





HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ И МЕТОДЫ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОГО ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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Russia and the Central Caucasus in Soviet and Modern Scientific Discourse: from “Colonialism” to Russian Statehood

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Abstract: The authors consider the problem of the Central Caucasus peoples’ joining Russia in Soviet and modern historiography. The purpose is to determine the main trends of the regional segment of Soviet historiography which remain relevant in the modern discourse, and to present the modern vector of research of the problem under consideration. There is given the periodization of the Soviet historiography. It is revealed that in the 1930s the formula of “absolute evil” was replaced by that of “the lesser evil” from the point of view of non-Russian peoples’ joining Russia. In the 1950s, there was taken a course to substantiate the progressive role of non-Russian peoples’ joining Russia and there appeared the idea of the voluntary nature of their joining. The article shows the fate of those historians who could not unconditionally accept the change in the research paradigm. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of modern historiography; its fundamental difference from the Soviet one is shown – the study of the issue without any ideological guidelines and its transfer exclusively into a scientific plane. The motive for addressing the problem is the research interest in the modernization processes of the post-reform period. As a result of the multifaceted research, there has been revised the assessment of the role of the socio-cultural institutions that served the goals of the peaceful conquest of the Central Caucasus peoples, and their positive role has been identified.

Keywords: Russian-North Caucasian relations, colonial policy, formation of Russian statehood and identity

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Россия и Центральный Кавказ в советском и современном научном дискурсе: от «колониализма» до российской государственности

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Аннотация: Рассмотрена проблема присоединения народов Центрального Кавказа к России в советской и современной историографии. Цель заключается в определении основных тенденций регионального сегмента советской историографии, которые остаются актуальными в современном дискурсе, и в представлении современного вектора исследования обозначенной проблемы. Дана периодизация историографии советского периода. Выявлено, что в 1930-е гг. произошла замена формулы «абсолютного зла» на формулу «наименьшего зла» с точки зрения присоединения нерусских народов к России. В 1950-е гг. был взят курс на обоснование прогрессивной роли присоединения нерусских народов, и появилась идея добровольного характера их присоединения. Показана судьба тех историков, которые не смогли безоговорочно принять смену исследовательской парадигмы. Отдельное внимание получил анализ современной историографии; показано ее принципиальное отличие от советской – исследование вопроса без каких-либо идеологических установок и перевод его исключительно в научную плоскость. Мотивом обращения к проблеме является исследовательский интерес к модернизационным процессам пореформенного времени. В результате многоаспектных исследований пересмотрена оценка роли социально-культурных институций, которые служили целям мирного покорения народов Центрального Кавказа, выявлена их позитивная роль.

Ключевые слова: русско-северокавказские отношения, колониальная политика, формирование российской государственности и идентичности

Благодарности и финансирование: исследование выполнено в рамках Программы научных исследований этнокультурного многообразия российского общества и направленных на укрепление российской идентичности, 2023–2025 гг. (руководитель академик РАН В.А. Тишков) – ГЗ СОИГСИ ВНИЦ РАН – № – 123090800006-3.

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Introduction

Relevance. The relevance of the issue is due to its high social significance in the context of intensifying geopolitical confrontation between Russia, the United States and the “collective” West. The main idea of the political elite of the unfriendly states associated with the dreams of destroying Russia “from within”, as well as the “liberation” of its peoples is embodied by the activation of the theme of “decolonization” launched by the opponents of the Russian Federation in the wide media space. The North Caucasus has traditionally been the object of special attention; therefore, many resources are involved in broadcasting to the region, calling on “freedom-loving highlanders” to fight for freedom, to refuse to participate in the Special Military Operation, and to support the Kyiv regime. An open challenge to national security, all-Russian statehood and identity, the soli-

clarity of Russians requires reaction from the scientific community, above all, since the promotion of the ideas of “decolonization” is based on the historical narrative. In modern public discourse, there are selectively used the studies of Soviet historiography devoted to the long and complex process of Russian-Caucasian interaction; the nature and timing of the region peoples’ joining Russia are traditionally questioned.

The destruction of harmful practices that negatively affect society requires the updating of scientific discourse, the return of the problem from the political agenda to the scientific one. The discourse of “decolonization,” scientific and public, has its own history and it is not the first time that it has been included in the political agenda.

Elaboration of the problem. The early Soviet period of the research into the problem of the North Caucasus peoples’ joining Russia was formed in the ideology of total criticism of autocracy; the concept of “absolute evil” inflicted by the Russian Empire on all “conquered” peoples fitted well into this ideology. This leading position was developed by the school of M.N. Pokrovsky, who played a major role in the development of regional historical science. In the North Caucasus, Russia’s “colonial” policy was studied by G.A. Kokiev, B.V. Skitsky, B.A. Gardanov, M.S. Totoev and other historians. Not all of them could rethink their views on the problem when this was required by a sharp change in ideological attitudes in 1936 and the emergence of a new directive that replaced the concept of “absolute evil” with “lesser evil.”

