenkulova, 5 October 2007)

However, there was still the chance of it putting on an act of a phoenix and re-emerging from the ashes. The fact that the statue of Maria was

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Wered’), by Amirx’an As-hed Hex’wpasch’e, can be found at <http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>.

still standing tall in the middle of Nalchik boded ill. Removing it would have required a brave political decision. There were several acts of vandalism directed at the detestable monument, but the Kabardians failed to remove the bronze idol (the Adigeans also fell short of removing the corresponding monument in their republic). A golden opportunity was missed to redeem Kabardian (and Circassian) history!

### **International Circassian Congress & Association**

The first International Circassian Congress (ICC) was held in Nalchik on 19-21 May 1991. The Congress was attended by representatives of the Adige Xase in Kabardino-Balkaria, Adigea and the Karachai-Cherkess Republic, by delegates from the Abkhaz Popular Movement, the Motherland Association (Rodina or Xekw), and by envoys from the Circassian associations and cultural centres in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA. In this context, 'Circassian' denotes both Adiga and Abkhaz-Abaza.

One of the principal resolutions of the Congress was the establishment of the International Circassian Association (ICA; Дунейпсо Шэрджэс Хасэ; *Duneypso Sherjes Xase*). This body was formed of elected members representing the republics in the Russian Federation and the diaspora. Its main task was to co-ordinate efforts directed at setting up and developing cultural relations among all Circassian communities around the world. The ICA was tasked with the preservation and development of national culture and folklore, and promoting the status of Circassian, which had been under tremendous pressure.

The Congress declared that the ICA was to be entrusted with the study and solution of the general problems facing all Circassian peoples, the research into and writing of the actual Circassian history, guarantee of religious freedom, and the preservation of the national character of the Circassians. It also purported to offer all possible assistance to the Circassians who want to return to their ancestral lands, and to repatriate and restore all Circassian historical and cultural treasures that are dispersed around the globe.

The Congress ratified the charter of the ICA and elected the Association's leadership. The first president of the ICA was the late (Cherkess) Yura Kalmyk (Къалмыкъ Юрэ), who later became Minister of Justice in the Russian Federation (until his resignation in 1995, in protest against the Russian invasion of Chechnya). It was decided that

the centre of the ICA would be in Nalchik. The ICA published a journal 'Circassian World' in three languages: Russian, English and Turkish. The journal, which was intended to depict the situation of the Circassian, Abaza and Abkhaz communities and to foster consolidation, was distributed in the three Circassian republics and other Circassian regions, as well as in the diaspora. The journal was conceived by Kalmyk, one of the Circassian nationalist greats of the 1990s. It is still published in Cherkessk in the Karachai-Cherkess Republic.

### **Taming of Kabardian nationalism**

By the mid-1990s, the Russians had been able to neutralize the Kabardian (and the wider Circassian) nationalist movement through foul means and by placing their 'men' in key positions in its leadership. Nationalist issues were excluded from official newspapers and media, and nationalist newspapers were guillotined. One of the main victims of the anti-nationalist drive was the newspaper *Sherjes Xexesxer*, which was geared to broach issues of concern to, and concerning, the Circassian diaspora. The homeland Circassians were no longer allowed to discuss the matter of the 'Circassian diaspora', let alone conceive of schemes to lure their co-ethnics back home.

Most of those who rode the nationalist band wagon jumped off just before it was derailed and set on fire. Some of them even went on to become staunch henchmen in the implementation of Russian campaign against Circassian nationalists. However, there is still a rump of sincere nationalists who still hold the ideals of the ICC and ICA.

To undo the nationalist ideals and dogmas, the Russians ordered their Circassian lackeys to revive the myth of the 'Union' of Kabarda with Russia. The quaint Russian tall tale crept back out of the 'rubbish heap of history' and restored its position as the central showcase of Kabardian history. The phoenix just won't have its ashes scattered to the four winds! Kabarda was brought firmly back into the Russian fold. The term of guardianship had not elapsed yet in Russia's estimation. The Kabardians, heirs of the formidable Kassog Kingdom and descendants of Inal the Great, were deemed not ready to fare it on their own amongst the comity of nations.



### **Kabardians celebrate 450 years of Russian ‘friendship and tutelage’**

In the summer/autumn of 2007, all state sponsored culture in the Circassian republics was mobilized by the Russians in the celebrations of the 450th anniversary of the ‘Union’ of the Circassians with Russia, fifty years after the grand events held by the Soviets in Moscow to commemorate the ‘joyful Union’.<sup>5</sup> *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*<sup>6</sup>

The decision to celebrate the anniversary – and by implication to go back to the older view of history – was taken last year [2006], and sanctioned by Russian President Vladimir Putin. It coincided with a campaign by Circassian organisations for the killings and deportations that marked the end of the 19th century war to be recognised as ‘genocide’... “The celebration of the ‘voluntary accession of Circassia to Russia’ is supposed to erase the truth about the genocide of an indigenous people in the Caucasus – the Circassians – by the Russian state,” said Murat Berzegov [Berzej], the leader of Adygeia’s Circassian Congress. “The fact that the authorities have reverted to the myths of Soviet times indicates that they have lost their way and are not prepared to address the issues we have.” (M. Marshenkulova, 5 October 2007)

This is a stark manifestation of the flippancy with which the Russians have been dealing with the Circassian issue. It is also a stark example of how the culture of a whole nation is held hostage by a colonial power for propaganda purposes so as to propagate its rule. Circassian apologists for

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<sup>5</sup> For the latest ‘official’ (lay) account of Kabarda’s history, refer to ‘[450 years with Russia](http://president-kbr.ru/eng/450years/?id=403&aktiv=1)’ <<http://president-kbr.ru/eng/450years/?id=403&aktiv=1>>, Official Site of the President of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. Somehow, the ‘voluntary union’ of Kabarda with Russia and the calamity that befell the Circassian nation in the 19th century and almost brought it to extinction are comprehended in the same paragraph, so to speak.

<sup>6</sup> This time round, the Balkars did not take part in these ‘Kabardian’ festivities, not because they were not around, but because in their own reckoning their joining of Russia took place in 1827. Their celebrations of ‘180 years with Russia’ were separately held in May 2007.

Russian hegemony in the North Caucasus, who, one suspects, function out of compulsion and self-interest rather than a diligent pursuance of the truth, have to make reference every now and then to a flimsy tale that has the paradoxical components of this fictional union with the Russians and the incontrovertible fact that the Circassian nation was brought to the brink of extinction by the expansionist drive of Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries.

### **Bizet, Ivan and Maria**

In Georges Bizet's (1838-1875) *Ivan IV* (1867; completed posthumously), an opera in five acts and six tableaux, there is a duet between Tsar Ivan and his Circassian wife Maria (Marie), and Prince Temryuk (Temrouk), her father, and Oleg, her brother, are featured. An adaptation of Bizet's opera by Circassian classical musicians Zawir Zhiriq (Жырыкъ Заур; Zaur Zhirikov) and Zhebre'iyl He'wpe (ХьэIупэ ЖэбрэИил; Jabrail Khaupa) was staged in Nalchik in 2007 in celebration of the so-called 'Union' of Kabarda with Russia, a fictitious (non-)event used by the Russians as a pretext to perpetuate their hegemony over Circassia. The duet part was sung by the Circassian opera singers Muhediyn Batir (Батыр Мухьэдин; Batirov) and 'Esiyat Sherjes (Шэрджэс Iэсият; Cherkesova).<sup>7</sup>

### **Kabardian history and historiography**

It is said that history is in most cases written by the victor, but the re-ascendant Circassians are no longer taking hackneyed tales on their history lying down. Alternative interpretations of Circassian history have been and are being made available by the Circassians themselves (underground in the Caucasus and by diaspora Circassians) and by Western scholars.

The Russians managed to rein in the Kabardians in the early 1990s. They also scratched out what little of their nation's history the Kabardian historians had managed to write in the few years of relative freedom. But will the Russians be able to keep the Circassians on a leash for much longer, now that their close kin the Abkhaz have tasted the sweetness of freedom?

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<sup>7</sup> Muhediyn Batir, Honoured Artist of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, is a soloist at the Kabardino-Balkarian State Musical Theatre. 'Esiyat Sherjes is Honoured Artist of the Kabardino-Balkarian and the Karachai-Cherkess Republics.

It is imperative that the Circassian nationalists make their voices heard so that the world would know that they are not very happy with Russian domination of their past and destiny. The remnants of the Russian versions of Circassian history are increasingly being regarded as the straws clung to by the last of the colonial powers in the third millennium in its attempts to hold on to its empire in face of mounting self-assertion and nationalist resurgence of the many restless peoples and nations comprehended by its vastness.

It remains to be seen whether the Kabardians will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the 'Union' with their fellow Circassians in severalty in the year 2057, or whether they will be able to shake off the oppressive yoke and dispose of the quaint Russian tales once and for all. The Circassians should settle for nothing less than complete independence (preceded by the reclamation of their historical lands and unity). The proud Circassian nation deserves nothing less.

The following is a humble attempt at drawing a skeletal account of Kabardian history from the Middle Ages. Epic mediæval songs and chants are included to adorn the tale.

Any suggestions and corrections (to [jaimoukha@gmail.com](mailto:jaimoukha@gmail.com)) are most welcome.

