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SOME ASPECTS OF THE COLONIAL POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN NORTHERN AZERBAIJAN (FIRST DECADES OF THE 19TH CENTURY)

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the colonial policy pursued by the Russian Empire in Northern Azerbaijan during the early decades of the 19th century, focusing on its political, social, and demographic consequences for the Azerbaijani people. It emphasizes that the Russian conquest was not a process of peaceful "unification," as described in Soviet historiography, but rather a violent occupation aimed at dismantling the independent Azerbaijani khanates and integrating the region into the imperial system. Soviet-era historians deliberately substituted politically charged terms such as "occupation," "invasion," and "annexation" with "voluntary accession" or "reunion" to portray Russian domination as historically progressive and beneficial.

Drawing upon archival documents and contemporary accounts, the study reveals that many Azerbaijani khans, beys, and local leaders actively resisted Russian expansion through both armed struggle and diplomatic efforts. However, following their defeat, the tsarist administration initiated a systematic campaign to eliminate the native ruling class, confiscate their property, and replace traditional governance structures with Russian bureaucratic institutions. A key aspect of the empire's colonial strategy was the organized resettlement of tens of thousands of Armenians from Iran and the Ottoman Empire into Azerbaijani territories such as Karabakh, Nakhichevan, and Iravan. This policy aimed to create a politically loyal Christian population that would serve as a buffer between the Muslim inhabitants and Russian authorities. The demographic engineering profoundly changed the ethnic balance of the region, laying the groundwork for future conflicts.

The paper further exposes the pervasive corruption, arbitrariness, and exploitation characterizing Russian colonial rule. Heavy taxation, forced labor, and economic plunder impoverished the rural population, while local officials engaged in bribery and abuse of power. Ultimately, the study concludes that the alliance between Russian imperial and Armenian nationalist interests in the Caucasus was based not on cultural or religious solidarity, but on shared geopolitical ambitions to suppress and control the Muslim-Turkic peoples of the region.

Key words: Russian Empire, Northern Azerbaijan, 19th century, colonial policy, occupation, Azerbaijani khanates, resistance movement.

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ДЕЯКІ АСПЕКТИ КОЛОНІАЛЬНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ІМПЕРІЇ У ПІВНІЧНОМУ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНІ (ПЕРШІ ДЕСЯТИЛІТТЯ ХІХ СТОЛІТТЯ)

У статті пропонується всебічний аналіз колоніальної політики, яку проводила Російська імперія в Північному Азербайджані протягом перших десятиліть ХІХ століття, зосереджуючись на її політичних, соціальних та демографічних наслідках для азербайджанського народу. У ній наголошується, що російське завоювання не було процесом мирного «об'єднання», як це описується в радянській історіографії, а радше насильницькою окупацією, спрямованою на ліквідацію незалежних азербайджанських ханств та інтеграцію регіону в імперську систему. Історики радянської епохи навмисно замінювали політично заряджені терміни, такі як «окупація», «вторгнення» та «анексія», на «добровільне приєднання» або «возз'єднання», щоб зобразити російське панування як історично прогресивне та вигідне.

Спираючись на архівні документи та сучасні свідчення, дослідження показує, що багато азербайджанських ханів, бейів та місцевих лідерів активно чинили опір російській експансії як за допомогою збройної боротьби,

так і дипломатичних зусиль. Однак після їхньої поразки царська адміністрація розпочала систематичну кампанію з ліквідації місцевого правлячого класу, конфіскації їхнього майна та заміни традиційних структур управління російськими бюрократичними інституціями. Ключовим аспектом колоніальної стратегії імперії було організоване переселення десятків тисяч вірмен з Ірану та Османської імперії на азербайджанські території, такі як Карабах, Нахичиван та Ірван. Ця політика мала на меті створити політично лояльне християнське населення, яке служило б буфером між мусульманським населенням та російською владою. Демографічна інженерія глибоко змінила етнічний баланс регіону, закладаючи основу для майбутніх конфліктів.

