

C E M  T I

CAHIERS D'ÉTUDES SUR LA MÉDITERRANÉE ORIENTALE
ET LE MONDE TURCO-IRANIEN

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L'individu en Turquie et en Iran

Et aussi

Le paysage politique en Azerbaïdjan

Le bazar à Téhéran

Le cinéma turc

Deux livres sur les Balkans

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Nadège RAGARU

Chronique bibliographique

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Mehmet Tütüncü (dir.),
The Caucasus: War and Peace
New World Disorder in Caucasia
Haarlem 1998, SOTA, 224 pages.

The Caucasus was something apart... Caucasian and Oriental music had its own particular pulse, a saccade rhythm of drum beats, the insistent, fevered wildness of sword dances...

But these fierce or voluptuous rhythms, like Lermontov's evocations of the Caucasus, and the Caucasian stories of Tolstoy and Bestoujev-Marlinsky had not yet become part of the Russian consciousness. For the most part the Caucasus was still a faraway battlefield, a distant graveyard for the legion of recruits who were levied by force from the villages. To the dandified staff-officers at the War Office, it was a poorly mapped mountainous area, pin-pointed by unpronounceable names; a theatre of operations which neither that old savage, Yermolov, or his successor Paskievitch, had yet succeeded in conquering.

To the Emperor Nicholas it represented failure - humiliation. His most cherished dreams were thwarted. He was quite at a loss to understand how a chain of mountains and a few wild tribes could have withstood his might for years. It was insufferable. Across all the Russias the Tzar ruled so autocratically, he turned his 'pewter stare' on the Caucasus with displeasure. These rebels had defied him too long. No matter which General was sent to finish off the campaign quickly, the fact remained, it dragged on in a most inexplicable fashion.

These lines were written by Lesley Blanch, in *Sabres of Paradise*, supposedly a book romantically favorable to Caucasians¹. This time around, the whole world saw a replay in technicolor, with different actors, different weapons, and different leaders. And we even had our own President Clinton, helping his 'friend' Yeltsin with his code words "End it quickly!" But the Chechen War did not end quickly, and it looks like

¹ Blanch, Wesley, *Sabres of Paradise*, 1962 : 76.

neither the one in Abkhazia, nor the one in Upper Karabagh, will end quickly. In the aftermath of the breakup of the USSR, for most peoples of the world, the Caucasus is still mainly a place with unpronounceable names, populated by "ferocious" and "fierce" peoples such as the Chechens who must be mad to defy the might of Russia.

The Caucasus conjures up images of various kinds; to the classically educated it is where Prometheus was chained by the Gods and the land of the Golden Fleece; in the English speaking world, especially the USA, Caucasus is where whites (Caucasians) come from; in the Middle East and Turkey, the home of most of the refugees and forced migrants of the last century, it is the home of the Çerkez with whom almost all Caucasians are identified, and the home of the Turkic Azeris; to Russians it is the land of myth and romanticism along with dark savages; to Armenians, it is about Artsakh, home away from home; to Azeris it is 'Karabagh' (the Black Garden) their land being occupied by a foreign power, yet another indignity foisted upon them by Russia, the same indignity of being a part of the empire, having communism foisted upon them, and now being encircled by great powers Iran and Russia, and having almost a million refugees from occupied territories, and finally to most of the news-following population of today it is probably a place where a small population, formerly unheard of, called Chechens, put up a heroic, almost superhuman, struggle against the might of Russia.

The Caucasus : War and Peace ; New World disorder in Caucasia discusses the most important conflicts of the region, and in addition has informative articles on the Caucasus and the traditional players in the region. It is broken down into three parts; Karabagh (Artsakh), Chechenia (still called Chechnya using the Russian declension), Abkhazia, and a General Overview. It seems that the General Overview should have come first. It has articles by specialists in the region, for example, Dr. Hewitt, the only full-time academic post in the United Kingdom for Caucasian languages; by Drs. Helen Krag of the University of Copenhagen, (a specialist on the USSR and the Caucasus), & Lars Funch of Denmark; by Dr. Moshe Gammer, the author of the only scholarly book (recently published by the Curzon Press) on the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, except for the John F. Baddeley book and the romantic *Sabres of Paradise* by Lesley Blanch; and by scholars on Russia, Dr. Cutler of Canada's Russian Institute (at Carleton University) who writes about American and Russian views. For those who want to know more about the peoples and their languages inhabiting the Caucasus, the article on the ethnicities of the Caucasus by Krag & Funch is guaranteed to clear up any confusions

