

DIVISION OF AZERBAIJANI LAND: EMERGENCE OF SOUTH DAGESTAN ON RUSSIAN EMPIRE'S MAP

Map of the Caspian coast from the Volga to the Kura drawn by geographer Johann Gerber in 1728

Demarcation of the historical Azerbaijani territory into the Dagestan province and numerous districts and depriving the Azerbaijani people of their own ethnonyms and the right to statehood and territorial integrity caused the Azerbaijani nation's division by territorial barriers. Derbent and the surrounding areas, which historically had been Azerbaijani territories, became part of the Dagestan province.

As for the geo-political situation in the Caucasus in the first three decades of the 19th century, this period saw the Russian Empire's aspiration to establish complete hegemony in the region. Its global rivalry with the Ottoman Empire and Iran concluded with the conquest and annexation of the Caucasus to Russia and the imposition of administrative, legal and socio-economic order of the Russian Empire in this region in the 1830s and 1840s.

Russian Emperor Alexander I, just like Paul I, sought to confine himself to forming "a union under the supreme patronage" of the Russian Empire (Georgievsk, December 26, 1802) comprised of the northern Azerbaijan and Dagestan possessions. However, this artificial entity was comprehensible only for its initiators, who were anticipating that Azerbaijan, as well as its integral part that was termed in historiography as "South Dagestan", would become Russian possessions.

In 1802, Russian authorities announced the accession of Avaria to the Russian Empire and tackled the conquest of north-western Azerbaijan, Ossetia and Abkhazia, with a view to infiltrating onward to the Chechen and Trans-Kuban territories. In retaliation to Azerbaijani and Dagestani landlords' countering the imposition of Russian rule in the South Caucasus, the territories incrementally seized by the Russian troops were being annexed. In 1804, the Russian troops took over more Azerbaijani land, including the Ganja khan-



ate. This was followed by the invasion of the Garabagh, Shaki and Shirvan khanates in 1805 and the Baku, Guba and Derbent khanates in 1806. In the Derbent province (Ulus, Garakaytag, Tabasaran), most of the state-controlled settlements were inferior to the bays (rulers). The Ulus "mahal" (district), which included nine villages (389 courtyards), was a property of Sheikh Ali Khan of Guba until 1806. The Russian authorities initially recognized Sheikh Ali Khan as the Khan of Derbent (Sheikh Ali of Guba, as currently referenced in historiography, was the Khan of Guba and took over the ownership of Derbent

Map of Dagestan in Yermolov's era. 1818-1826

after the death of his brother, Hasan Khan), who also controlled the suburbs of the city of Derbent located along the Samur river with all local villages and regions (10, 258-264).

Following the anti-Russian revolt in the regions controlled by Sheikh Ali Khan and the Russian conquest of the Guba khanate, the Council of Four was instituted. It was chaired by a Russian officer and comprised of four bays. The Tsarist leadership relied on loyal bays who were committed to the Russian authorities and could report the actions of other bays, i.e. fulfilled policing duties.

Following the accession of the Derbent territory to the Russian Empire in 1806, the khan title was abolished. On August 23 (September 10), 1806, the Russian command handed over the Azerbaijani Derbent khanate ("Ulus Mahal"), with the exception of the city of Derbent, as well as the Guba khanate, to Shamkhal Tarkovsky Mehdi Khan for inherited possession with the right to benefit from all income, in accordance with the previous customs. The Shamkhal continued to live in his estate, but managed his new possessions through his associates. The office of his deputy controlled by the fortress commandant remained in Derbent. Russian troops were stationed in the city's fortress part.

The supreme authority in Dagestan following the peace Treaty of Gulistan concluded in 1812 was wielded by the Russian military command. The newly established Derbent and Guba provinces were run by district military chiefs. These provinces were mainly administered from Derbent. A "divan" (city court) comprised of popularly elected delegates operated on the ground. It was chaired by a governor (2, 231; 3, 93-96). Six villages of the Derbent province were governed by marshals.

It is worth mentioning that in addition to the ancient Azerbaijani city of Derbent and its suburbs, Azerbaijanis have also lived in Nizhny (Lower) Kaytag (Gara-Kaytag) and Tabaristan since the ancient times. Anti-Russian uprisings swept through these very areas, which were therefore subsequently reformed.

One of the documents drawn up by I. F. Paskevich, the Baku, Guba and Derbent provinces were incorporated under the same title, which was "Dagestan". Paskevich explained this notion by the fact that he was referring to "the land that was already in full disposal and management of our superiors". Thus, the Azerbaijani territories were quite casually called Dagestan merely with a stroke of the pen in order to distinguish them



from other Azerbaijani khanates that were not subject to Russia (3, 250).