### **Armenian mediæval sources**

Armenian sources of the seventh century AD mentioned that the people ‘Kash’ (the Kassogs, or early mediæval Kabardians) lived ‘between the Bulgars and the Pontus’, i.e. in the area between that of Kubrat Bulgaria (north of the Kuban River and Sea of Azov) and the Black Sea. The Kassog dominion also comprised the lands between the Don and Kuban. The Kassogs were close (westerly) neighbours of the Alans. These sources indicate that the differentiation of the Circassians (Adiga) into Kassogs and Zikhis had been completed by the seventh century AD.

The Kabardians had developed a runic alphabet of the Murfatlar type (found in Bulgaria and Romania) in the sixth-seventh centuries AD.<sup>8</sup> Most probably this intellectual development was an adjunct to the spread of Christianity in Kassogia (Kabarda), where there was need to spread the good word, so to speak.

According to *The Book of Administration of the Empire (De Administrando Imperio; Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ρωμανόν* [To My Own Son Romanus]), written in the tenth century in Greek by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905-959), the Circassian nations of Kasakhs (modern-day Kabardians; *also* Kassogs) and Papaghis lived in the hinterland of Circassia. The Zikhis (Western Adiga) and Abkhazians occupied the eastern Black Sea littoral.

### **The Tmutarakan Principality**

In the 11th century, the Russians under Mstislav the Bold (son of Vladimir the Great) took part in routing the Khazar army in the Crimea. They then crossed the Taman Strait and defeated the Kassogs, or Kabardians, under their legendary leader Prince Reidade (Редедя, Rededya, in Russian sources).<sup>9</sup> Legend has it that at first Mstislav was unsuccessful and was forced to take refuge in a swamp, whence he sold his soul to the Devil (promised the heavens to erect a church, according to Russian sources). The Demon counselled him to challenge the

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<sup>8</sup> For details on the Kassogian runic system of writing, refer to P. Dobrev (1995).

<sup>9</sup> The reference in some sources to Prince Idar (son of Yinarmes son of Tabile son of Yinal [Inal] the Great) as the leader of the Kabardians at the time is anachronistic, since he was not to make his presence felt in Kabardian history until the 16th century.

invincible Reidade to a wrestling match. An epic duel was fought in 1022 AD, in which the Circassian giant was slain.<sup>10</sup> Mstislav then subjugated the Iron, or Ossetes. He founded a small principality, Tmutarakan («Тмутаракань» in Russian), or Tamtarkan, under the suzerainty of Russia, with the Kabardians and Ossetes, amongst other peoples, as subjects. Mstislav was the prince of Tmutarakan in the period 988-1036, that is until his sudden death in a hunting accident. The Kassogs took part in Mstislav's military campaigns. The town of Tmutarakan was situated on the Taman Peninsula, opposite Kerch. The Tmutarakan Principality lasted for a few centuries, but with diminishing influence in Circassia.

According to Shora Nogmov (1861), Tamtarkan was destroyed at the hands of the Circassians, who still have the saying, 'May the lot of Tamtarqay befall you!' («Тамтаркъай (Тамтаркъей) и махуэр къыпхукъу!»), е «Тамтаркъай (Тамтаркъей) ухъу!»).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 'In the later 17th century, when the *Velvet Book* was being compiled by the Russian aristocracy, the [Lopukhins](#), [Ushakovs](#), and several other noble families, seeking for illustrious pedigrees, asserted their descent from Mstislav's postulated son Roman, who was allegedly married to Rededya's daughter. This fable has been repeated in numerous genealogical compilations of later date.' — [NationMaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Mstislav-of-Tmutarakan). <<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Mstislav-of-Tmutarakan>>. Mstislav's wife was called 'Maria'. If this was Redadya's daughter, as some sources state, then we have another historical incident in which a Circassian 'Maria' marries a Russian potentate.

<sup>11</sup> «Тамтаркъей (Тамтаркъай) ухъу!»; «Тамтаркъей и махуэр къыпхукъу» (Адыгэхэм Тамтаркъей [Тмутаракань] пщыгъуэр зэрызэхакъутэгъам псалъэжъыр къытекълащ. *Енлъ Нэгумэ*, Ш. Б., «Адыгэ народым и тхыдэ», н. 120. 'May the lot of Tamtarkan befall you!' Refers to the destruction of the Russian Principality by the Circassians in the 11th century AD. See Sh. B. Nogmov's *History of the Adigey People*, Nalchik, 1958, p120).



(Kabardian) depiction of the legendary wrestling duel between the Kassog (Kabardian) strongman Reidade and Russian Prince Mstislav of Tmutarakan in 1022 AD. The bout was won by the latter after he had sold his soul to the Devil (according to legend). After suffering hegemony for many years, the Kabardians were eventually able to destroy Tmutarakan and throw off the Russian yoke.  
[W. Jirandoqwe et al, 1951, the page after p64]



Clash of the Titans.

(Russian) portrayal of the epic combat of the Russian Prince Mstislav Vladimirovich the Bold (of Tmutarakan) with the Kassog Prince Rededya (Reidade) in 1022 AD.  
[Portrait by A. I. Ivanov, 'Duel between Prince Mstislav Vladimirovich the Bold and Kosog Prince Rededya', 1812.  
Courtesy of the [Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Auburn University](#)]

### **Georgian suzerainty over parts of Circassia**

The Circassians had kept their independence until the early years of the 13th century, when part of their country and Abkhazia were subjected by the Georgians under Queen Tamara (1184-1213) and (re-)Christianized in part. This was the heyday of Georgian domination, which extended over most of the Caucasus. Georgian historians referred to Circassia as 'Djiketia' (variation on 'Zikhia', mediæval name of [Western] Circassia). Churches were built during this time whose remains can still be found scattered in some parts of Circassia. Important and mutually enriching cultural exchanges took place between the Circassians and Georgians in this era, cementing their cultural connections that have lasted until this day.

The Adiga rebelled against Georgian rule towards the end of the 14th century, but around 1390 AD, during the rule of King Bagrat VI, the Georgians mounted a punitive campaign against the insurrectionists, and took many hostages. Around 1424 AD, after the demise of King Alexandre of Georgia and the division of his lands among his sons, the subjugated peoples of the kingdom revolted. The Circassians threw off the Georgian yoke for good.

### **The Mongols devastate Circassia**

Genghis Khan's Mongol hordes crossed the Caucasus in the 13th century and laid waste to the North Caucasus. The Mongols subdued the Circassians (and Alans) in 1238. Some lucky natives escaped the onslaught by taking refuge in the mountains. Batu, grandson of Genghis, established the Khanate of the Golden Horde in the North Caucasus (and other areas) in the 1240s. The Kipchak Khanate, as was the powerful state also known, dominated the North Caucasus until the late 14th century, when Tamerlane conquered the Caucasus and ended Mongol rule.

### **The Circassian occupation of the Crimea**

In the early 13th century, the Kabardians left their original homeland and, after wandering for some time, headed towards the Crimean Peninsula and occupied it in 1237 AD. They resettled in the plains around the Sea of Azov, and in the southwest of the Crimea (in the area of present-day Sevastopol) among the Tatars between the rivers Katch (Kacha) and Belbek, both of which flow into the Black Sea. To this day, the area of the upper reaches of the Belbek is called 'Kabarda', and the



land between the two rivers ‘Cherkess-Tuss’ (‘Plain of the Circassians’, in Tatar), which was dominated by the fortress Cherkess-Kerman.

### **The Kabardians return home**

In the 15th century, the Kabardians left the Crimea in boats to the Ts’emez Bay (ЦІЭМЭЗ; Soudjak-Kale, Sujuk-Qale; present-day Novorossiysk), about 45 km to the southeast of Anapa. They headed to the mouth of the Kuban River and then resettled in the area just to the south. Their leader Abdun-Khan ordered the building of the town of Zhansherx’ (ЖАНШЭРХЪ; literally: heavy rolling implement of the fabulous Narts in shape of huge wheel with cutting blades; the town was also called ‘Chantchir’, ‘Shanjir’, etc.) on the ruins of Sindika, the capital of the ancient Circassian Sindika State. Located between the rivers Psif in the east and Nefil (Nepil) in the west (about 40 km to the northeast of Anapa and 100 km to the west of Krasnodar), Zhansherx’ was the most important town in Circassia in the Middle Ages.<sup>12</sup> It was the seat of power of the legendary Prince (of Princes) Inal (Yinal; Инал) Nexw, grandson of Abdun-Khan (more about Inal later).

### **The Kabardian State**

The Kabardians established a strong state in the 16th and 17th centuries in the middle of the North Caucasus. This was only possible after the demise of the Golden Horde, when a power vacuum was created by the defeat of Tokhtamysh, a descendent of Genghis Khan and last khan of the White Horde (part of the Golden Horde), at the hands of the mighty Tatar Tamerlane in 1395 by the Terek River. The Kabardians gradually reclaimed their lands in East Circassia starting in the 15th century.

At the zenith of its power, Kabarda had an area exceeding 40,000 sq km. It extended from the Kuban (Psizch) in the west to river Sunzha in the east, and from the Kuma River in the plains north of Pyatigorsk in the north to Georgia in the south.

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<sup>12</sup> According to Julius von Klaproth (1823, vol. 1, p343), Chantchir was a ruin of a town near Anapa on the Circassian coast. Klaproth wrote his account on the Caucasus in the first decade of the 19th century. According to Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux (Vol. I, 1839 [2002], p78), the ramparts, parapets and trenches surrounding the town, which were used for defence and fortification, were still visible in the ruins of Chantchir. According to Pallas (1805, vol. I, p423), the ramparts had four egress points, like a Roman camp. At the time (19th century), the area of Chantchir was occupied by the Circassian Nartkhuajs.

