

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH194934-945>

Research paper

Sharafutdin A. Magaramov
Cand. Sci., Senior Researcher
Institute of History, Archeology of Ethnography
Dagestan Federal Research Center of RAS, Makhachkala, Russia
sharafutdin@list.ru

FEATURES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RUSSIAN FRONTIER IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Abstract. In recent decades, both foreign and Russian historiography have increasingly focused on the concept of the frontier when examining the formation of various territories within the Russian state, including the North Caucasus. The utilization of the frontier concept for studying Russian-Caucasian relations is now widely accepted in historiography, eliminating one-sided assessments. The frontier theory serves as a fundamental concept, enabling the exploration of the complex dynamics between the peoples of the Caucasus and the Russian Empire from the standpoint of imperial power and mountain societies. Consequently, the frontier concept is integrated into the research methodology. This work aims to investigate the essence and distinctive features characterizing the development of the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus. Unlike other Russian frontiers situated on various peripheries of the state, the North Caucasus frontier exhibits unique characteristics, notwithstanding the continuity of the Russian state as one of the actors. The identified features of the North Caucasian frontier – international, political, economic, and social – set it apart from similar phenomena along other geographical borders of the country, rendering it uniquely original. A key and distinctive aspect of the North Caucasus borderland was the coexistence, alongside the Russian frontier, of two additional Muslim frontiers – those of the Shah’s Persia and the Ottoman Empire, the latter predating the Russian one. This historical phenomenon is referred to as “polyfrontism” in historiography. The expansion of the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus consequently led to the gradual reduction and ultimately the abolition of Muslim frontiers. Nevertheless, remnants of the regional powers’ frontiers persist in the Caucasus in the present era. The “closure” of the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus transpired in the 1860s with the culmination of the Caucasian War and the definitive subjugation of the mountaineers by the Russian Empire. The considered features of the Caucasian frontier are not exhaustive and may be subject to further examinations.

Keywords: Russian frontier; Caucasus; development features; colonization; Cossacks; polyfrontism.

For citation: Magaramov Sh.A. Features of the Development of the Russian Frontier in the North Caucasus. *History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Caucasus*. 2023. Vol. 19. N.4. P. 934–945. doi. org/10.32653/CH194934-945

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH194934-945>

Исследовательская статья

Магарамов Шарафутдин Арифович
к.и.н., старший научный сотрудник
Институт истории, археологии и этнографии
Дагестанский федеральный исследовательский центр РАН, Махачкала, Россия
sharafutdin@list.ru

ОСОБЕННОСТИ РАЗВИТИЯ РОССИЙСКОГО ФРОНТИРА НА СЕВЕРНОМ КАВКАЗЕ

Аннотация. В последние десятилетия в зарубежной и российской историографии все чаще стали обращаться к концепту фронта при изучении процесса формирования различных территорий Российского государства, в том числе на Северном Кавказе. Перспективность изучения российско-кавказских отношений с помощью концепта фронта уже не вызывает сомнений в историографии, так как позволяет избегать односторонних оценок. В качестве базовой концепции он позволяет с позиций имперской власти и горных обществ рассмотреть сложную картину взаимоотношений народов Кавказа и Российской империи. Концепция фронта становится частью методологии исследований. Целью настоящей работы является исследование сущности и особенностей развития российского фронта на Северном Кавказе. Северокавказский фронт в отличие от других российских фронтов на разных окраинах государства имеет ряд отличительных особенностей несмотря на то, что один из акторов контакта – Российское государство, остается прежним. Выделенные особенности северокавказского фронта – международные, политические, экономические, социальные – отличают его от подобных явлений на других географических рубежах страны и делают его во многом оригинальным. Принципиальной, отличительной особенностью северокавказского пограничья являлось наличие параллельно с российским фронтом еще двух мусульманских фронтов – шахской Персии и Османской империи, причем возраст последних был больше российского. Данное историческое явление получило в историографии наименование «полифронтность». Расширение российского фронта на Северном Кавказе приводило, соответственно, к сокращению мусульманских и в конечном итоге их отмены. Тем не менее, следы фронтов региональных держав прослеживаются на Кавказе и на современном этапе. «Закрытие» российского фронта на Северном Кавказе произошло в 60-е гг. XIX в. с окончанием Кавказской войны и окончательным покорением Российской империей горцев. Отмеченные особенности кавказского фронта не являются исчерпывающими, они могут быть расширены при дальнейшей разработке проблемы.