У статті також викривається повсюдна корупція, свавілля та експлуатація, що характеризують російське колоніальне правління. Високі податки, примусова праця та економічне розграбування призвели до зубожіння сільського населення, тоді як місцеві чиновники займалися хабарництвом та зловживанням владою. Зрештою, дослідження робить висновок, що союз між російськими імперськими та вірменськими націоналістичними інтересами на Кавказі ґрунтувався не на культурній чи релігійній солідарності, а на спільних геополітичних амбіціях придушити та контролювати мусульмансько-тюркські народи регіону.

Ключові слова: Російська імперія, Північний Азербайджан, 19 століття, колоніальна політика, окупація, азербайджанські ханства, рух опору.

Statement of the problem. There was no correct scientific concept in the historiography of the Soviet period regarding the occupation of Northern Azerbaijan by Russia and the problem of establishing a colonial system in this region (Aliyev M., 2001: p. 131–153). This process was even more correctly reflected in the works of Russian Caucasus scholars of the 19th century compared to the Soviet period, and was called by its own name “occupation”, “annexation”.

In the 20s–30s of the 20th century, Soviet historiography viewed this event from the prism of “lesser calamity” and concluded that there were no historical conditions for Azerbaijan to live independently at the beginning of the 19th century.

In later periods, the terms “occupation” and “annexation” were somewhat softened and replaced by the term “unification”. The main “concept” that took root in our historiography in the 40s–50s of the 20th century served to justify the progressive significance of the unification of Northern Azerbaijan with Russia in economic, political, cultural, etc. areas. (Aliyev M., 2001: p. 154–191). The replacement of the radical concept of “unification” in the Soviet historiography of Azerbaijan in the 60s with the softer formula of “incorporation” should be considered more the result of a political order (2).

The purpose of the article. Nevertheless, in the late 1960s, a group of patriotic scholars approached this problem in accordance with objective historical reality, putting forward the fact of the occupation of Northern Azerbaijan by Russia, and noted that the policy pursued by Russia in Azerbaijan at that time had a colonial character (Aliyarlı S., 2009, p. XVI). One of the problems of this period that has not yet been fully explored in our historiography is the question of determining the role played by the Azerbaijani elite in the resistance movement of 1801–1828.

Most historians who write about this issue have forgotten that at that time the Russian colonial authorities clearly understood the impossibility of occupying Azerbaijani lands without subjugating the elite (Губайдуллин А., с. 30).

The vast majority of the khans and beys, who formed the upper echelons of the Azerbaijani khanates, held a strongly hostile position towards the Russian government, which was completely alien to them in terms of ethnicity and religion. The ruler of Guba, Sheikhalı Khan, the noble beys and the population who supported him, fought an unequal struggle against Russia three times in 6 years and fought heroically with the occupying army. The ruler of Ganja, Javad Khan, and all the beys of the khanate entered into battle with the Russian army led by General Sıyanov in January 1804, choosing death over captivity. The ruler of Sheki, Selim Khan, after the brutal murder of the ruler of Karabakh, Ibrahim Khan, along with his family, by the Russian major Lisanevich in 1806 (Selim Khan's sister was Ibrahim Khan's wife and she was also murdered), destroyed the Russian military detachment in the Sheki fortress. Selim Bey, who had risen in rebellion, was defeated by the Russian military forces in an unequal battle in October of that year (Bakikhanov A., 1951: p. 196–198). As can be seen, the wars waged by Russia in Azerbaijan were not an ordinary walk, but met with serious resistance.

Research analyzes. The statement of A. S. Griboyedov, who played an active role in the implementation of Russia's invasion plans in the Transcaucasian regions and was one of the main organizers of Armenian resettlement to Muslim regions, that “Russian blood is sprinkled at every step here” (Aliyarlı S., 2007: d. 62 p. 290) cannot be considered a coincidence.

If the events of the period we are talking about were approached from the perspective of the history and national interests of the Azerbaijani people, history books would not have passed over the uprising against Russia in the Shamshaddil region in 1818–1819 led by Nasib Sultan and Mustafa Agha (AKAK., 1874: doc. 1035–1038, p. 702, 703, 785), and the popular uprising that engulfed 45 villages in the Sheki region in September 1825 and was led by representatives of the upper echelons (CSHAG., f. 2, l.1, 1992: s. 1). Analysis of the historical docu-

ments of that era demands the return of the historical rights of the Azerbaijani khans and beys, who were the organizers and leading forces of the national liberation movement against colonialism.