At its apogee, Kabarda was so dominant that all powers with vested interests in the area, namely Moscovy and the Ottoman Port, sought to court and bestow honours upon its princes in order to further their interests. This culminated in the betrothal of Tsar Ivan IV to Prince Temryuk Idarov's (Идар и къуэ Темрыкъуэ; Yidar Teimriqwe) daughter Gwascheney (later baptized Princess Maria), in 1561 AD.

This marriage of alliance was intended to bolster the so-called 'Union' between Russia and Kabarda; an alliance between equals. In Soviet times, a bronze statue of Princess Maria was erected in the centre of Nalchik to mark the event. In this period, the Cherkasskys, Kabardian princes in the Russian court, as an aristocratic family formed whose descendants played a significant role in the Russian military and politics.

The date of the fictitious unification is reckoned by Russians to have occurred in 1557. However, as will be explained later, the authority of Temryuk over the other Kabardian princes was very tenuous and many of these declined to 'ratify' the alliance, which was at best symbolic.

The feudal princes of Kabarda dominated the North Caucasus up to the start of the 18th century. By the end of the Middle Ages, Kabarda had become a formidable state. It spread its hegemony over the whole of central North Caucasus, reducing the Ossetes and various Turkic peoples, remnants of the Kipchaks, to vassalage. At times its power extended to the shores of the Caspian. Alliances were struck with the Shamkhals of Daghestan. These achievements would have supposed some degree of co-ordination and co-operation between the plethora of princes, the occasional civil strife notwithstanding.

### **Kabardian dynasties**

A few words about the Kabardian ruling dynasties in the Middle Ages are perhaps apt at this juncture. Abdun-Khan ruled the Crimean Kabardians at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century. Prince Inal Nexw (the Great), grandson of Abdun-Khan, assumed the reins of power in Kabarda in the 15th century, specifically in the years 1427-1453. According to A. Shorten, Inal died in 1458 (Шортэн, А., Адыгэ IуэрыIуатэхэр, Налшык, 1969, т. II, н. 6).

. Inal was son of X'wifelhey (son of Abdun-Khan).<sup>13</sup> During his reign many people submitted to his rule and chose to become part of his state. He managed to unite the Circassians and Abkhazians into one kingdom, which he ruled for a long time. However, after his demise Kabarda was riven into several rival principalities by his several sons.

Prince Talhosten (son of Zhanx'wet) became the potentate of all Kabarda towards the end of the 15th century upon the demise of his uncle Prince Yinarmes (son of Tabile son of Yinal). Yinarmes succeeded his brother Zhanx'wet as ruler of Kabarda. Talhosten was the progenitor of the Talhosteney Dynasty.

Beislhen son of Zhanx'wet (son of Tabile son of Yinal; Жанхъуэт и къуэ Бесльэн), nicknamed 'Pts'apts'e' ('The Obese'; «Бесльэней Пцлапцлэ») ruled over Kabarda in the period 1498-1525. He was the younger brother of Talhosten. Prince Qaniqwe son of Beislhen (son of Zhanx'wet) left Kabarda to establish the Beslanay tribe to the north in the land of the Five Mountains (Bgiytxw, Pyatigorsk) during a period of civil conflict.

Civil war ensued in which the Kiakh (*Ch'axe*=Western Circassians) were instrumental in installing Prince Yidar (Idar) as sole potentate. Yidar son of Yinarmes (Инармэс и къуэ Идар), whose tenure of power extended over the period 1525-1540, was the progenitor of the Yidar clan. The Yidar dynasty started to lose influence in the 17th century as a result of internecine wars.

In the late 1520s the (Christian) Kabardians, during the reign of Prince Idar, mounted a campaign against the (Muslim) Crimean Tatars. The Kabardians used their fleet of ships to transport the cavalry and the two-wheeled war chariots across the sea to the Crimean Peninsula. The Kabardians attacked Bakhchisaray, the capital of the Crimean Khanate at the time, located in the southwest of the Peninsula, and were victorious, bringing back great spoil, including 100 chariots packed full with cloth (a precious commodity at the time).<sup>14</sup> Andeimirqan (b. circa 1509), the

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<sup>13</sup> The origin of Inal is shrouded in mystery and many myths have been spun around his background and exploits.

<sup>14</sup> The Bakhchisaray Campaign was immortalized in song. A recording of 'The Ballad of the Bakhchisaray Campaign' («БАХЪШЫСЭРЕЙ ЗЕКЮЭМ И УЭРЭД»; 'Bax'shiserey Zeik'wem yi Wered') by Ziramikw Qardenghwsch'

legendary Kabardian hero (the equivalent of Robin Hood in the Circassian ethos), was in the elite force of the Kabardians during the Bakhchisaray Campaign.<sup>15</sup>

The main princely dynasties of mediæval Kabarda were Yidar (Idar), Talhosten, Zhambolet, Qeitiqwe, Qaziy, Zhilax'sten, and Mudar.

### **Shamkhals and Kalmyks**

Peace and stability prevailed for many years in the 16th century, allowing the Circassians to go on with their lives. As had become the usual scheme of things, a fresh wave of invaders broke on Circassian shores. In the middle years of the 16th century (during the term of tenure of Teimriqwe Yidar), a combined force of the Turghwt (Тургъут; Turgut [of the Oirat, or Oyirad, Mongols], ancestors of the Kalmyks) and the Shamkhal (Kumyk potentate) of Tarki engaged the Kabardians at the confluence of the Malka [Balhq] and Terek [Terch]. The first encounter went the way of the former party, the Circassians retreating to Psigwensu (Псыгуэнсу) River.<sup>16</sup> The Turghwt overwhelmed the entrenched Circassians, who were forced to take refuge in the mountains. At the third meeting, the Circassian forces were on the verge of a total rout when a contingent of 2,000 warriors came to the rescue, and the tide of battle turned. The Turghwt were driven out and all Circassian lands were restored. The battle scene was named 'Qereqeschqetaw' («КЪЭРЭКЪЭЩКЪЭТАУ»)<sup>17</sup>

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can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

<sup>15</sup> Two versions of 'The Song of Andeimirqan' («АНДЕМИРКЪАН И УЭРЭД»; 'Andeimirqan yi Wered'), both sung by Vladimir Bereghwn, can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

<sup>16</sup> Psigwensu is a right tributary of the Sherej (Cherek), which is a right tributary of the Bax'sen (Bakhsan), which in turn is a right tributary of the Balhq (Malka), a left tributary of the Terch (Terek).

<sup>17</sup> The epic battle was immortalized in song. Recordings of 'The Song of the Qereqeschqetaw Battle' («КЪЭРЭКЪЭЩКЪЭТАУ ЗАУЭМ И УЭРЭД»; 'Qereqeschqetaw Zawem yi Wered'), by Amirx'an As-hed Hex'wpasch'e and Ziramikw Qardenghwsch', can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

The army of the Shamkhal of Tarki (mainly made up of Mongol Kalmyks, Tatars, Kumyks and Nogais) attacked Kabarda soon after their defeat in the Qereqeschqetaw Battle. The Kabardian army massed under the leadership of Prince Scholex'w (son of Teipseriqwe, who fell in the Qereqeschqetaw Battle; Teipseriqw was son of Talhosten; the long-lived Scholex'w ruled Kabarda in the last years of the 16th century and early years of the 17th), at the Qwlhqwzhin River (a tributary of the Malka [Balhq] River), where a bloody battle ensued that lasted for 15 days.<sup>18</sup> The Kabardians routed the invading army in the Qwlhqwzhin Battle (КЪУЛЬКЪУЖЫН ЗАУЭ; Qwlhqwzhin Zawe).<sup>19</sup>

### **The statesmanship of Temryuk**

Teimriqwe (Temryuk) son of Yidar (son of Yinarmes) ruled Kabarda in the period 1554-1571/2. Fifth descendant of Inal the Enlightened One, Temryuk had an enigmatic personality that is worthy of some elaboration. On the one hand, he conceived a vision of a strong Kabarda dominating the whole of the Central Caucasus under his command. He was painfully aware of the divisions inside his country and the mighty foes flanking it on both sides, the Crimean Tatars and their Ottoman allies in the west and the Shamkhal of Daghestan in the east. In Temryuk's reckoning, Russia was to be used as a disinterested ally to help him achieve his ambitions.

In retrospect, one would consider Temryuk's overtures as presenting the Russians with a pretext first to occupy Kabarda and then the whole Caucasus. He, together with other princesses who approached the Russians, started a controversy that still rages to this day. For almost 450 years, the Russians, and later the Soviets, harped on the theme of the 'Voluntary Union' of Kabarda and Russia. After 1991, Kabardian historians re-assessed this period and put paid to 'theories of union'. That is until the early years of the 21st century!