Colonization of the Caucasus began in the 1830s and the Russian government started investing heavily in a military build-up. The unions of rural communities were actually placed under the control of the Guba commandant. In 1839, Samur District consisting of all rural community unions of the Samur valley except Rutul, which acceded to Ilisuy Sultanate, was instituted.

Organizing a fortified line along the Samur river was aimed at severing communication among the Muslim ethnic groups in the two parts of the Caucasus and preventing the appearance of highlanders in northern Azerbaijan. That same year, 94 maafs (persons of the social class exempt from duties) were sent in from the Shaki province to patrol the area. In 1840, the Samur district became part of the Guba province. The chief Qadi and divan servants were appointed to assist the district chief, with one of them representing each "mahal" (region). Furthermore, the rulers were "assisted" from now onward by officers of the Tsarist army, including those chosen from among local noblemen. These persons gradually assumed the task of local governance. Senior representatives and bays were subordinated to the commanders of military units. According to the 1838 regulations on running the Gara-Gazikumykh khanate and the Azerbaijani Ilisuy Sultanate, the Kyura-Garaku-mykh possession was made part of the district Derbent authority of the Caspian governorate and entitled Kyura-Gazikumykh Khanate (3, 397-399; 4, 247-248). The governor positions were abolished soon thereafter and the control was entirely taken over by officials and military leaders. In addition to altering the supreme authority and the form of governance locally, projects aimed



at changing the ethnic and confessional maps of the region were implemented.

Following the end of the second Russo-Persian War (1826-1828), a period which saw the capture of Azerbaijan's northern part by the Russian Empire, the Russian administration embarked on relocation of a large part of the Christian population to the territory of northern Azerbaijan. This practice was also employed in the North Caucasus as the colonial rule of the Russian Empire took hold in the region in the 18th-19th centuries.

During the mentioned Russian-Iranian war feudal lords suspected of empathizing with Iran were deprived of their land possessions. However, Nicholas I changed his policy with regard to local feudal lords at the end of the war and ordered to repatriate the exiled persons and allow them or their heirs to regain their previous estates. The Russian authorities began thoroughly studying the situation and governance in the Caucasus in order to develop a unified administrative, legal and financial management system.

Coat of arms of the Dagestan region. 1880

The territories of north-western Azerbaijan, including the free Tsakhur communities and the Ilisuy Sultanate's compact territory in the headstream of the Samur river in Highland Mahal (15 mountain villages) and in the Gara-Alazan valley where the Suvagil, Mukhakh and Jinykh communities were located, as well as a part of the Ilisuy Sultanate, itself, were also militarily included in the list of Russian possessions.

The draft Regulations on managing the Transcaucasia region, drawn up by the Russian administration under the guidance of Gen. Rosen in 1837, were of life-changing importance. During that period the administrative and territorial redrawing of land was carried out rapidly without taking into account the historical realities.

The Caspian province comprised of seven districts was established in 1840, in accordance with the Senate decree on introducing "Supremely approved projects of the new civic system" in Transcaucasia. The bill, tabled by Senator Ghan, was endorsed by the Caucasus Committee and the National Council in April 1840. It was titled "Institution for the Administration of the Transcaucasian province". The Derbent and Guba provinces, transformed into districts of the Transcaucasian region, acceded to the Caspian province. They were overseen by district chiefs that included Russian officials, who succeeded provincial commandants. Tabasaran became part of the Derbent district (Kaytag, Ulus Mahal), while the Samur district was included in the Guba district. Supreme authority in these districts, in particular, police oversight, was vested in the Derbent district military chief (in addition to the Caspian provincial administration) (5, 254; 2, 232; 6, 237–240).

It is noteworthy that the newly established districts were run in line with the Russian local traditions, disregarding their indigenous and ethnic identity, though Russian rule was out of the question altogether until the end of the Caucasian War, since a vast area of the North Caucasus was controlled by Imam Shamil, who still wielded a firm reign in this territory.

The Russian administration studied numerous decisions passed by commissions, projects and plans on the delineation of the Caucasus region. Finally, on January 1, 1841, a new administrative division of the entire Transcaucasian province was enacted. According to that project, the Transcaucasian region, excluding Abkhazia, Mingrelia and Svaneti, which were



controlled by their own rulers, was divided into two parts: the western part, i.e. the Georgian-Imereti governorate, and the eastern part, i.e. the Caspian Oblast (province). The Caspian province included the territories that were later cited as part of the rest of the Yelizavetpol governorate, the Baku governorate, as well as a part of Dagestan. The Caspian province, with the provincial city of Shamakhi, consisted of seven districts. The Derbent and Guba districts were under the unified control of the Derbent district military chief.