Ключевые слова: Российский фронт; Кавказ; особенности развития; колонизация; казачество; полифронтность

Для цитирования: Магарамов Ш.А. Особенности развития российского фронта на Северном Кавказе // История, археология и этнография Кавказа. 2023. Т. 19. № 4. С. 934–945. doi.org/10.32653/CH194934-945

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The issue of frontier in the contemporary development of humanitarian knowledge represents a promising avenue for analyzing Russian-Caucasian relations. The application of the frontier theory enables an examination of the history of the Russian state's expansion into the Caucasus and the region's integration into the empire from dual perspectives: that of the local residents and the imperial center, mitigating one-sided assessments. As American researcher of Russian history, Professor M. Khodarkovsky rightly observes: "The history of Russian advance into the Caucasus is not merely a chronicle of military conquest and colonization. It is also the narrative of the encounter between two worlds with disparate structures: a highly centralized imperial state and local tribal societies with rudimentary political organization" [1, p. 24].

The applicability of the frontier concept to the dynamics of Russian-Caucasian relations has been convincingly demonstrated in both foreign [2] and domestic historiography [3; 4]. The efficacy of employing the frontier concept to examine the process of expansion of the Russian state's borders, including insights from the North Caucasus, has been highlighted in the ongoing scholarly discourse on frontiers [5].

E.A. Sheujen contested the application of the frontier concept to the realities of the North Caucasus in its classical sense [6]. In this stance, we fully align with her perspective, as Turner's definition of the frontier is deemed unsuitable for the realities of the North Caucasus. In the contemporary development of humanitarian knowledge, the classical theory of the frontier by F.J. Turner sees minimal use; scholars are moving away from the concept of the frontier as a catalyst for progress and are reevaluating it as a persistent locus of conflicts [5, p. 96]. Consequently, B.H. Bgazhnokov introduces a novel definition of the concept: "The frontier is an internally organized and relatively autonomous existential space, subject to particularly strong influences and tensions due to the lack of certainty of its status in the surrounding geopolitical and sociocultural environment. This is the most important characteristic not only of this space but also of the countries and peoples between which the frontier is formed" [7, p. 155].

We also cannot agree with the assertion made by some authors categorizing the North Caucasus as an eternal frontier [8]. Following the definitive integration of the North Caucasus into the Russian Empire in the 1860s with the conclusion of the Caucasian War, the region no longer exhibits the characteristics of a frontier, complete with its inherent elements. Such statements seem to reflect more on politics than on historical realities.

As part of the implementation of the RSF grant, the research group is undertaking the preparation of a series of scholarly publications examining the history of the North Caucasus frontier. The ongoing article, addressing the issue of periodization of the frontier in the North Caucasus, is currently in writing and includes a historiographical overview of the problem. Future publications within this project will focus on a comparative analysis of the North Caucasian frontier in relation to other Russian frontier zones (Siberian, Southern), an exploration of the socio-psychological characteristics of frontier zone actors, and an examination of their daily lives, among other aspects. This comprehensive initiative, drawing on an analysis of materials from historiographical sources and archival data identified by the author – some of which are being introduced into scientific circulation for the first time – aims to unravel the specifics and features of the development of the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus, spanning three hundred years (1560–1860s) [9].