### **The Cherkasskys**

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<sup>18</sup> 'The Song of Prince Scholex'w' («ЦОЛЭХЪУПЩ И УЭРЭД»; 'Scholex'wpsch yi Wered'), sung by Ziramikw Qardenghwsch', can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

<sup>19</sup> A recording of 'The Ballad of the Qwlhqwzhin Battle' («КЪУЛЬКЪУЖЫН ЗАУЭМ И УЭРЭД»; 'Qwlhqwzhin Zawem yi Wered') by Ziramikw Qardenghwsch' can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

The Cherkasskys were a large sprawling clan, a loose coalition of comparatively distant relatives. The princely family came from Kabarda to the Russian court in the 1550s and 1560s (and later decades), and some of its members immediately occupied prominent positions as generals and statesmen. One of Maria's brothers, Sulht'anqwl, who assumed the Russian name Prince Mikhail Temryukovich upon joining Tsarist service, became one of the most influential men in the Oprichnina (special administrative elite under Tsar Ivan IV).<sup>20</sup> Prince Gregory (Circassian name 'Sanjalay'; Сэнджэлей и кьуэ Сэнджэлей) Sunchaleevich Cherkassky (son of the famous Prince Sanjalay; more about him later) became boyar (privileged aristocrat) in 1657 and was the Voevoda (provincial governor) of Astrakhan in 1660-1663. He died in 1672. Prince Kaspulat Mutsalovich Cherkassky (grandson of Prince Sanjalay) was granted the Princedom of Terek in 1661. He led the Chigirin Campaign of Russian Tsar Alexey Mikhailovich Romanov (Алексей Михайлович Романов) in 1677-1678, in which Terek and Greben Cossacks took part.

#### **Tatars and Russian encroachment**

The Russian bid to subdue the North Caucasus was checked in 1605 when a combined force of the Shamkhal of Daghestan and the Ottomans dealt a severe blow to tsarist ambitions. The project was to be delayed for almost 130 years. However, the Cossacks kept their presence in the area, but they were not yet under direct Russian influence. Their formal submission was to be tendered in 1712. During their incessant wars with the Mongols and Tatars, the Circassians sought to forge closer relations with Russia, from whom they perceived no threat, being relatively

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<sup>20</sup> Despite being brother-in-law and favorite of Ivan, Mikhail ended up being hacked to death by the Tsar's soldiers in 1571 on suspicion of having secret contacts with the (Crimean) Tatar Khan Devlet-Girey I. It is noteworthy that in 1570 Devlet-Girey attacked the Circassians, which were headed by Temryuk, Mikhail's father. Following his defeat, Temryuk accompanied Devlet-Girey on his Russian campaign in 1571. The Russian folk song 'Kostryuk' 'may have assimilated some features of Mariya's other brother, Prince Mikhail Temryukovich Cherkasskii, who lived permanently in Moscow after his sister's marriage: he was a leader of the *oprichnina*, and was executed in 1571, apparently suspected of treasonous relations with the Tatar khan Devlet-Gerei' (M. Perrie, 2002, pp 189-206). Maria's other brother was Prince Mamstryuk, about whom not much is known, except that he sojourned in Moscow for some time.

distant and of the same faith. The Kabardians were also at loggerheads with the Shamkhals of Daghestan. Nevertheless, the Tatars gradually pushed the Circassians south, shrinking their country in the process.

After the demise of the Golden Horde, Russia began its campaign of gradual conquest of the steppes north of the Caucasus. By 1556 Russia ended Eastern Tatar domination after sacking Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1554, and established its power on the Volga. Astrakhan was used as the first springboard in Russia's long-term quest to occupy the Caucasus. However, at the time, Russia had not yet formulated her policies in the Caucasus, being still ignorant of the ways of the land.

In 1555, the Circassians of the Five Mountains (the Beslanay) went through the motions of submission to the Russian tsar. An alliance of sorts was struck between the Kabardians and Russians against the Tatars. In 1557, Temryuk sent a delegation to Astrakhan pleading Russian assistance against the formidable Shamkhal. The Russians dallied at first, being at the same time solicited by the Shamkhal, but eventually sided with the Kabardians. A force was sent in 1560 that defeated the Shamkhal army and allowed the victorious Temryuk to claim large areas of Tarki.

In 1563-66, there was an intense civil conflict in Kabarda between Temryuk and his rivals. In 1565, Temryuk dispatched another delegation to solicit Russian help against his compatriots. Again the Russians obliged, and Temryuk was able in 1566 to launch a military campaign against his principal rival Pschi'epschoqwe (Pschiapschoqwe) Qeitiqwe (Къетыкъуэ ПщыІэпщокъуэ [Пщыапщокъуэ]; 1540-1580) Prince of Western Kabarda. Pschi'epschoqwe was grandson of Beislhen son of Zhanx'wet (son of Tabile son of Inal the Great). The victorious Temryuk was assisted by a Russian army contingent under the command of Prince Ivan Dashkov. By pacifying his main co-ethnic pretenders to the throne, Temryuk was able to augment his sway in Kabarda.

His drive for power led him in 1567 to petition Russia to build a fortified town nearer to his country. This project had to wait for ten years to be realized as hostilities flared up between Russia and the Porte in 1569. The Tatars and Ottomans marched on Astrakhan with the intention of wresting it from Russian hands, but were thwarted by a huge force. The war ended in 1570, establishing Russia as one of the major players in the game of Caucasian politics. Thereafter it set out on its southward

expansion. The Circassians were caught in the middle of Russian ambition and Tatar ferocity.

In 1570, the Khan of the Crimean Tatars Devlet-Girey I, threatened by the Russian encroachment, gathered a great force and marched on the lands of the Five Mountains (the land of the Beslanay Kabardians), present-day Pyatigorsk. A combined force of Kabardian and Beslanay warriors under the leadership of Prince Temryuk was assembled on the banks of the middle Kuban. The Circassians were crushed. The victorious Khan forced some of them to embrace Islam and resettle on the banks of the Kuban, which river became Circassia's northern frontier. Until that time, Adiga settlements stretched northwards to the Kuma River and some scattered groups were even found as far as the mouth of the Don.

Devlet-Girey took his campaign all the way to Moscow in 1571. According to some sources, the Khan was accompanied by Temryuk, the erstwhile enemy.<sup>21</sup> Ivan the Terrible and his retinue fled to the city of Rostov, and the Crimean Khan torched Moscow to cinders.

#### **Temryuk's demise**

Temryuk died in 1571/2. He was succeeded by his younger brother Qambolet, or Qaniybolet (Идар и къуэ Къамболэт [Къаниболэт]). In 1571, the Russians built a fortress on the Sunzha in Eastern Kabarda. By 1577, the Kabardians had recovered from their defeat at the hands of the Crimean Tatars in 1570. Following the death of Qaniybolet in 1589, Prince Scholex'w son of Teipseriqwe (son of Talhosten son of Zhanx'wet) sat on the throne of Kabarda. The centenarian Scholex'w died in 1615.

Following Temryuk's demise, his branch of the Inal clan gradually lost its sway in Greater Kabarda. Prince Qaziy son of Pschi'epschoqwe (son of Qeitiqwe and progenitor of the Qaziy clan) (ПщыІэпщокъуэ и къуэ Къазий) was able to avenge his father's defeat (of 1566) by routing the remnants of Temryuk's clan in the 1590s. Qaziy found his perdition in November 1616 at a battle against his fellow Circassians and Great Nogais (P. A. Bushkovitch, 2004, p19).

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<sup>21</sup> See for example H. von Staden, 1967, p46.



Following Qazy's death, his nephew Alijiqwe Schojeni qwe (Щоджэныкъуэ и къуэ Алыджыкъуэ) became the strongest potentate in Kabarda. His long tenure lasted until his death in 1653. During the first six years of his rule, Alijiqwe was at loggerheads with Qwdenoqwe (Qwndeit) son of Qambolet (Qaniybolet) Yidar (Къамболэт [Къаниболэт] и къуэ Къудэнокъуэ [Къундет; Къундэт]). However, after 1624 the influence of the Idar (Yidar) clan in Greater Kabarda was effectively over.

### **Prince Sanjalay of Lesser Kabarda**

In the 16th/17th centuries, Prince Sanjalay, who sired seven sons and two daughters, had 400 men in his town (Terek) and a further 600 Tatars in Otary. Sanjalay (Сэнджэлей) was Prince Teimri qwe Yidar's younger brother's grandson. Prince Sanjalay's father was Qanqilish (Къанкъылыш) son of Zhileghwet (Жылэгъуэт). In Russian sources he is referred to as 'Sunchaley Yanglichev' ('Сунчалей Янгличев'). His first trip to Moscow took place in 1605. He was appointed leader of the Terek Fortress and military camp north of present-day Grozny, capital of Chechnya. Sanjalay died in 1625. Many of his progeny also distinguished themselves as military leaders.<sup>22</sup>

Prince Sanjalay and his descendants, the last influential branch of the Idar Dynasty, held sway in Lesser Kabarda from their base in the Terek Fortress for most of the 17th century.

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<sup>22</sup> See P. Bushkovitch (2004) for an account of Sanjalay, his domineering consort (Zhilegwasche), and his progeny. The military exploits of Prince Sanjalay against the (remnants of the) Tatars and their leader Soteresh are forever preserved in song. Audio files of recordings (of two versions) of 'The Song of Prince Sanjalay' («СЭНДЖЭЛЕЙ И УЭРЭД»; 'Senjeley yi Wered'), by Vladimir Bereghwn and Ziramikw Qardenghwsch', can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.



**Тэрч кьалэр  
XVII  
лэщыгьуэм и  
30 гьэхэм.**  
*Сурэтыр нэмыцэ  
дипломат  
Олеарий Гэдэм  
ицГац.*

Terek Fortress (and town) in the mid-1630s, the headquarters of Prince Sanjalay and his progeny in the 17th century.