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anyone might still have. That is just the beginning. There are many excellent articles each tackling some aspect of the Caucasus written from many different angles. The editor of the book, Drs. Mehmet Tütüncü, discusses the Turkish attitude to complement that of Dr. Cutler's. Regrettably there is no one writing about the other player in the region, Iran. The articles on Abkhazia are written by Paul Henze, a member of the US National Security Council from 1976 to 1980, and a consultant to the Rand Corporation. There are articles written by Dr. Fogelquist of Eurasia Research Center, and by Dr. Sariahmetoglu, of the Turkology Research Institute, Marmara University.

The book also features articles by reporters in the region, for example, the Dutchman Charles Van Der Leeuw, and American Thomas Goltz. Mehmet Binay, a freelance joins with his analysis on the Chechen crisis. It has articles by two Georgians, Urushadze who is the Editor and Publisher of the Independent Tblisi newspaper *Adamianis Uplebebi*, and Dr. Khutshishvili, the director of ICCN in Tblisi. It carries articles written by Azeris; Dr. Mollazade, the president of the US-Azerbaijan Council, comments on the legal aspects of the Karabagh conflict, and Huseynov gives an excellent recounting of the messy ethnic mixture of the Caucasus. An ethnic Abkhazian, Chirikba gives a good historical account of Abkhazia.

The articles contain such titillating pieces of information as,

. Except for Alstadt and Swietochowski, there is almost total blackout of information on Azerbaijan (Fogelquist)

. Armenians were the only people in the former USSR who had both a Union Republic and an Autonomous Region in the territory of another Union Republic (Mollazade)

. Armenian terrorism comes from the time before terrorism, as we know it today, existed (Van Der Leeuw)

. Melkonian, who killed Enver Pasha, was involved with Stalin's Tseka (Van Der Leeuw).

. Ermolov had the people of a whole Chechen village (Dadi Yurt) massacred and the village burnt as an example (Gammer). During the deportations of the second World War, the same thing was done to another Chechen village, Khaybakh (Gammer). We all know about the Nazi attempts at such violence. Did they invent it?

. The conflict in Chechenia (and the North Caucasus) has been going on really for 300 years (Gammer). Are only Europeans worthy of self-determination?

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. Abkhazians are neither Muslim nor Turkic as reported early on in the newscasts. There is not a single mosque in Abkhazia. (Henze)

. There is a naval blockade of Abkhazia by Russia. No adult male can leave. The phone lines to the outside world have been cut by Russia. (Chirikba)

. The world is suffering from an overload of crises, and hence does not pay much attention to those in the Caucasus. (Henze)

. Russia now apparently thinks that a reasonably healthy Georgia is better than a small Georgia in shambles. (Henze)

. All capitals of the North Caucasian Republics were founded as Cossack fortifications, and, following conquests, Cossacks settled on soil previously inhabited by Caucasian people. (Krag & Funch)

. Evliya Chelebi, the famous traveler, was half-Abkhazian half-Turkish (Hewitt)

. An excessive and naïve faith in the truthfulness of print media is widespread throughout the Caucasus (including Turkey) (Hewitt).

. The North Caucasus occupied last place in the list of Russia's eleven regions in terms of per capita income, ninth in terms of prices for main food items, and eleventh in purchasing capacity per capita (Huseynov).

Even from these scattered pieces we can see that the conflicts in the Caucasus will probably continue until and unless there is some overall general policy promulgated and agreed upon by the main actors, Russia and America. In addition, the book also has other pieces of information which the literate, and especially those who have access to Internet will find interesting. For example, which people involved in the Caucasian conflicts have connections with and receive money from the KGB? Which Internet personality has been involved in mass killings in the Karabagh war? These and more can be found in the articles in the book. The book tries to rectify the lack of knowledge of the Caucasus, specifically the conflict areas, and succeeds rather well.