When compared with analogous phenomena in Russia, the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus emerges as notably unique and does not align entirely with any other frontier, despite the continuity of at least one participant in the contact – the Russian state. The North Caucasus frontier sets itself apart from other frontiers, such as the Siberian and Southern frontiers, through a variety of features, which will be thoroughly discussed below. Simultaneously, each of Russia's border spaces, alongside its specific traits, shares numerous universal features. These universal aspects have received sufficient attention in Russian historiography, and therefore, we see no need to extensively dwell on them.

The settlement of the North Caucasus frontier occurred both at the official state level and concurrently through a process of unrestricted settlement of the territory. In the early stages of frontier development, the settlement processes in the studied region were largely spontaneous. However, from the era of Peter the Great onward, population relocations to the region became deliberate and purposeful. The establishment of Terek town in the second half of the 16th century played a crucial role as the primary instrument for shaping new Russian geographical spaces in the North Caucasus. In this context, the “sovereign” Cossacks, alongside the *streltsy*, began to serve in the fortress. Simultaneously, “free” or “plundering” Cossacks arrived on the Terek from the Volga, executing orders from Terek governors and receiving royal payment. Despite their service obligations, these Cossacks retained a degree of independence, following elected atamans and refusing service if salary payments were delayed. Over time, both groups came to be collectively referred to as the Terek Cossacks [10, p. 107–109]. Subsequently, Cossack towns emerged in the lower reaches of the Terek and near the mouth of the Sunzha. Those Cossacks dwelling “in the *grebens*,” i.e., in the foothills, came to be known as the Greben Cossacks. Notably, there was no distinct division between Terek and Greben Cossacks; both constituted a unified military force and received equivalent salaries [10, p. 120].

The territory chosen by the Cossacks for settlement held strategic significance, serving as crucial routes to the North Caucasus and forming the border space between the Russian state and the peoples of the North Caucasus. Evolving as a border community, the Cossacks' status profoundly influenced all aspects of their communal life. The Moscow state strategically employed the Cossacks as border guards, highlighting their integral role in securing the frontier [11, p. 51–52]. Simultaneously, representatives of the Terek and Don Cossacks found themselves serving in the initial Russian forts in Siberia around the same period [12, p. 145].

During the era of Peter the Great, the population of Cossacks in the North Caucasus experienced a notable increase, primarily driven by the resettlement of Don Cossacks. Following Peter I's Persian campaign to Agrakhan and the fortress of the Holy Cross, a thousand Cossack families were relocated from the Don [10, p. 150]. The Cossack community saw a continuous influx of individuals arriving from various regions, including peasants escaping serfdom and Christian slaves liberated from captivity. The government actively encouraged colonization by resettling thousands of serfs and state peasants from the central provinces of the country, eventually converting them into Cossacks. By the late 18th century, what was previously a more spontaneous and free peasant colonization of the Caucasus became legalized through Catherine II's decree of December 22, 1782, titled “On the division of those who wish to settle the lands that make up the vast steppe stretching along the Mozdok line” [13, p. 784] and was actively promoted and facilitated by the state.

Starting from the era of Peter the Great, the Christian population, predominantly Armenians and Georgians from the South Caucasus, sought refuge in the region of the North Caucasian frontier, fleeing Turkish and Persian authorities. Russian authorities perceived them as a reliable social element for the implementation of their policies. Substantial Armenian diasporas were established in the vicinity of Derbent and Kizlyar, with plans to populate the mono-ethnic territories of Dagestan near Russian possessions with Armenians. In a confidential decree dated March 5, 1729, Lieutenant General A.I. Rumyantsev, the commander of Russian troops in the Caspian regions, was tasked with settling the Sagnak Armenians in “Tarki, [which] is between Sulak and Derbent, in which Shamkhal [Tarkovsky] previously lived, where there is all sorts of contentment...”. The imperial authorities anticipated that by settling Armenians in the ancient Dagestan city of Tarki, they “could establish control over Dagestan rulers, akin to having Russian garrison in Tarki..., furthermore, if the Armenians multiplied in Tarki, the Dagestanis would be in fear and firm allegiance to the Russian state, and Armenians could become significant merchants in Sulak”¹. However, the plan to settle Armenians in Tarki was not executed for reasons unknown to us.