[Picture drawn by the German diplomat Adam Olearius, who was on a mission to the Shah of Persia]

### **Russian ambitions in the Caucasus thwarted**

The Russian bid to subdue the North Caucasus was checked in 1605 when a combined force of the Shamkhal of Daghestan and the Ottomans dealt a severe blow to tsarist ambitions. The project was to be delayed for almost 130 years. However, the Cossacks kept their presence in the area, but they were not yet under direct Russian influence. Their formal submission was to be tendered in 1712.

### **Beginning of Cossack settlement in the North Caucasus**

The Cossacks made their first appearance in the North Caucasus at the beginning of the 16th century. They settled in the steppes north of the river Sunzha and along the Lower Terek. Among their earliest settlements were Tarku and Andreyevo. Initially relations between the Cossacks and the Northern Circassians were cordial, no real menace being perceived by the local population. The Cossacks began to adopt many Circassian customs, and, in general, they emulated the North Caucasian way of life.

By the turn of the 18th century, relations between Cossacks and the North Caucasians had become soured as Cossack settlements penetrated deep into the Stavropol Region in the northern Caucasus. Thereafter, raids and counter-raids became the order of the day. In 1712, the Cossacks submitted to Tsar Peter the Great and were incorporated into the Russian war machine. They became a potent force in the Russian relentless drive to warm waters, playing a major part in the Russian-Caucasian War.

### **Kabardians utterly defeat Crimean Tatars**

In August 1708, Khan Qaplan-Girey I (Kaplan Giray; ruled the Crimea in the period 1707-1708, 1713-1715, and 1730-1736), at the head of 100,000 Crimean Tatars, marched against the Circassians of the Five Mountains (the Beslanay). The potentate of Kabarda Prince Kwrghwoqwe Het'ox'wschiqwe (ХьэтIохъушыкъуэ и къуэ Кургъуокъуэ; ruled Kabarda in the period 1695-1708), sensing the

inferiority of his forces, decided to invoke ruse (upon the counsel of his principal statesman and strategist Zhebaghi Qezenoqwe [Къэзэнокъуэ Жэбагы]).<sup>23</sup> They retreated into Qenzhalischhe (Къэнжалыщхьэ), or Qenzhal Mountain (on the right bank of the Malka [Balhq] River), and built stone fortifications across the forbidding passes. Remains of these ramparts, called the ‘Walls of the Crimea’, can still be come across.<sup>24</sup>

In the absence of any resistance, the Tatars went into a rampage. The Circassians sent deputies to offer their submission to the Khan, who imposed stiff conditions. He demanded, among other things, 4,000 maids and boys as hostages. The Adiga pretended to accept the terms and sent provisions, including intoxicating liquors. The Tatars revelled in their ‘victory’. One night, while they were in deep slumber induced by the strong drink, the Circassians rolled heavy stones on the tents below, and fell on the Khan’s camp, massacring a great number of his men and putting the rest to flight. The Khan lost a brother and son. Thenceforth, the Kabardians were rid of the Tatars forever. The leader of the Kabardians was Prince Kwrghwoqwe the Great (son of Het’ox’wschiqwe; ХьэтIохъушыкъуэ и къуэ Кургъуокъуэ).

### **Kabardian divisions**

In 1728 the Kabardians were divided into two rival factions: the Kashkatau (from Kashkatau, a town and mountain to the south of present-day Nalchik), and Bakhsan (from Bax’sen, a town to the north of Nalchik) (A. Namitok, 1956, p18). The first party had leanings towards

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<sup>23</sup> Zhebaghi Qezenoqwe (1684-1750) was an accomplished Kabardian statesman of the 18th century, being responsible for formulating Kabardian policies with respect to the Crimean Khans and their overlords, the Ottomans. Stories of Zhebaghi’s wisdom and sagacity are still very much alive in national memory. He played a pivotal role in modernizing the Circassian code of conduct (адыгэ хабзэ; *adige xabze*) and removing outdated customs and practices, though he is sometimes erroneously accredited with originating it. Freedom Park in Nalchik is adorned with a statue of the Circassian sage.

<sup>24</sup> A monument commemorating the decisive battle was erected on top of the Qenzhal Mountain in 1998 (later vandalized). In 2008, the Kabardians marked the 300th anniversary of the battle. The Balkars, denying that such a battle had ever taken place and claiming that Qenzhal Mountain is within Balkar territory, blocked the route of a group of Kabardian horsemen who were heading to the battle scene from Nalchik, as part of the celebrations. However, good sense prevailed in the end, and the horsemen were able to reach their destination.

the Ottomans, the other, the Russians, and each camp had a ruling prince. Pro-Ottoman Prince Yislham Misost (Мысост и къуэ Ислям) was installed by the Crimean Khan Saadat-Girey IV (Saadat Giray; ruled the Crimea in the period 1717-1724) in 1720 and then removed by Tsar Peter I in 1721 and replaced by Aslhenbech Qeitiqwe (Къетыкъуэ Аслъэнбэч).<sup>25</sup> Prince Yislham died in 1732; Qeitiqwe in 1746. This fragmentation undoubtedly contributed to eventual defeat and conquest by Russia, although the Bakhsaniks were eventually, but belatedly, to ‘see the light’ and realize the true intent of the Russians.

### **Treaty of Belgrade**

In 1736, a war broke out between Russia and the Ottoman Empire due to the latter’s intervention in Kabarda. In the Treaty of Belgrade of 18 September 1739, the independence of Kabarda was formally guaranteed. Article six of the Treaty stated:

As for the two Kabardas, Greater and Lesser, and the nations that inhabit therein, the two parties agree that the two Kabardas shall remain free, and will submit to neither of the two empires, but will be considered as a boundary between the two; and on the part of the Sublime Porte, neither the Turks nor the Tatars shall interfere in [the internal affairs of] of these [two] countries, and, according to old custom, the Russians shall continue to have the right to levy hostages from the two Kabardas, the Sublime Porte being also free to levy the same for the same purpose; and in case the above mentioned peoples of the Kabardas give ground for complaint by either of the two powers, both are permitted to punish them. (B. Nolde, 1952-1953, p341)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Saadat-Girey’s foray into Kabarda in 1720 had revenge over the Tatar defeat at Qenzhalischhe in 1708 as one of its objectives. It was Zhebaghi Qezenoqwe’s wise counsel to Prince Aslhenbech Qeitiqwe that averted war between the Kabardians and Tatars.

<sup>26</sup> See also G. Noradounghian, *Recueil d’Actes Internationaux de l’empire ottoman*, vol. 1, Paris, 1897, p261. [4 vols, 1897-1903]

In the middle years of the 18th century, Russia was preoccupied in Europe, where most of her forces were engaged. In the mean time, the Cossacks defended Russian territorial gains in the North Caucasus. The *status quo* was maintained until 1763, when the conflict in Europe was settled with the Treaty of Versailles.

### **The Caucasian Military Line**

Following the Treaty of Versailles and relaxation of tension in the European front, Empress Catherine II embarked on an ambitious plan to sever the Caucasus from Turkish influence and annex it to her ever-expanding empire. The scheme involved hemming the northern frontier of Circassia with fortresses to be used as springboards for further expansion. The first military outpost, Mozdok, was established in Kabarda in 1763 at the site of a Kabardian village on the left bank of the Terek at a distance of 250 km west of Kizliar.<sup>27</sup> After this development, the Kabardians entered into negotiations with the Turks in reaction to Russia's by then plain intentions to occupy their lands. In 1764, a Kabardian emissary, Qeisin Qeitoqwe (КЪЕТЫКЪУЭ КЪЕСЫН), was sent to St. Petersburg to protest the foundation of the fort and request its removal. He presented a petition in which the limits of Kabardian lands as conceived by the inhabitants themselves were recorded:

The Kabardian lands extend, on one part, to the River Kuma and the ruins of the ancient town of Madjar on this river, and, on the other part down the River Terek until the locality of Meken on the said river, at least 60 versts [64 km] down river from Mozdok... (B. Nolde, 1952-1953, p344)

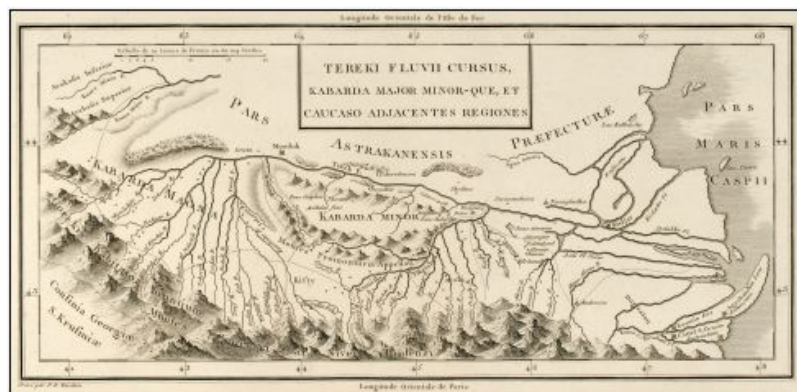
This meant that by building Mozdok, Russia had moved the eastern frontier of Kabarda by 64 km. This act may be regarded as a flagrant contravention of article six of the Treaty of Belgrade. By 1769, a line of fortifications was extended eastwards to Kizliar, followed by a string of fortresses in the opposite direction that extended northwestwards to the Sea of Azov, forming the so-called Caucasian Military Line. The NW

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<sup>27</sup> According to some sources, the town of Mozdok (Mez Degw, Мэз Дэгу = Thick Forest in Circassian) was built by the Kabardian Prince Qwrghwoqwe in 1759.