In July-August 1826, a revolt against Russian colonialism swept across Azerbaijan. This large-scale revolt, which was described in official government documents as a "general alarm" and made the central government fear for the fate of the Caucasus, has not yet taken its rightful place in the history of the national liberation movement. It is enough to note one fact: as a result of this revolt, the Russian troops were forced to leave the lands of Azerbaijan and concentrate their main military forces on the defense of Tiflis. General Yermolova, who had been implementing Russian policy in the Caucasus for more than ten years, was "severely reprimanded" for this incident by the Supreme Tsar's decree of March 2, 1827 (CSHAG., f. 2, l. 1, 1992: s. 1) and was removed from his post as commander-in-chief of the Caucasus.

1. Presenting main material. Russia's policy towards the upper Muslim class during the occupation. In official circles of that time, it was clearly stated that all the uprisings and uprisings against Russia in the Azerbaijani provinces took place under the influence of local bays and aghas, and their punishment by any means was considered "the most reliable method against Asians" (AKAK., v. IV, 1870: d. 1028, p. 670). Taking into account all these political factors, the Russian government pursued a policy of politically, physically and economically eliminating and neutralizing the upper class, which was the only force that could hinder it during the occupation of Azerbaijan. Noting that this policy was multifaceted and complex, its main directions can be assessed as follows. The first direction: the military penal organs of tsarism were put into action, the captured beys and aghas were punished by the laws of war, executed, imprisoned, and at best exiled to Siberia and other places (CSHAG., f. 1377, l. 1, f. 29). The second direction: the land, political rights and privileges of the upper class were restricted and not only national but also religious discrimination was fostered against them. The Russian government, which allowed the neighboring Georgian nobility to establish such an important body as the Assembly of Nobility Deputies to regulate their social and property rights, and which considered the Georgian nobility equal to the Russian nobility in all respects, never allowed the Muslim beys to have access to these rights (CSHAG., f. 2, l. 1, s. 1–23). General A. P. Yermolov (1816–1827), who more consistently implemented the colonial line in the Caucasus region of Russia, used all kinds of methods against the forces that did not reconcile with the invaders, and in this he was assisted by the Armenian R.G. Madatov. This person, despite being from a

simple background, was awarded the rank of general and the title of prince by the Russian government for his loyal service to Russian policy in the Caucasus. A. P. Yermolov's right hand, Madatov, who was considered the "Achilles heel" according to sources, was used as a means of pressure and intimidation against the ruler of Karabakh, Mehdigulu Khan, the ruler of Shirvan, Mustafa Khan, and the ruler of Sheki, Ismayil Khan, who had forcibly accepted Russian vassalage (CSHAG., f. 2, vol. 407, 458, 186, l. 725–726). Prince Madatov was especially ruthless towards the ruler of Karabakh, Mehdigulu Khan. Based on the insidious plan they had developed together with Yermolov, in 1818–1820 they demanded that the khan return the "ancestral lands" of Prince Madatov. Although Madatov was from a tax-paying class and had no property or land left by his ancestors, under pressure from Yermolov, the khan was forced to sign a decree "returning" many villages consisting of 1,500 peasant families to Madatov without any basis.

After Prince Madatov added the names of the villages he wanted to the document with his own hand, the forged document was approved by Russian Tsar Alexander I in 1821, thanks to Yermolov's special efforts. According to sources, Madatov, who had no real nobility, took possession of almost half of Karabakh in this way (AKAK., vol. 6, 1876: p. 2, 1876: d. 725–726, 807–808). He applied the same tactics of intimidation and slander that he had used in Shirvan to Karabakh in 1822, and succeeded in forcing Mehdiqulu Khan to flee Karabakh to Iran. As a result, the Military District of Muslim Provinces was established in place of the three abolished khanates; Prince Madatov was appointed head of this department, with its headquarters in Shusha (AKAK., v. 1, 1874: d. 1097, p. 738). After that, a real Russian-Armenian policy began to be implemented in the lands inhabited by Muslims. Madatov, who was also considered the leader of the Russian military units in these provinces, oppressed and removed Muslim beys, especially in Karabakh, appointed Armenians in their places, and ruthlessly robbed and plundered the Muslim population (CSARA, f. 130, l. 1, f. 13, s. 2–3). In response, a general uprising against Russian colonialism broke out in Azerbaijan in 1826.