A considerable part of Caucasian Cossacks was enlisted to serve on the border line, effectively reducing government expenses for maintaining the army. This utilization stemmed from the Cossacks’ longstanding reputation as individuals from the frontiers, naturally inclined to serve on the outskirts of the country. Consequently, Russian authorities maximized the military-colonization potential of the Cossacks to its fullest extent.

Cossacks took an active role in Russia’s expansion into the Caucasus. Relying on the capabilities of the Cossack forces allowed the Russian government to establish a presence on the northern borders of the Caucasus, leading to the formation of a dedicated Cossack army tasked with safeguarding the southern borders of the state. In 1721, the Terek Cossacks were removed from the jurisdiction of the Posolsky Prikaz and placed under the authority of the Military Collegium, effectively becoming servants of the state. Historian A. Kappeler aptly describes their general position as “loyal servants of the tsars” [14, p. 377]. Operating as irregular units within the Russian army, the Cossacks were deployed by the empire to quell local socio-political protests. In 1722, the Cossacks actively participated in a punitive expedition led by Brigadier Andrei Veterani against the Dagestan village of Endirei [15, p. 1118–1130]. This action was a response to the involvement of its rulers in campaigns against Cossack towns and the Terki fortress. Subsequently, in 1725–1726, the Cossacks engaged in another expedition against the influential Dagestan ruler, Shamkhal of Tarki Adil-Girey, due to his anti-Russian stance². In 1775, the Terek-Kizlyar and Mozdok Cossacks played a crucial role in a campaign against the Utsmi of Kaitag Amir-Gamza. A year prior to this campaign, the Utsmi had detained the renowned scientist and traveler, full member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, S.G. Gmelin, who unfortunately died while in captivity. The military expedition aimed to punish the Utsmi and instill “respect and fear for Russian arms” [16,

1. Reports and letters from the actual Privy Councilor of Peter Tolstoy to Peter I, to the Senate, to the Prosecutor General, to the Cabinet and to the Secretary of the Cabinet Makarov // AVPRI. F. 77. 1729 Inv. 77/1. File 5. L. 7-7 rev.

2. Reports from the Nizovoy Corps of 1725, 1726 and 1727 about the search over the unfriendly Persians and mountain peoples.” Reports on military operations against the Persians and mountain generals: Mikhail Matyushin, Gavrila Kropotov, Prince Vasily Dolgorukov from May 1725 to July 1727 // RGVIA. F. 20. Inv. 1/47. File 9. L. 28-30 rev.; Register of books included in the Cabinet from official places and from other persons, messages, letters and other matters of 1726 // RGADA. F. 9. Inv. 4. File 78. L. 214-215.

p. 288]. During this expedition, the commander of the Terek-Kizlyar army, Temirbulat Cherkassky, the son of Elmurza Cherkassky, lost his life. His position was subsequently filled by Major Pyotr Tatarov of the same army, a Kabardian who had converted to Christianity and had previously served in Terki, the fortress of the Holy Cross, and in Kizlyar [10, p. 166].

The foundation for consolidating the frontiersmen's positions and a pivotal tool for Russia's conquest and development of new territories in the North Caucasus were forts, Russian fortresses, garrisons, fortified lines, and Cossack stanitsas. In 1588, responding to the request of the Kabardian prince, an ally of the Moscow state, the Russian fortress Terki, or Terka (Terek city), was constructed at the mouth of the Terek. Though the first Russian forts in the North Caucasus had been built slightly earlier, they were dismantled upon the request of the Turkish-Crimean authorities. By the mid-1590s, a comprehensive system of Russian fortresses emerged in the region, including Terek city at the mouth of the Terek, Koisinsky fort at the mouth of the Sulak, and Sunzhensky fort at the confluence of the Sunzha River with the Terek. These fortifications effectively blocked the North Caucasus route, placing it under the control of Russian governors. Gradually, the Moscow state secured strategic directions by constructing forts/fortresses along crucial land and water routes. These fortresses served as hubs for establishing and maintaining connections with Caucasian rulers and organizing military campaigns against the Dagestan ruler, Shamkhal of Kazikumukh, under the leadership of Khvorostinin in 1594 and Buturlin in 1604–1605 [17 p. 284, 287–288].