Caucasus was under siege. Practically all towns in the region, e.g. Nalchik, originate from these fortresses. The Plains Circassians were gradually pushed south between 1763 and 1793. In 1771, a Kabardian prince made another petition to the Empress to remove the fortress at Mozdok, but this was categorically refused, which answer convinced many Kabardians that the Russians were intent on occupying their lands.

It was during this period that the Ossetians were resettled (by the Russians) from the mountains to the valleys. The founding of Mozdok and Vladikavkaz (1784) was partly intended to lure the Ossetians to the plains. This process was inevitably attended by the displacement of the Kabardian villages in the area. General Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov (Ermolov) (more about him later) accelerated this process in the 1820s, forcibly removing the Kabardian original inhabitants from the area of the Georgian Military Highway and settling Ossetians there (J. Burbank and D. L. Ransel, 1998, p160).



Engraved map of the two Kabardas in the second half of the 18th century.

‘TEREKI FLUVII CURSUS, KABARDA MAJOR MINOR-QUE,  
ET CAUCASO ADJACENTES REGIONES’

(‘The Terek River, Greater Kabarda and Lesser Kabarda,  
and Adjacent Caucasian Regions’)

[Engraved by the cartographer Pierre François Tardieu (1711-1774),

From the Atlas Volume of N. G. Le Clerc’s

*Histoire physique, morale, civile et politique de la Russie Ancienne*,  
Paris and Versailles: Froullé and Blaizot, 1783]

### **Annexation of Kabarda**

In the first Russian-Ottoman War, the Turks attacked the Military Line in 1768. The Kabardians, who still retained their might, attacked the town of Kizliar on the Caspian and sacked it. After cessation of hostilities in 1774, the Ottomans ceded Kabarda and the Crimea to Russia in the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynardji, despite the fact that the Porte had no claim whatsoever over Kabardian lands. The Russians pursued a policy of gradual annexation of northern Circassian lands by dislodging the indigenes and replacing them with the loyal Cossacks. Many fortresses were erected during this time including Ekaterinograd on the Malka, Giorgievsk on the Podkumok and Stavropol on the Tchla. By the beginning of the next Russo-Turkish war, the Military Line had reached the Sea of Azov. It was completed in 1832, cutting off contact between the Circassians and Turkey. The garrisons in these strongholds consisted of a melange of Cossacks and regular troops.

### **Kabardian-Russian War**

The Russian-Circassian War can be divided into two phases. The first took place in Eastern Circassia, specifically in Kabarda. When the eastern regions were annexed, the war moved on to western Circassia, marking the second stage. Two propositions are prevalent as to the dating of the first stage. Some historians give the early date of 1779 as the start of the Russian-Kabardian war, and 1818 as the date of the complete pacification of the country. Other historians consider 1800 as the year of flare-up of hostilities, which only ended in 1829.

There is a wide-spread misconception that the Kabardians voluntarily joined Russia in the 16th century and that their country came under Russian protection in a bloodless manner. This is far from the truth. There are documents that prove that the Russians began to conceive plans to annex Kabarda in the 18th century. In 1770, Russia prepared a topographical map of Kabarda. Krichinkov, Governor of Astrakhan, suggested in 1775 that Russia gave support to the peoples that were under Kabarda's domination (the Ossetes and Balkars, for example) in order to undermine its power.



In the summer of 1771, the Kabardian princes expressed their dissatisfaction with the policy of the imperial administration in the Caucasus and the construction of the military line between Mozdok and Kizliar. This hastened the first open battle between the Kabardians and Russians, which took place near the Malka River on 29 September 1771. The Russians under General Jacoby won the day and took good spoil – about 2,000 horses and 5,000 cows, thousands of sheep, and 10,000 roubles. In December of the same year, Colonel Savilov attacked Lesser Kabarda and subjugated it. Effectively a third of Kabarda was occupied and Malka became the boundary between the two countries. At that stage, both Kabardian factions, Kashkadau and Bakhsan, were united in their animosity towards Russia.

In 1779 Empress Catherine II instructed the Governor General of Astrakhan, Prince Potemkin, to pacify Kabarda by fair means or foul. General Jacoby was given his marching orders. He conducted an offensive in Kabarda, which lasted all summer. After the arrival of fresh enforcements from Russia, the expedition succeeded in penetrating deep into Kabardian lands. At the end of September 1779, a fierce battle was fought in which the Kabardian force, taken unawares, was massacred. About fifty princes and more than 350 noblemen were killed, a huge toll by the reckoning of those days. Dubbed ‘Kabardian Nightmare’, the battle marked one of the bleakest days in Kabardian history.<sup>28</sup> By December, the Kabardian princes were defeated and the northern frontier of Kabarda retracted to the rivers Malka and Terek. One clause of the act of submission allowed Kabardian serfs to leave the service of their masters and re-establish themselves as freemen beyond the Military Line.

The position of the Kabardians became even more precarious when Russia occupied the Kuban in 1781 and annexed the Crimea in 1783. Many Tatars, the erstwhile enemies, took refuge in Circassia, the khans

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<sup>28</sup> The memory of this battle has been preserved in the song «КЪЭБЭРДЕЙ ЖЭЩТЕУЭМ И УЭРЭД» (‘Qeberdey Zheschteiwem yi Wered’; ‘The Song of the Kabardian Night Assault’), also found in the ‘Heroic/Historical Chants & Ballads’ section on the CD (song no. 11) accompanying Amjad Jaimoukha’s book *Circassian Culture and Folklore: Hospitality Traditions, Cuisine, Festivals & Music (Kabardian, Cherkess, Adigean, Shapsugh & Diaspora)*, Bennett and Bloom, 2009. The epic song, sung by Vladimir Bereghwn, can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>.

retaining their titles. Sensing the threat posed by Russia, the Circassians and Nogais launched joint attacks on the Russians in the Western Caucasus in 1784, but no serious harm came out of these forays.

### **Mansur, the first advocate of North Caucasian unity**

The mystic warrior, Sheikh Mansur, made his first mark on the history of the North Caucasus in 1785. Many legends arose on his origin. In some accounts, he was said to have been an Italian knight bent on rolling back the dark shadow of Russia. However, it is most probably that Mansur was a Chechen follower of the Naqshabandi brand of Sufism. According to tradition, he was the first leader who considered a united North Caucasian front as the antidote to Russian encroachment. In the hope of uniting all the disparate North Caucasian peoples, he declared Holy War and launched concerted attacks against the Russians. He managed to capture the imagination of the mountaineers by his spectacular defeat of a Russian force sent to capture him in 1785. His early brilliant feats attracted many Circassians to his side. However, he was defeated at Tatartup in Kabarda (at the confluence of the Balhq [Malka] and Sherej [Cherek] Rivers in the northeast of present-day Kabardino-Balkarian Republic), and thereafter took refuge in western Circassia. He reassemble his forces and co-ordinated his actions with the Ottomans.

The Ottomans kept a presence in the northeast coast of the Black Sea in the fortresses of Anapa, Sukhumi, Poti, Anaklia, etc. Anapa, which was constructed in 1784, served as the base from which the Ottomans maintained their political and mercantile contacts with the NW Caucasians. It was the central stage on which the power struggle between Russia and the Ottoman Empire was played. The Russians considered coastal towns under Ottoman control as a great threat to their strategy to strangle the Circassians, as they acted as breathing ports.

In 1787, fighting resumed between the Russians and Ottomans. The former destroyed a Circassian force under Mansur who took refuge in Anapa. This strategic port was attacked twice in 1788 and 1789, but was only taken by the Russians in 1791. Mansur fell in Russian hands. According to one account, he was imprisoned in Schlüsselburg Fortress, where he died three years later. Mansur was the precursor of the Imams who were to take up the struggle in Northeast Caucasus. In the Treaty of Jassy of 1792, Russia ceded the port back to the Porte.

The Russians introduced courts of justice in Kabarda in the early 1790s. These were highly unpalatable, being based on Russian law with no consideration for local customs and sensitivities. They were attacked several times. A general revolt broke out in 1794, but was swiftly quelled. Several princes were exiled to Ekaterinoslav.

In 1807 the Russians retook Anapa and other forts, only to cede them back to the Ottomans in return for Turkish neutrality as stipulated in the Treaty of Bucharest of 1812. Great pressure was also exerted by the Porte, whose harems were running low on beautiful maids.

### **Russian final subjugation of Kabarda**

By 1801, the Russians had reduced Georgia to a protectorate. They thus formed a vice round the tribes of the NW Caucasus. The fate of the Circassians was sealed. By the end of the 18th century, most of Kabarda was under Russian control. The construction of a fort in 1803 at Mineralnye Vode in the north of Kabarda and of the Georgian Military Highway meant that Kabarda was isolated from all sides. Tsitsianov, the Supreme Commander of the Caucasus Army, resolved to restore the system of law of 1793. In 1804, he sent an expedition under General G. I. Glazenap to achieve his aim. A bloody battle took place in May near the Khumbilay River. This incident has been preserved in national folklore in the saying ‘He who survived the pestilence found perdition in Khumbilay’ [«Емынэм къелар хъумбылейм ихъыжащ (ехъыж)»; ‘Yeminem qeilar x’wmbileym yihizhasch (yehizh)’]. In 1805, Glazenap ordered his forces to burn down eighty villages to terrorize the people into submission and to wreak revenge upon the Kabardians. His forces had previously suffered a Kabardian counterattack in May 1804. The brutality of retribution caused the conflict to spread to other parts of the North Caucasus.