The policy of the Tsarist colonial authorities to create and relocate a "Christian base" in the region. One of the main features of the colonial policy pursued by Russia in the Caucasus was the creation of a social base consisting of the Christian population under the influence of "Christian fanaticism". At this time, the main attention was paid to the Armenian population, which constituted a minority in the region. The first steps in this area were taken in the 1920s, when the Russian colonial line was being implemented more consistently. In 1827, the traditional rights of Muslim

beys over villages and peasants in the Shamshad-Dil and Gazakh districts were grossly violated, and the administration of the villages under their ownership was left to the discretion of the Armenian Archbishop Nerses (CSHAG., f. 2, l. 1, f. 559, l. 106). This was an unprecedented event on Azerbaijani soil and without analogues in history. Because the insignificant place occupied by the Armenian elite in the Caucasus region, and even the fact that only 5 Armenians were allowed to wear a bey's robe by the commander with the permission of the Shah of Iran in the Iravan Khanate, a historical Turkish land, proves that this people has no historical roots in the Caucasus region.

The process of removing the Armenian population, which was a minority in the historical lands of Azerbaijan, from the rule of Muslim rulers began in 1827 after the capture of the Iravan Khanate by Russian troops. The Iravan Khanate, whose population was 73.8 percent Muslim Turks (CSHAG, f. 2, l. 1, f. 3859, s. 20), was transformed into an "Armenian province" in 1828. As early as December 15, 1827, in the special "Rules" sent by the Tsar's Chief of Staff, General Dibich, to the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus, General Paskevich, the idea of granting self-government to the Armenians, who had been under the influence of the Muslim elite for centuries, was a red line, and this idea was met with disapproval by the Civil Affairs Judge of the Caucasus, Lieutenant General Velyaminov.

In his notes on the "Rules", he indicated that this step "would undermine the traditional ownership rights of the Muslim rulers (in fact, this was the real goal of the Russian government) and make them dissatisfied with the government, because since 2/3 of the population in the lands occupied by Russia from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea were Muslims, this rule would undermine confidence in Russia among the vast population, and the Turkish and Iranian governments would easily organize uprisings in these places..." (AKAK, vol. 7, 1878: dok, 435, p. 483–484). Despite this reality, the central government, of course, did not abandon its policy of "Armenizing" the Iravan Khanate. After the treaties of Turkmenchay (1828) and Edirne (1829), the Russian government began the mass resettlement of the Armenian population from Iran and the Ottoman Empire to Azerbaijan (Griboedov A. S., 1971: v. 2. p. 339) The following note by the Russian historian N. N. Shavrov regarding the impact of the mass Armenian resettlement on the demographic situation in the Transcaucasian regions and its political implications is also very interesting: "In the two years following the war (1828–1830), 40 thousand Armenians were resettled from Iran to Transcaucasia, and 84 thousand from Turkey, and we settled them in the Iravan and Yelizavetpol governorates, where Armenians were a minority..."

"Of the 1.3 million Armenians living in Transcaucasia at the beginning of the 20th century, 1 million were not original residents of the region, but were settled by us" (Shavrov N. N., p. II. 1878: d. 433, pp. 59–60.20, v. 59–60). As a result of this policy, consistently implemented at the state level, the demographic balance in the region was disrupted, and attempts were made to change the situation in favor of the Armenian population in places within Russia's reach. According to the 1823 cameral census, the specific weight of Armenians, which constituted 8.4 percent of the population of Karabakh, increased to 34.8 percent in 1832, and to 53 percent according to the 1897 census (Pokrovsky V. P., 1924: p. 186). The specific weight of Azerbaijani Turks, which constituted 3/4 of the population of the Iravan Khanate before the occupation, had already decreased to 46 percent in 1834–35. In 1918–1920, 100 thousand Azerbaijani Turks were exterminated or expelled from their native lands by the Dashnaks in Iravan. One of the most striking examples of revanchist sentiments against Turks and Muslims is the Supreme Decree signed by Tsar Nicholas I on November 4 of that year in honor of the occupation of the city of Iravan by Russian troops in 1827. By this decree, it was decided to transform the main mosque of Iravan into an Orthodox Greek-Russian church in honor of the "victory of Russian weapons over Muslims" (Eroshkin N. P., 1981: p. 56). 3. The "Open Robbery" System Established by Tsarist Russia in the Villages of Northern Azerbaijan.