Despite repeated destruction due to various factors such as attacks by mountain rulers, Crimean Tatars, fires, epidemics, and floods, Terek city was consistently reconstructed and persisted as a key border point for sociocultural, economic, political, and diplomatic interactions between mountaineers and Russians. Terek town served not only as a defensive outpost for the southern borders of Russia but also as a zone for the development of a distinct community. Here, military servicemen from Muscovite Rus', townspeople from Old Russian cities, representatives of Cossack freemen, and North Caucasian peoples coalesced into a unified society.

The frontline fortress of Terki was established as an outpost and a stronghold from which subsequent military operations with the North Caucasian rulers could be conducted. During this period, there was no distinct demarcation of the frontier, meaning there was no fixed border characterized by a chain of settlements. In this context, Tersky town stands out as one of the earliest frontier settlements in the entire North Caucasus and holds significant strategic importance. Terki evolved into a central hub from which the threads of frontier lines later extended.

In the era of Peter the Great, the fortress of Terka was replaced by a new fortress named the Holy Cross at the mouth of the Sulak River. The motive behind founding this new fortress was the desire to consolidate control over the "newly conquered" provinces, deemed to be the western and southern coasts of the Caspian Sea. The Holy Cross fortress, positioned as the primary Russian fortification in the North Caucasus, facilitated easy control over the foothills and Caspian Dagestan, along with maintaining communication with Derbent. Following Peter I's Persian campaign of 1722–1723, the southern border of the Russian Empire rapidly expanded along the western and partially southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Russian garrisons were stationed in key locations such as Derbent, Baku, and Rasht – the center

of the Gilan region. However, in the mid-1730s due to the new geopolitical situation in the Western Caspian region, the Russian borders again moved to the Sulak River, the fortress of the Holy Cross was razed. In 1735, the Kizlyar fortress was founded, which became the new administrative and political center of the Russian state in the North Caucasus.

The Kabardians who lived at the fortress of the Holy Cross, newly baptized people, Armenians, Georgians, Dagestanis, Eastern Teziks, and former Terek city Cossacks, all were relocated to Kizlyar. They collectively came to be known as Terek-Kizlyar Cossacks, forming the basis for the establishment of the Terek-Kizlyar Cossack army [18, p. 63]. The command over the irregular units of the troops was entrusted to the Kabardian prince Elmurza Cherkassky, the brother of Alexander Cherkassky (Bekovich), who had met his demise in Khiva. Under Elmurza Cherkassky's leadership, a detachment was formed, modest in size but intricate in its ethno-confessional and social composition, encompassing Cossacks. This scenario is a rather uncommon occurrence in 18th, when a Muslim assumed authority over Christians [10, p. 166].

The further process of conquering and developing the territory of the North Caucasus is closely tied to the construction of the Mozdok fortress in 1763 and the establishment of the Azov-Mozdok fortified line between 1777 and 1780. This line connected, in a continuous chain, all Russian fortresses from the Black to the Caspian Seas. The fortified line effectively severed part of the lands cultivated by the mountaineers and extensive pasture spaces from the North Caucasus. New Cossack villages began to emerge along this fortified line. In the memoirs of Russian officers who participated in the Caucasian War, the Caucasian line was referred to as "land" and was described as a territory bordering the mountaineers with Russian fortresses, fortified by Cossack villages [19, p. 229–234]. Initially, the Caucasian fortified line was viewed as a model for organizing or developing new spaces that were destined to become part of the Russian Empire [20, p. 51].