All these decisions and other measures taken at the time sparked discontent of local landowners and public outcry. The split-up of the South Caucasus territory, the administrative division of areas and zoning was carried out without considering local specific features, ethnic and religious affiliation, and the state interests of Azerbaijani and mountainous landowners. Moreover, socio-economic measures, military administration and other decisions angered the local population.

Families from southern Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan that were discontent over the Russian authorities were being relocated to Iran. However, soon thereafter the Tsarist administration deemed the 1841 law a political error and revisited the issue regarding the upper Muslim classes. Lieutenant General, Prince M. Z. Argutinsky-Dolgoruky (7, 74-75; 2, 233–234) was tasked in 1844 with oversight of southern Dagestan and control over the troops in southern Dagestan, in the Guba and Derbent districts, as well as in the Samur district.

In 1845, a vicegerency headed by a governor was enacted to establish a centralized government in the



Caucasus. The vicegerent single-handedly addressed all issues pertaining to ministerial power and could appeal to the emperor directly, while ministries served as advisory bodies to the vicegerent. Count M. S. Vorontsov was the first appointee to this post. The territory overseen by the Caucasus governor included the Caucasus province, including the South and North Caucasus. The vicegerent also served as the commander of troops of the Caucasus Military District.

Unlike his predecessors, Vorontsov was loyal to the local noblemen and committed to their involvement in Russian military and civil service. At the same time, the "Note on the arrangement of Imereti and Dagestan Oblasts" written in 1846 said that "taking into consideration the expanse of Dagestan and challenges with establishing communication between its northern and southern parts, His Highness decided to instruct the Main Department for the Transcaucasia province to contemplate whether or not it would be more convenient to organize two Oblasts there, namely, North Dagestan and South Dagestan". However, the Caucasus vicegerent suggested postponing the solution of this issue, citing the state of war and the ongoing military action.

The Main Department for Transcaucasia suggested establishing the Dagestan province comprised of the Guba and Derbent districts (the Caspian province, the Samur and Dargin provinces, the Kyuri and Gazikumykh possessions, as well as the land located south of Avar Koyusu. Such an adventurous decision would further aggravate the situation in the region.

In 1846, the position of military governor with a residence based in the city of Derbent was instituted to govern Dagestan. The provincial court was subordinated to the military governor, who was also tasked with civilian control. The Guba and Derbent district courts were reorganized into a single regional court based in Derbent and one provincial prosecutor was appointed instead of two district prosecutors. The Azerbaijani Derbent and Guba provinces were renamed into districts. The mandate dated December 6, 1846 approved the inherited ownership of land possessed by the families of khans, bays and other persons during the Muslim-populated provinces' accession to Russia, regardless of the fact that some of them were granted land for special merits.

Vorontsov's project on dividing the whole Transcaucasia into four governorates, namely, Tiflis, Kutaisi, Shamakhi and Derbent (with Shamakhi and Derbent

formed using the Caspian province), was approved in accordance with the decree enacted on December 14, 1846. The Derbent governorate included the Derbent district (the city of Derbent together with Ulus Mahal, Kaytag and Tabasaran), the Guba district, the Samur and Dargin provinces, Kyuri, Gazikumykh and other possessions located south of the Avar Koysu. The position of the Derbent district chief was abolished soon thereafter and his duties were vested in the district commandant. The Terekemey section and Ulus Mahal were run by commissioners. The treasuries in Guba and Derbent were subordinate to the Derbent military governor and remained under the jurisdiction of the Shamakhi treasury chamber. In 1847, the Derbent governorate, the Tarki Shamkhalate and the Mekhtuli Khanate constituted a new administrative unit, namely, the Caspian region headed by the commander of troops (5, 255-256; 2, 233-234; 8, 258-259).

The split-up of the South Caucasus territory, the administrative division of areas and zoning was carried out while disregarding local specific features, ethnic affiliation and the state and national interests of Azerbaijani and North Caucasus landowners. Moreover, socio-economic measures, military administration and other decisions angered the local population.

As a result of the administrative and territorial reorganization conducted by the Russian authorities, the Azerbaijani land was divided and made part of various governorates. Residents of the Samur district and the Kyuri khanate, which were included in the Derbent governorate, faced dire challenges in particular. The administrative and territorial redrawing caused a split-up of the Azerbaijani territories, abolition of the Azerbaijani khanates and elimination of political independence. The Caucasus province included all of the areas settled by mountaineers that had been run by the highlander military command, i.e. part of the Kuban, Terek and Dagestan Oblasts, the Zagatala district (the territories of north-western Azerbaijan) and the Sukhumi department.