In 1810, the Russians conducted a campaign in which many Circassians were killed and about 200 villages burnt. The Kabardians sent a delegation to St. Petersburg to petition for peace and to request that the rights and privileges granted by Empress Catherine II in the early 1790s be restored. Tsar Alexander I concurred with these demands. Some Kabardians, later dubbed ‘*Hejeret*’ – immigrant or fugitive Circassians – refused to accept Russian hegemony, and moved west to the land between the upper Kuban and Zelenchuk rivers (in present-day Karachai-Cherkess Republic). It was from this new base that they took up the struggle.



Circassia in the 19th century.

The once mighty Circassians were subjected to systematic genocide and ethnic cleansing by the Russians in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The restoration of Greater Circassia and restitution are the principal demands of the Circassian nationalists.

[J. S. Bell, 1840]

### **The plague and Yermolov devastate the Kabardians**

The war in Kabarda was localized and badly organized. The Circassian princes failed to present a united front, the Russians taking advantage of principal rivalries. When General Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov, military commander of the southern Tsarist forces, arrived on the scene in 1816, Kabarda was on her knees. Four decades of open conflict had demoralized the people and left the land in ruins. The Kabardians suffered heavy losses. By 1818, their number had fallen from 350,000 before the war to a mere 50,000.

In 1821, Yermolov demanded that the Kabardians living in mountainous areas move to the plains to facilitate their control. The mountaineers refused to obey, causing the General to move against them in 1822. He laid the foundations for several forts and imposed harsh punishments on the population. The Caucasian Military Line was pushed further into Kabardian territory and many massacres were committed against the

populace, which had been ravaged by the plague for close to fourteen years. The intensity of conflict subsided in 1825. No serious disturbances occurred until 1846.

The last Kabardian Prince of Princes was Kwshikw Zhanx'wet (Жанхъуэт и къуэ Кушыку), who ruled Kabarda in the period 1809-1822. By his death in 1830, a dynasty that went back to the 14th century AD came to an end.



Full weapon set of Kabardian warrior  
(sword with sword-belt, dagger, pistol, cartridge cases).  
The set was presented to Tzarevich Nikolai Alexandrovich  
(future emperor Nicholas II) in 1888 by a North Caucasian deputation.  
[[The Russian Museum of Ethnography](http://eng.ethnomuseum.ru/) <http://eng.ethnomuseum.ru/>]

In Lesser Kabarda, of the three principal families, the Mudars refused to submit to Russian rule and they removed to Chechnya, which was still free at the time. Yermolov, in a characteristic whimsical move worthy of a tyrant's viceroy, transferred possession of the whole country, more than 1000-sq. km in area, to Prince Bekovich-Cherkassky, a Circassian colonel in the Russian Army. He thus punished the whole population for

the defection of the Mudars, depriving all other princes of their lands and authority.

The once mighty Kabardians had been reduced to a subject people of Russia by the middle of the 19th century. Despite their defeat, the Kabardians were always on the lookout for an external ally to rise up against the occupiers. They maintained contacts with Shamil and the Kiakh (Western Circassians). With Eastern Circassia pacified, Yermolov took the war to the Kiakh.

Tens of thousands of Kabardians were forced to leave their native lands to the Ottoman empire during the exodus years of 1862-64. The descendants of these exiles are spread across the Middle East, especially in Turkey, Syria and Jordan.

#### **John McNeill's perspective on the occupation of Kabarda by Russia**

'Her [Russia's] caution has hitherto been equal to her pertinacity. She has never pushed her successes in the East so far as to involve her in a contest with any of the great powers of Europe; but as soon as that danger appeared to be imminent she has suspended her progress, always claiming, and often receiving, credit for her magnanimity and moderation while she was abiding a more favourable opportunity again to advance.

'Not less remarkable than her pertinacity and caution has been the uniformity of the means by which her acquisitions have been obtained. The process has almost been reduced to a regular formula. — It invariably commences with disorganization, by means of corruption and secret agency, pushed to the extent of disorder and civil contention. Next in order comes military occupation to restore tranquillity; and in every instance the result has been protection, followed by incorporation. Such have been the means by which Poland — the two Kabardas [Greater and Lesser] — the Crimea — Georgia — Imeretia — and Mingrelia have been added to the Russian dominions.' — J. McNeill, 1854.

#### **The Dzeliqwe insurrection**

During the tsarist years, Kabarda was subsumed under the Stavropol Province. Cossack and Slav settlers found a new home in the north-

eastern parts of Kabarda. There were about 70,000 Kabardians in Kabarda in the early years of the 20th century.<sup>29</sup>

In the years preceding WWI, feelings were running high across the whole empire against the ever more intrusive policies and imperialist institutions. In 1912-13, there was a minor revolt in Kabarda against Nicholas II called 'Dzeliqwe War', but it was quickly put down.<sup>30</sup> In the Soviet period, this uprising was looked upon favourably and was interpreted as a class struggle between the aristocracy and oppressed masses yearning to establish a socialist state. Russia escaped invective.

### **The North Caucasian Mountain Republic**

The Central Committee met on 28 July 1917 in an extraordinary session to prepare for the Second Congress, which was scheduled to take place in the Daghestani town of Andi. The main resolution was the set up of a committee to prepare for the creation of a standing army. Local meetings were held in August 1917 to elect delegates to the Andi Congress. In Nalchik the meeting was attended by the Central Committee member Tawsulht'an Shakman (Shaqmen), a Kabardian. In Batalpashinsk (Cherkessk), Simon Basarya, an Abkhaz, supervised the meeting. In Hakurina-Habla in Adigea the meeting was attended by Circassian delegates and representatives of the Armavir Armenians from the village of Urupsk and Jews from Dzhekhanas. These two groups had been assimilated by the Circassians to some extent and identified with their cause (P. Kosok, 1956, pp 45-6).

In September 1917, a provisional constitution was ratified by the Second Congress of the 'Union'. The Republic of North Caucasus seceded from

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<sup>29</sup> 'Kabardia', Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. V15, p619, 1911. Online Encyclopedia <[http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/JUN\\_KHA/KABARDIA.html](http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/JUN_KHA/KABARDIA.html)>. According to the article, Kabarda was then 'part of the Province of Terek'.

<sup>30</sup> Bechmirze Pasch'e (ПашIэ Бэчмырзэ) immortalized the Kabardian revolt of 1913 against Tsarist rule in the famous song 'Dzeliqwe War' («ДЗЭЛЫКЪУЭ ЗАУЭ»). Apart from being the founder of modern Kabardian poetry, Pasch'e was a very versatile songwriter, in the best tradition of the Circassian bards (джэгуакIуэ). He made use of the traditional heroic song genre to convey his ideas, as in 'The Song of Wezi Murat' («УЭЗЫ МУРАТ И УЭРЭД»; 'Wezi Murat yi Wered'), an audio recording of which can be found at <<http://jaimoukha.synthasite.com/statue-of-maria-teimriqwe-yidar.php>>, sung by Zhiraslhen Ghwch'el' (ГъукIэлI Жыраслъэн).

Russia in 1917, and declared its independence on 11 May 1918. It signed an alliance with Turkey and was formally recognized by the Central Powers, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey, and by Great Britain (A. Avtorkhanov, 1992, p152).

On 8 June 1918, a contingent of instructors from the Turkish Army arrived in Daghestan to organize a North Caucasian force. All members of this group were of North Caucasian origin, the leader being Ismail Berkuk, a Circassian. This force together with the help of fifteen Turkish divisions under Izzet Yusuf Pasha, another Circassian, routed the forces of General Bicherakhov. However, before consolidating the position of the North Caucasians, the Turkish Army had to withdraw from the Caucasus under the provisions of the armistice. Another attempt by diaspora North Caucasians to free their lands was blotched.

The short-lived North Caucasian Republic was able to unite most North Caucasians under one banner, which is no mean feat by any standards. The peoples of the North Caucasus had been weary of Russian Tsarist rule and they longed for the creation of an independent republic in which their aspirations and dreams of freedom could come true. The Communist Revolution offered them the opportunity to cast off the oppressive yoke. However, these aspirations ran contrary to the schemes of the communists, and when the Red Army crushed White resistance, the North Caucasian Republic was violently destroyed.

This period has become the point of reference when the emotive issues of North Caucasian unity and freedom are invoked. There is a poignant lesson in this episode of North Caucasian history. Although both Reds and Whites were engaged in a mortal fight, both parties were united in their goal of destroying Caucasian independence and freedom. Each time the North Caucasians sided with some faction, they ended up with the short end of the stick. This pattern was to be repeated after the demise of the Soviet Union, when Rotskoy and Yeltsin, the bitter enemies, were united in their stance against Chechen independence. History keeps repeating itself. It is the wise who takes heed.

### **The Caucasian Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic**

The Caucasian Mountain Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was proclaimed in Vladikavkaz in January 1921, in place of the abolished North Caucasian Republic. It was made up of Chechens, Ingushes, Ossetes, Kabardians, Balkars, and Karachais.



The Soviet authorities promised the Mountaineers autonomy and internal independence within the framework of the Soviet State. Although the Republic survived until 1924, it started to fall apart a long time earlier. For example, in September 1921 (16 January 1922 by other reckonings), the Kabardian Autonomous Oblast (AO) was formed, followed on 12 January 1922 by the Karachai-Cherkess AO. On 16 January 1922, the Balkar Okrug was attached to the Kabardian AO to form the Kabardino-Balkarian AO. United North Caucasians is a concept most unpalatable to colonialist Russia, no matter what form or shape it takes.