On the frontier line, the North Caucasian rulers pledged allegiance to the tsar, and amanat-hostages were also present as a guarantee for their adherence to loyalty obligations to the Russian tsar. The Russian authorities held amanats in strategic locations such as Astrakhan, Terki, the fortress of the Holy Cross, Derbent, Kizlyar, Mozdok, and the fortresses of the Caucasian line. The perspectives on amanats varied significantly between the central government and local political elites. Russian ruling circles or representatives of regional authorities, such as voivods, viewed amanats as a symbol of unequivocal and exclusive submission to autocracy. The Russian military administration, having raised them with an emphasis on Russian culture and etiquette, anticipated their steadfast pro-Russian orientation. Conversely, for local ruling elites, the institution of amanatism was an unwelcome but necessary aspect accompanying agreements with the tsarist government, involving military alliances, mutual non-aggression, or patronage.

The fates of different amanats varied considerably. Often, young children, while in captivity, succumbed to the challenging conditions of their confinement. In cases where the local ruler did not provide a replacement after the death of an amanat, the Russian authorities would capture influential members of the community or the ruling house, as stipulated by the College of Foreign Affairs in 1754 [21, p. 163]. The raids organized to capture new hostages sometimes transformed into predatory expeditions, bearing little difference from the attacks of mountain dwellers on Russian settlements. The challenging

conditions of amanats' captivity often compelled local rulers to seek assistance from the royal administration, requesting exchanges for new amanats. A. S. Pushkin, who visited the Caucasus in 1829, documented the difficult situation of amanats and the harsh conditions of their confinement in his later work "Travel to Arzrum": "In the fortress (Vladikavkaz) I saw Circassian amanats, lively and beautiful boys. They constantly get into mischief and escape from the fortress. They are kept in miserable state, walking around in rags, half-naked and in deplorable filth. I saw others wearing wooden stocks. It is likely that amanats released into the wild do not regret their stay in Vladikavkaz" [22]. For breaches of agreements with Caucasian rulers, amanats faced punishments and other punitive measures. Prisoners of the Russian fortresses were not released.

The North Caucasus frontier was a constant battleground, facing frequent attacks by the troops of Iranian shahs, Ottoman-Crimean detachments, and mountaineers. Simultaneously, Cossack troops conducted raids on the lands of the mountaineers.

In 1651, Shah Abbas II orchestrated a campaign involving united Shah, Shirvan, and Dagestan armies near the Sunzhensky town. The objective was to expel Russian forces and establish Iranian dominance in the North Caucasus [23, p. 181–184]. The participation of Dagestan troops in the campaign was attributed to the considerable influence of Iranian rulers on Dagestan leaders, some of whom had ascended to power with Iranian administration support. The campaign concluded unfavorably for the organizers, leading to a temporary deterioration in Russian-Iranian relations.

The Terek town, the fortress of the Holy Cross, and the Cossack villages faced repeated attacks from mountaineers. In early 1725, dissatisfied with the actions of the Russian authorities, Dagestan ruler Shamkhal of Tarki Adil-Girey organized a campaign against the Cossack towns on Sulak. In response, during the fall of 1725 and spring of 1726, punitive expeditions by Russian troops, commanded by Major General G.S. Kropotov, were carried out against the possessions of the Shamkhal. These expeditions resulted in the destruction and burning of two dozen villages, the devastation of crops, and the theft of large flocks of livestock.³ On May 21, 1726, Shamkhal Adil-Girey surrendered⁴ and was subsequently sent to the Arkhangelsk province, where he passed away.