In accordance with the new territorial and administrative division, the Stavropol governorate, the Kuban and Terek Oblasts were included in the North Caucasus or Fore-Caucasus. The Dagestan province, along with the Black Sea, Kutaisi, Tiflis, Irevan, Yelizavetpol and Baku governorates, as well as the Zagatala district and the Kars province, became part of Transcaucasia. Ultimately, the Tiflis, Kutaisi, Yelizavetpol, Irevan and Baku governorates were included in the Transcaucasia region, in addi-

tion to the Dagestan Oblast with the adjoined Derbent borough, the Zagatala and Black Sea districts, as well as the Sukhumi department.

The Dagestan Oblast was reorganized using the territory of the Derbent governorate, which was established in 1848. It included nine districts, namely, Temir-Khan-Shura, And (Botlikh), Khunzakh, Gunib, Dargin, Gazi-Kumukh, Kaytag-Tabasaran (Derbent), Kyuri and Samur (Akhty), i.e. the entire territory of the mountainous Dagestan, as well as the area previously called the Caspian region, excluding the Guba district that became part of the Baku governorate.

The border between the Dagestan Oblast and the Baku governorate stretched along the Samur river. Management and the administrative division of the Dagestan Oblast, the Zagatala district, the Sukhumi department and the Black Sea district was carried out in accordance with special regulations. The new administrative structure was introduced in line with the «Regulations on managing the Dagestan Oblast and Zagatala District», which were approved by the Caucasus army's commander-in-chief on April 5, 1860.

The delimitation of the historical Azerbaijani territory into the Dagestan Oblast and a number of districts, depriving the Azerbaijani people of their own ethnonyms and the right to statehood and territorial integrity caused a division of the nation due to territorial barriers. This sparked public outcry, which led to the declaration of the so-called military-public administration in this province. The province was divided into four military areas, i.e. North Dagestan, South Dagestan, Middle Dagestan and Upper Dagestan. South Dagestan, which was mainly populated by Azerbaijanis, was divided into three administrative areas, namely, the Kaytag-Tabasaran district (Upper and Lower Kaytag, North and South Tabasaran), the Kyuri khanate and the Samur district. Two of the civic administrative areas covered the Derbent urban area, including the city of Derbent and Ulus Mahal, and the city of Petrovsk with the surrounding territories. Military and civic control was exercised by the chief of the Dagestan province and Tsarist officers. Moreover, Derbent and Ulus Mahal constituted a special administrative area similar to an urban governor's office. The remaining parts of the Derbent governorate became part of similar military administrative areas. Thus, the Derbent governorate was abolished. The areas located at the eastern boundaries of the Caucasus were included in the Dagestan province and the Zagatala district (9, 17, 10, 1, 11, 243, 244-245, 254-256; 12, 1-2).

According to the “Draft Regulations on the Administration of the Dagestan Province”, districts were subdivided into naib’s offices, with the exception of the Kaytag-Tabasaran district. On July 18, 1860, Minister of War, Gen., Field Marshal, Prince Baryatinsky made some changes to the administrative structure of the Caspian region. Thus, the Guba district was broken away from the Caspian region and included in the Baku governorate.

“The founding of the administration of the Caucasus region” went into effect from 1883. It stipulated that the Caucasus region was divided into North Caucasus and Transcaucasia. The latter was comprised of the Tiflis, Kutaisi, Yelizavetpol, Irevan and Baku governorates, the Dagestan and Kutaisi provinces, as well as the Black Sea and Zagatala districts. The governorates and provinces were subdivided into districts (11, 254–256; 12, 1,5).

The Caucasus vicegerency and the Caucasus Committee were abolished in 1882. The authorities also revoked the positions of the commander of troops and department chiefs, the provincial headquarters, as well as the South Dagestan class and land commission in the Dagestan Oblast in the 1880s. Governance in the province was vested in the military governor. The Derbent governor’s office and the special department subordinated to it were abolished. A part of this territorial unit, which had not been part of the city of Derbent, became part of the Kyuri district. The finance minister suggested abolishing the Dagestan Oblast and including its southern districts (Kaytag-Tabasaran, Samur and Kyuri) in the Baku governorate, while the remaining districts would become part of the Terek Oblast. However, this proposal was not approved by the National Council. The unresolved status of the administrative, territorial and land-related issues, subordination between Bays and peasants, who refused to pay and serve their duties, subsequently caused uprisings in the 1880s in the Dagestan province, with most of the unrest sweeping through its southern part (13, 37).

The administrative and territorial division caused a split-up of Azerbaijani territories and some Azerbaijanis ended up within the boundaries of the newly established administrative units. Tensions escalated with the proclamation of independent states in the early and late 20th century. The delimitation of Azerbaijan’s historical territory into the Dagestan Oblast and numerous districts, depriving the Azerbaijani people of their own ethnonyms and the right to statehood and territorial integrity caused a division of the nation. ❁

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Map of Dagestan