In order to clearly understand the reasons for the lawlessness, arbitrariness and robbery regime created by Russian colonialism in Azerbaijan, it is necessary to reveal and show the military-bureaucratic essence and character of the Russian state at that time. The report submitted to His Majesty the Emperor in 1859 by the Tsar's secret adviser Grech on the arbitrariness and corruption that engulfed the Russian state machine is very important in this regard: "Is it really impossible to find 8 intelligent ministers and 50 honest governors from the 60 million population of Russia?" (CSHAG, f. 2, l. 1, f. 1034, s. 5–9.) (i.e., is it really impossible to find 8 intelligent ministers and 50 honest governors from the 60 million population of Russia?). The fact that the Russian state system was considered "shining on the outside, rotten on the inside" in the sources of that era shows that after the occupation, Azerbaijan was included in a structure governed not by such laws, but by emergency situations, by cannons and bayonets, by a system of arbitrariness and bribery. Russian administrations and state officials in Azerbaijan showed a real example of arbitrariness and lawlessness. This can be clearly shown on the basis of several examples, in 1821, the bailiff Shamshaddil collected additional taxes from

the population for his own benefit, and the commandant of the Shirvan province, Lieutenant Colonel Vsotsky, embezzled the money he had collected as tax debts. In 1829, the criminal case initiated against the head of the Elizavetpol district, Lieutenant Colonel Berents, and police chief Yankovsky for embezzling 13,301 rubles (silver) that were to be paid to the residents for the grain they sold to the government, dragged on for 12 years. The guilty parties remained unpunished (CSHAG, f.2, l. 1, f. 203, 3011, 3025) In 1829–30, senators sent from the center to inspect Transcaucasia, gr. P. L. Kutaysov and Y. I. Mechnikov, wrote: “One is horrified by the depravity of the chiefs and the suffering of the population in the Muslim provinces. Here, human dignity has been trampled on, all kinds of justice have been forgotten, and the law has become only an instrument of slavery” (AKAK., 1878: v. 7. d. 35, 368, p. 20, 423–424).

Another aspect of the “open robbery” and robbery system created by Russia in Azerbaijan was the leasing (renting) of state revenue areas. The right to collect taxes from state farms was sold for several years to Russians, and often to greedy Armenian merchants who flocked to Azerbaijan from various regions in search of free income. The leasing agents stripped the Muslim population of their skin and made a profit

that was much higher than the amount they paid to the state (AKAK., 1878: v. 7. d. 35, 368, p. 423–424).

Conclusions. Thus, determining the factors that bind Russians with Armenians, whether in the Caucasus or in other Turkic lands, does not require much serious research. What unites Russians with Armenians, who throughout history have oppressed their ethnic and religious brothers, the Slavs, and prevented them from living independently, is undoubtedly their common goal and interest against the Muslim and Turkish peoples. Even now, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Ukrainians, who are of the same ethnic origin as Russians, are trying to escape the Russian yoke, which they know well, and seek refuge in the help and protection of other peoples who are ethnically alien to them. In such a situation, the fact that Armenians, who have no ethnic ties to Russia, and whose religious denominations do not even correspond to Orthodoxy or Catholicism, breathe eternal brotherhood with Russia, and that Armenia's reconciliation with symbolic independence and transformation into a military battlefield for this superpower is more related to the alignment of strategic interests and the “throwing into the mouths” of the Armenians of the lands that Russia has torn from Azerbaijan at each transitional stage of history than to the “mother-child” relationship that has stood the test of two hundred years of history.

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