The construction of Mozdok and the Caucasian fortified line sparked discontent and armed uprisings among the Kabardians. The Kabardian princes persistently requested the demolition of the fortresses. When their request was denied, they attempted to capture and destroy the fortifications in 1779 but were ultimately defeated. As a result, they had to reconcile themselves with the functioning of the Caucasian line, pay a substantial indemnity, and take a new oath of allegiance to the Russian throne [10, p. 560].

Another distinctive aspect of the Russian frontier in the Caucasus was its coexistence with other frontiers in the same region, particularly to the south and southwest, where the frontiers of the Muslim world – Shah's Iran and Turkey – ran parallel. This phenomenon is not observed in any of the other Russian frontiers. A.T. Urushadze refers to this coexistence as "polyfrontism" [4].

3. Register of books included in the Cabinet from official places and from other persons, messages, letters and other matters of 1726 // RGADA. F. 9. Inv. 4. File 78. L. 214–215.

4. Reports from the Nizovoy Corps of 1725, 1726 and 1727 about the search over the unfriendly Persians and mountain peoples." Reports on military operations against the Persians and mountain generals: Mikhail Matyushin, Gavril Kropotov, Prince Vasily Dolgorukov from May 1725 to July 1727 // RGVIA. F. 20. Inv. 1/47. File 9. L. 81–82 rev.

The Muslim frontiers in the Caucasus were established a little earlier than the Russian frontier, emerging in the early 16th century. Persian (Safavid) troops occupied Shirvan and the southern part of Dagestan, while Derbent became the northern outpost of the Safavid empire in the Eastern Caucasus. A significant number of Turkic-speaking Shiite tribes were resettled in Derbent from various regions of Persia. With Sultan Murad III (1574–1595) assuming power in Turkey, the country's foreign policy toward the Caucasus intensified. In 1578, Sultan Murad III attempted to conquer Eastern Transcaucasia; his army successfully occupied the southern part of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. In the Eastern Caucasus, the Turks also conquered Sheki, Shemakha, Baku, Shabran, and Derbent [24, p. 278]. Around the same period, the peoples of the Western Caucasus fell partially under the influence of the Ottoman Empire.

In the early 17th century, Shah Abbas I (1588–1629) actively prepared for a war with Turkey with the aim of seeking revenge. He successfully reclaimed many lands previously occupied by the Turks in the Caucasus. The Derbent region once again became the northern border of the Safavids in the North Caucasus. Persian influence in Derbent was notably evident in architecture, the ethno-confessional composition of the population, and spiritual culture. The number of Persian colonists in Derbent increased annually, as colonization served as one of the methods to establish Safavid influence in the region. The city remained under Persian administration until the early 18th century when, due to anti-Iranian uprisings in the region, Safavid power was overthrown.

The geopolitical landscape in the Caucasus-Caspian region underwent a significant transformation after Peter I's Persian campaign. Russia, under Peter's leadership, secured a narrow strip of the Caspian regions and crucially prevented Turkish access to the shores of the Caspian Sea, which had been part of the original plan of Russian diplomacy. The confrontation between the Russian Empire and Turkey resulted in the establishment of a Russian-Turkish border in Eastern Transcaucasia. This border divided local peoples and societies without consideration for historically established economic traditions and socio-cultural contacts. The new border line acted as a "barrier" between closely connected ethnocultural and economic communities, creating a divide among Caucasian and Persian societies that had historically developed together. Local border communities and their elites, by fate's design, became embroiled in the complex dynamics of Russian-Turkish relations. This division of Caucasian territories contributed to a prolonged conflict situation in the border zone and led to intricate and fluctuating frontier life [25, p. 94–109].

Despite Russia's early geopolitical success, it proved to be short-lived. By the mid-1730s, the empire was compelled to retract its borders to the Terek region in northern Dagestan. In the second half of the 1730s and the first half of the 1740s, under Nadir Shah, Persian dominance in the Eastern Caucasus was nominally restored, and the region gained independence after Shah's death in 1747. At the turn of the 18th to the 19th centuries, Persia once again asserted its claims to the Caucasus. In the firmans of the Persian shahs, Kizlyar and Mozdok were mentioned as border points of Persia [26, p. 807]. The Russian victory in the Russian-Iranian war of 1804–1813 led to Persia abandoning its claims to the South and East Caucasus, formally recognizing the entire region as part of the Russian Empire.