From the middle of the XX century the methodology for studying Russian-Caucasian relations was changing, which is evident in the terminology. The terms “colonization” and “conquest” gave way to “entry” and “joining.” The next stage of the research into the problem of Russian-Caucasian relations was marked by discussions about the timing of the region peoples’ joining Russia, which historian M.M. Bliev considered conceptually important, as a key position determining the nature of the entire process.

The purpose of the research is to determine the main trends in the study of the problem of the North Caucasus peoples’ joining Russia, relevant in modern discourse. The stated goal determines a number of tasks related to the stages of the development of domestic social science, and then historical science in general and Caucasus studies in particular.

The source base is the works of Soviet and modern authors on the problems of Russian-Caucasian relations. The article presents for the first time a historiographical overview of modern studies on various aspects of Russian-North Caucasian interaction focused on the socio-cultural consequences of the region peoples’ joining Russia.

Influence of M.N. Pokrovsky’s concept of “absolute evil” on regional history

In the early Soviet historiography of the problems of non-Russian peoples’ joining Russia, the leading position was occupied by the school of M.N. Pokrovsky. The historian was one of the first to put forward the concept of “absolute evil” inflicted on all non-Russian peoples which were forcibly joined to Russia and turned into its colonies¹. This concept was quite popular and attracted many supporters who developed M.N. Pokrovsky’s ideas on regional material.

One of the prominent representatives of M.N. Pokrovsky’s school was Georgy Alexandrovich Kokiev, doctor of historical sciences, who from 1929 taught a course on the history of the Caucasus at Moscow State University and headed the sector of the history of the XX century at the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Having studied in detail the process of the establishment of Russian-North Caucasian re-

¹ M.N. Pokrovskiy, *Zavoevanie Kavkaza. Diplomatiia i voiny tsarskoi Rossii v XIX stoletii* [Conquest of the Caucasus. Diplomacy and wars of tsarist Russia in the XIX century] (Moscow: Krasnaia nov’ Publ., 1923).

lations, G.A. Kokiev identified “colonial measures,” which, as he believed, constituted “the internal mechanism of Russian colonial policy.” They included as follows: the introduction of class differentiation into highland societies, which made it easier for Russia to strengthen its influence on peasant masses; involvement of highlanders in the sphere of trade and capitalist relations in Russia; amanatism, which forced highlanders to submit to Russia; resettlement of the highlanders for the purpose of their Russification on Russian territory, in the Russian environment; inciting national antagonism among highland peoples in order to weaken them physically and economically; bribery of highland feudal lords, representatives of other privileged classes, elders with the aim of turning them into active conductors of “colonial activities of the metropolis”; missionary work, which played a very important role in the general system of Russian colonial policy in terms of ideological and political enslavement of the highlanders; organization of the Caucasian military line with the aim of weakening the highlanders economically and physically².

In the processes of Russian-North Caucasian interaction G.A. Kokiev identifies the period from the end of the XVIII century to the middle of the XIX century as a defensive-colonial one, when there was defense of the borders and a simultaneous advance of a military line across enemy territory, the settlement of the lands newly occupied from the highlanders by the Cossack population. He considered the Sevastopol campaign as the beginning of a new period aimed at the complete colonization of the region³. G.A. Kokiev saw serious differences between the old defensive system of “Russian colonization” and the new system of A.I. Baryatinsky, which assumed “an active offensive of the Russian army along the entire front with a broad and clearly defined plan for the colonization of the entire region by natives of central Russia.”⁴

The defensive nature of Russian-Caucasian interaction until the beginning of the XIX century was also noted by M.N. Pokrovsky, but he focused on the economic conquest of the Caucasus through its colonization.

Among the “colonial measures” noted by G.A. Kokiev, there is indicated the establishment of close contacts with local political elites using bribery in the form of gifts and officer ranks which he considered one of the cornerstones of the policy of Catherine the Great⁵.

As another method of Russian colonial policy, the scientist considered the desire of the tsarist authorities to destroy the national languages, customs and traditions of the Caucasus peoples. G.A. Kokiev quoted a letter from Astrakhan governor, Major General P.N. Krechetnikov to Catherine the Great:

In order to reject their languages and customs, I consider it necessary to deploy garrisons in the highlands and let both soldiers’ daughters and soldiers marry highlanders, and thus eliminate their languages and customs⁶.