### **The Bakhsan Revolt**

In 1928 the Kabardians rose up against the Soviet arbitrary and ruinous policies. However, the Bakhsan Revolt was brutally put down. Of the 118 people who were prosecuted, eleven were executed and the rest were given prison sentences ranging from three to ten years. Ridiculous trumped-up charges included belonging to the princely class (five cases) and to the nobility (ten cases). Only eight persons were eventually rehabilitated. The official line is that the families of the rest did not submit the necessary papers to exonerate their kin. Among those who were imprisoned and later died inside was Adem Dim who set up the first Circassian printing house in Bakhsan and published the magazine 'Voice of the Circassians'.<sup>31</sup>

### **Centralization and collectivization**

By 1929 Soviet power had been consolidated throughout the former Russian Empire. The policy of tolerance towards the North Caucasians was scrapped. Instead, collectivization as an economic and social policy was initiated and it caused North Caucasian traditional economic and social structures to collapse. Caucasian political figures and intellectuals were subjected to ruthless systematic pogroms. The policy of centralization, another name for rule by Moscow, was pursued at all cost. All decisions, no matter how trivial, were made in the Capital. Local initiative was frowned upon. The level of backwardness and stagnation were hidden behind propagandist embellishments. It was only after the demise of the Soviet Union that the full extent of devastation was revealed.

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<sup>31</sup> For an account (in Circassian) of the 1928 Bakhsan Revolt, refer to H. Membet, 1992.

The leader of Bolsheviks in Kabardino-Balkaria was Betal Kalmyk (КЪАЛМЫКЪ БЕТІАЛ; Qalmıq Beit'al; 1893-1940), a local Kabardian. He led Red Army units during the Civil War. Thus, Circassians fought on both sides of the divide. Kalmyk was Chairman of the Kabardian Oblast Executive Committee from 1921 to 1930. Thereafter he was First Secretary of the Kabardino-Balkarian Oblast Party Committee until 1938, effectively the most powerful executive.



Monument to Betal Kalmyk,

at the entrance of the Nalchik City Park.

The memorial was sculpted by Michael Kh. Thek'wmasch'e,  
Honoured Art Worker of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic.

Architect V. Oltarzhevsky. The statue was commissioned after rehabilitation of Kalmyk in 1957. From hero to apostate and back to idol, Kalmyk's status rode a full wave within three decades. His present standing is not certain—the final verdict of history is still pending.

On 5 December 1936, the status of Kabardino-Balkaria was elevated to autonomous republic within the Russian SSR, thus becoming pompously known as the Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

### **The Great Purges**

In 1937, leaders of the Circassian regions fell victim to the Great Purges. These erstwhile 'heroes' of the Revolution were accused of engaging in anti-Bolshevik activities, arrested, and either shot or sent to concentration camps. Thousands of people, including intellectuals and peasants, were denounced as 'enemies of the people', 'bourgeois nationalists', and 'kulaks'. Many of these were liquidated. The entire Oblast Party Committees and governments of the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR, the Adigey AO, and the Cherkess AO were arrested (R. Karcha, 1959, p37).

In the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, Khrushchev denounced the purges of 1936-38, and many people were rehabilitated. However, for some it was too late. A monument was erected for Kalmyk at the entrance of the Nalchik Park.

After the demise of the first generation of revolutionary leaders, a new breed of Party apparachiks came to the fore. Characterized by blind faith, they held power in the Circassian republics for long periods. For example, President Tembora Melbax'we (Мэлбахъуэ Темборэ; Tembora Kubatiyevich Malbakhov; 1917-1999), a Kabardian, remained in power in Kabardino-Balkaria for almost three decades (Nov 1956-19 Oct 1985). Though they lacked charisma, these executives ensured stability and a long spell of tranquillity, only disturbed by the Second World War.

### **WWII**

Despite the sacrifices and hardships endured by the Kabardians during WWII, they were not immune from Stalin's deleterious post-war dictates. A whole region in the northeast, Kura, including the town of Mozdok, inhabited by Christian Kabardians, was severed from the body of Kabarda and incorporated into North Ossetia. Another tract of land

was given to Georgia. In addition, the northern boundary of the republic was pushed back to shrink the area to roughly half its pre-war size. These measures cut off a substantial proportion of Kabardians from their mother republic. The War, coming so hard on the heels of the purges, caused depletion of the national cadres.

The name of the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR was changed to the Kabardian ASSR on 8 April 1944, following the exile of the Balkars at the end of WWII on false accusations of collaboration with the invading Germans. In the late 1940s, there were 152,000 Kabardians in the Kabardian ASSR in an area of 12,600 km<sup>2</sup>.

Khrushchev rehabilitated the Balkars, and the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR was restored on 9 January 1957. The 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s present a long lacuna, a string of non-events, characterized by stagnation. The leadership in the Republic kept the peace and dutifully implemented central dictates. It was only in the middle 1980s that the quiet was interrupted by Gorbachev's reformist policies of Perestroika and Glasnost.

The Russian Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yeliseyev (b. 1936) took over the Presidency from Melbax'we and remained in power until 21 February 1990, when Valery Kokoov (КӀуӕкӀуӕ Валерӕ; K'wek'we; 1941-2005) took over the reins of power for the next 15 years (except from 1 September 1990 to August 1991).

### **Post-Soviet developments**

In the early 1990s, the idea of a North Caucasian federation was revived as the vehicle for the people in the area to reach their political aims. The North Caucasians, especially the Abkhaz leadership, were aware of the limitations imposed by fragmentation and the advantages of concerted action. Georgia had been single-minded in demanding the abrogation of Abkhaz autonomy, and started to beat the drums of war. The Abkhazians sought safety by allying themselves with their Abaza and Circassian kin across the mountains. The Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the North Caucasus (KGNK) was recreated in 1990 to fill the vacuum left by the ebbing Soviet power. In October 1992 it changed its name to Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK). It was a voluntary conglomeration of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus, excluding the Daghestanis. Its principal aim was the (re-)establishment of the North Caucasian (Mountain) Republic. It had always been

independent of, and sometimes at loggerheads with the local authorities, which were inimical to any form of political change.

At first, the KGNK enjoyed overwhelming popular support and it scored some notable successes. In August 1992 the Parliament of KGNK declared war on Georgia and pledged support for the Abkhaz. Together with the International Circassian Association and the Congress of the Kabardian People, the KGNK mobilized the North Caucasians. On August 18th, an ultimatum was issued by the KGNK parliament that if Georgian troops did not withdraw from Abkhazia, war would be declared. Yura Schenibe (Щэныбэ Юрэ; Shanibov; b. 1935), President of KGNK and a native Kabardian, declared war three days later.<sup>32</sup> A few thousand Abaza, Adigean, Cherkess, Kabardian and Chechen volunteers joined forces with Abkhaz army units. This intervention played a decisive role in the spectacular Abkhaz victory and cemented the ethnic unity of the NW Caucasians.

The onset of the Chechen war at the end of 1994 disrupted the tacit and coincidental alliance between Russia and the North Caucasians. Now that the tables were turned against them, the Russians showed their true colours. Russia, which had been turning a blind eye to the activities of the Confederation in Abkhazia, started to view them as a major threat to its domination in the North Caucasus when attention was switched to Chechnya. Thenceforward, neutralizing the pan-North Caucasian movement became a priority in Russia's Caucasian policy.

On 30 January 1991, Kabardino-Balkaria declared state sovereignty and became a constituent republic of the Russian Federation with no right of secession. In the first half of the 1990s, the nationalists rode on a wave of popularity that almost managed to wash away the old apparachiks, but by 1996, the people had become more concerned with the economic woes that had gripped all Russia. The Kabardian nationalists are mainly represented by the Adige Xase (Circassian Association), which is a member of the International Circassian Association. The nationalists' principal demand is restoration of historical Kabarda as a first step towards re-establishment of Greater Circassia, with the concomitant repatriation of the diaspora.

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<sup>32</sup> A fascinating biography of Shanibov – and an eye-opening account of the Kabardian intellectual elite in the last decades of the 20th century – can be found in Georgi M. Derluguian, 2005.

Ex-President Vladimir Kokov (K'wek'we), effective leader of the Republic from 1990 to 2005, won the 1997 and 2002 presidential elections, putting more pressure on the already beleaguered nationalists. The nationalist institutions in Kabardino-Balkaria have been co-opted by the Russians. The Kabardians and Balkars have been at loggerheads since the latter were rehabilitated after their banishment. The Cossacks also aspire to secession. There is a small chance of open conflict, which could involve other kindred people.

### **Present state of Kabarda**

In September 2005, (Dr.) Arsen Kanokov (Къанокъуэ Арсен; Qanoqwe; b. 1957), a Kabardian businessman based in Moscow and president of the Sindika Company, replaced the ailing Kokov as president (by appointment, not through elections) of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (Kokov died on 29 October 2005; a monument was unveiled in his honour in Nalchik in 2007). The new president is considered by many to be the right person to lift the Republic out of the myriad crises gripping it and to ameliorate the dire economic situation. Others have criticized him for being weak. Anecdotal accounts tell of perceptible positive changes in Kabardino-Balkaria in the past few years. Despite the upheavals of the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008, few Kabardian voices have been raised demanding that their republic be declared independent by Moscow in the same vein as its extension of official acknowledgement of Abkhazia's independence.

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