During the second half of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century, Turkish policy in the Western Caucasus intensified due to the expansion of the Russian Empire in

the Azov region and the Caucasus. Turkey consolidated its position in the region through its proteges in the Abkhaz principality and the commandants of the Anapa and Sudzhuk fortresses, deepening ties with the area. Despite their efforts, the Turks suffered a significant defeat in the Russian-Turkish War of 1828–1829, marking the end of over 300 years of Turkish influence in the Western Caucasus [27, p. 28].

M. Khodorkovsky attributes the success of Russian policy in the North Caucasus to a systematic approach to colonization. Unlike the Persians, who periodically sent punitive detachments to assert short-lived dominance, and the Turks, whose random military campaigns aimed at securing tribute and slaves for Crimea and Istanbul, Russia systematically colonized the region. This involved stationing troops in numerous fortifications and fortresses, deploying military officials, merchants, and priests to newly built cities, and encouraging settlers to establish residences and cultivate the land [28, p. 430].

The North Caucasian frontier, particularly in the first half of the 19th century, served as a destination for the exile of criminals and undesirable individuals. As early as the first third of the 18th century, the Derbent garrison functioned as a form of “warm Siberia” – a place of exile for various offenses committed by Russian army personnel. Military courts were dispatched to the Caucasus, sentencing individuals “to be transformed into Persian regiments” for five to ten years due to offenses such as desertion, theft of government property, fornication, violence, and drunkenness [29, p. 180]. In the 19th century, Derbent continued to be a site of exile for individuals who fell into disgrace. Notably, in the mid-19th century, John Usher of the British Royal Geographical Society reported that Mikhelevsky, exiled from St. Petersburg for writing anti-government pamphlets, had been residing in the city for two years [30, p. 200].

Seventy-seven individuals associated with the Decembrist movement were among those exiled to the Caucasus. Upon joining the ranks of the tsarist army as soldiers and officers, these exiles actively participated in military engagements against the mountaineers. Beyond direct involvement in military operations, they contributed to the construction of fortresses, the development of roadways, and carried out diverse assignments such as compiling statistical descriptions and engaging in cartography. Additionally, they played a role in the development of the conquered territories [31].

Polish prisoners, many of whom were participants in the Napoleonic wars against Russia and the 1830–1831 uprising in Poland, were also subjected to exile in the Caucasus. Until the mid-19th century, approximately 50 thousand Poles were sent to the Caucasus. These individuals were often assigned to prison companies and fortresses. Subsequently, they contributed to the construction of military and civilian facilities, served in the tsarist troops, and actively participated in the Caucasian War [32, p. 25, 36-37, 42].

The identified features of the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus – international, political, economic, and social – distinguish it from similar phenomena on other geographical borders of the Russian state, making it unique in various ways. The role and significance of these features have evolved differently during various periods of the North Caucasian frontier’s development. At times, certain features dominated, while in other periods, different aspects took precedence. By the 1860s, with the conclusion of the Caucasian War and the final subjugation of the mountaineers by the empire, the Russian frontier in the North Caucasus was effectively “closed,” and the distinctive features of the frontier ceased to

be operational. It's important to note that the features outlined here are not exhaustive, and further exploration of the topic may reveal additional dimensions to the North Caucasian frontier.

Acknowledgement. The study was carried with the financial support of the Russian Science Foundation, project No. № 23-28-01106, <https://rscf.ru/project/23-28-01106/>

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Recieved 05.06.2023

Accepted 07.08.2023

Published 15.12.2023

Поступила в редакцию 05.06.2023 г.

Принята в печать 07.08.2023 г.

Опубликована 15.12.2023 г.