He considered that the ultimate goal of Russia was “the complete dissolution of the North Caucasus highlanders in the Russian population...”⁷ The conversion of the population of Ossetia to Christianity was also seen as an instrument of complete subjugation, and “mastery of the country’s mountain and mineral wealth,” the opening of the first

² G.A. Kokiev, *Metody kolonialnoi politiki tsarskoi Rossii na Severnom Kavkaze v 18 veke. Istoriia Kabardino-Balkarii v trudakh G.A. Kokieva. Sbornik statei i dokumentov* [Methods of Tsarist Russia's Colonial Policy in the North Caucasus in the 18th Century. Collection of Articles and Documents] (Nalchik: Yel-Fa Publ., 2005).

³ G.A. Kokiev, *Voенно-kolonizatsionnaia politika tsarizma na Kavkaze. Istoriia Kabardino-Balkarii v trudakh G.A. Kokieva. Sbornik statei i dokumentov* [The military-colonization policy of tsarism in the Caucasus] (Nalchik: Yel-Fa Publ., 2005).

⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁷ Ibid., 91.

school in Mozdok, where children were taught Russian and Ossetian literacy and scripture, as a means of colonial policy.

The scientist does not see any positive significance of the North Caucasus peoples' joining Russia in any of these measures. In his assessments, G.A. Kokiev was the most radical researcher of Russian-Caucasian relations, but his authority as the only professional historian in Ossetia contributed to the development of such ideas.

Change of the ideological and research paradigm: the concept of “lesser evil”

In the mid-1930s, there was a transition to the integrating course of the internal national policy, to the construction of a new national identity and to unity around the Russian people. The change in internal policy was accompanied by a broad campaign to revise the pre-revolutionary history of Russia, in particular, to reassess the relationship with the national outskirts. In 1936, the decision of the jury of the government commission for holding the contest for the best textbook on the history of the USSR outlined a new approach to the study of the problem of the country peoples' joining Russia; in particular, there emerged a recommendation to replace “absolute evil” (M.N. Pokrovsky) with “lesser evil.” The national policy of tsarism was recognized as “evil,” but the process of non-Russian peoples' joining Russia was considered as “lesser evil” or benefit that was brought into the lives of non-Russian peoples. For the Central Caucasus, the concept of the “lesser evil” also meant that, compared to the oppression of the Persians or Turks, joining Russia was the “lesser evil.” Over time, the formula of “lesser evil” received universal application when judging different peoples' joining Russia.

The result of the organized discussions accompanied by revealing actions was not only a sharp reassessment of many historical events, adaptation to the new ideological guidelines, but also persecution of historians who were not ready to rethink the established concepts, that is they made a “gross political mistake.” In 1949, G.A. Kokiev was arrested and convicted on a false denunciation “for anti-Soviet agitation and illegal possession of firearms”; he died in prison from a heart attack. Famous historian Boris Vasilyevich Skitsky who studied certain aspects of the “colonial policy” of tsarism in Ossetia was accused of “bourgeois nationalism”; his book “Anthology on the History of Ossetia” was removed, allegedly due to the idealization of patriarchal-feudal relations and a biased selection of sources. In 1953, unable to withstand the unfair persecution, B.V. Skitsky became seriously ill and left the republic⁸.

Prominent Ossetian historian Mikhail Soslanbekovich Totoev was subjected to severe pressure. He tried to defend his vision of the nature and periodization of the process of Ossetia' joining Russia, to give his assessment of the mass popular uprisings in Ossetia in 1830. However, the directive which appeared in the 1950s to evaluate them “as reactionary-nationalist anti-Russian actions of a part of the Ossetian feudal lords, whose goal was to separate Ossetia from Russia” seemed unfair to M.S. Totoev. Confident in his assessments, the historian decided to appeal to the North Ossetian Regional Committee of the CPSU with the substantiation of his scientific position and a request to reconsider the ideological guidelines. M.S. Totoev was forced to admit his mistakes; otherwise the Resolution of the regional committee of the CPSU “On the incorrect behavior of Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor M.S. Totoev” could have had other consequences⁹.

⁸ I.T. Corieva, “‘Razzhigal strast k poznaniiu istorii...’: Boris Vasilevich Skitskin. Chelovek. Uchenyi. Pedagog [‘Kindled a passion for the knowledge of history...’: Boris Vasilyevich Skitsky. Person. Scientist. Pedagogue],” *Izvestiya SOIGSI*, no. 18 (2015): 103–109.

⁹ I.T. Corieva, “Person. Scientist. Pedagogue (To the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Mikhail Soslanbekovich Totoev),” *Bulletin of North Ossetian State University named after K.L. Khetagurov*, no. 3 (2010): 136–141.