Furthermore, *The Caucasus : War and Peace ; New World Disorder in Caucasia* can be seen to highlight the Caucasus as both the gateway to and possibly an example of what not to do in Central Asia. If we look at the map, we see that the Caucasus, situated on the frontiers of Europe and Asia, is a crossroad and gateway between cultures and civilizations, (between Europe and Asia, Islam and Christianity, Turks, Iranians and Slavs) and still seems to be the most fertile ground for ethnic violence. About the only place where there is no ethnic conflict is the Karachay-Circassian Respublika, and the only other place where fighting is not the norm is in Kabardino-Balkaria although Balkars recently attempted to

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secede and form their own Respublika. If we are not victims of the "ancient hatreds" explanation of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, cooked up by the now forgotten Stephanopoulos faction in the United States' White House, who probably wanted the whole thing buried away from American mass consciousness, we owe it to ourselves to try to understand why these conflicts seem to be popping up all over the Caucasus. After all, there are as yet no wars in Central Asia, and if we are to believe all the standard historiography of the West, the Turco-Mongol peoples of Asia should have been more prone to fighting than those of the Caucasus.

No book is perfect, and the problems should also be delineated. There are numerous spelling errors. In the age of word processors and spelling checkers, these are less difficult to forgive than in the olden days. There is no standard spelling for place names, republics or even people's names, reflecting the age-old problem of transliterating names from other languages, and paying attention to historical usage. However, in general especially to those who read about this region, who, what and which is quite clear. There are passages, for example in Huseynov's article, which are not exactly correct; some Kabardans or Nogays might have been deported but the Kabarda and Nogay nations did not get deported during World War Two.

The general overview, it seems to me, should have been in the beginning and not at the end. Since the Caucasus is now part of the Silk Road and the Energy Corridor, the links should have been made more explicit. Regrettably neither Armenians nor Chechens attended the conference. Perhaps we should hold the editor responsible for not seeking contributions, even a token article, the conference.

A few articles compare the Caucasian conflicts to others with related problems such as Cyprus, Bosnia, Kosova, or Azeris in Iran, or Turkmens in Northern Iraq, but of course not only are they tangentially related, if no one wanted to write such articles for the Conference, then it would have been difficult to create them. Conflicts in the region are quite similar to those of Cyprus, Bosnia, Kosova and a myriad of others where the rights of the member nation of United Nations to unity is in direct opposition to the rights of self-determination of those attempting secession. These conflicts exist with or without oil, but in the case of the Caucasus, both in Karabagh and Chechenia, they can be seen to be a part of a bigger game directly linked to petroleum routes. Almost all the articles point to these truths in some way.

It is the job of every author to cull information from data and to present it to the readers as knowledge or information. This is attempted almost

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after every newscast in which the "analysts" give their spin on the important occurrences of the day. These are almost always tinged with political rhetoric because it is impossible for these analyses not to be a part of a wider world-view. As part of the world, this book could be expected to be subjected to the laws of the universe. In that sense the existence of representatives of ethnic groups and polities which are not well known in the West is a feature and not a bug. We should hear from the Azeris, the Chechens, the Abkhazians, and the Georgians. The Caucasus might still be apart from the West, but it has started to pass into the consciousness of the West and the world, and this book has made great contributions to that endeavor. As a Caucasian born in a refugee camp after World War Two, I am happy to see the Caucasus enter into the conscience of the world, and of course, specifically the West, since not only the Great Game but all games are played there. Even if all games are not played there, certainly almost all the referees come from there.

PS. After the conference a small controversy erupted because of Henze's articles on Abkhazia. Thanks to modern information technology, it can be found in a jiffy at <http://www.abkhazia.org/henze19980430.html>. If you do visit this site and read the articles there you might as well hop over to the books's homepage at : <http://www.turkiye.net/sota/caucbook.htm>.

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