In subsequent years, M.S. Totoev continued to study the problems of Russian-Ossetian relations, Ossetia' joining Russia, focusing his efforts on the influence of Russian culture on Ossetians, the development of cultural ties between Russians and Ossetians, and identification of the role of Russian culture in the formation of the Ossetian scientific and creative intelligentsia.

This theme fitted well into the ideological guidelines of the early 1950s, when there was a tendency towards a more detailed study of the consequences of non-Russian peoples' joining Russia, the progressive role of this process was outlined, and the idea of the voluntary nature of the joining emerged. The new approach was based on the thesis that "despite the colonial nature of tsarism policies," joining Russia also had positive consequences.

Periodization of Russian-Caucasian relations

In the context of national policy aimed at further bringing nations closer together and achieving their complete unity, in historical science of the early 1950s the concept of "voluntary joining" received considerable attention. There emerged more expansive interpretation of the progressive significance of non-Russian peoples' joining Russia. The terms "colonization," "conquest," "subjugation" disappeared from regional history; they were replaced with definitions that reflect a new view of the problem.

M.M. Bliiev who made a great contribution to the study of the problem of Russian-Caucasian relations considered the term "joining" to be the most accurate and productive for science; it allows "regarding historical events comprehensively, in all their complexity and inconsistency."¹⁰ He also believed that the concept of "voluntary joining" does not correspond to the complexity of the historical process of all non-Russian peoples; but at the same time he noted the wrongfulness of ignoring the efforts of those social forces that consciously sought to include their peoples in the Russian economic, political, cultural space¹¹.

Such initiatives of non-Russian peoples did not fit into the concepts of either "absolute" or "lesser evil." The punitive expeditions, in particular in 1830 in Ossetia, interfered with the promotion of ideas of the voluntary nature of joining. M.M. Bliiev substantiated these contradictions by the periodization of Russian-Caucasian relations highlighting two periods in their history: the establishment of relations and the Caucasus peoples' joining Russia, and the establishment of the Russian military-administrative apparatus which turned the region into the territory of the Russian Empire, with the involvement of the peoples of the region in the liberation struggle. According to M.M. Bliiev,

Such periodization dividing a single process into its component parts keeps the researcher from confusing two historical phenomena which were far from identical: the Caucasus joining Russia and the establishment of the military-administrative apparatus¹².

It should be noted that this "confusion" occupies a fairly strong position in Caucasus studies.

M.N. Pokrovsky and G.A. Kokiev also pointed out the significant difference between the initial, defensive period and aggressive colonization "by force of arms," but M.M. Bliiev paid special attention to the timing of the North Caucasus peoples' joining Russia, considering it conceptually important for further research of the problem as a whole. In 1970, the scientist devoted a special article to the chronology of the problem under

¹⁰ M.M. Bliiev, "O nekotorykh problemakh prisoedinenia narodov Kavkaza k Rossii [On Some Problems of the Accession of the Peoples of the Caucasus to Russia]," *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 6 (1991): 67–84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, 83.

consideration “On the timing of the North Caucasus peoples’ joining Russia”¹³. Disagreeing with B.V. Skitsky’s opinion concerning the adoption of Russian citizenship by Ossetian regions at different times (from 1815 to 1830), with the timing by M.S. Totoev (1830), as well as with the opinion of other authors who considered the punitive expeditions of generals P. Rennenkampf and I. Abkhazov as the date of the final establishment of Russian power, M.M. Bliiev offered his perspective on the problem.

Based on the documents he discovered, as well as the published works, the scientist concluded that the issue of Ossetia’s joining Russia was resolved after the conclusion of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774 and the Russian-Ossetian negotiations in Mozdok. It is this date that is considered to be the date of Ossetia’s official joining Russia.

Responding to his opponents, M.M. Bliiev relied on the following historical narrative. In 1749, the embassy was sent from Ossetia to St. Petersburg to discuss the issue of Ossetia’s joining Russia, which at that time was obliged to comply with the Treaty of Belgrade, in particular, the neutrality of the territory of the Central Caucasus. In October 1774, after the victory in the war and the conclusion of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, in Mozdok there were held Russian-Ossetian negotiations and the agreement was reached, according to which the Ossetians received the right to resettle on the foothills, guarantees of external security, the right of “free passage” and free trade on the Russian border; and the embassy let Russia “use the mountains freely” and “allowed the export of poly-metallic ores from Ossetia.”¹⁴

M.M. Bliiev believed that in order to determine the date of the North-West Caucasus peoples’ joining Russia, such aspects as the timing of approval of the Russian administration, private initiatives, including letters from individual highland princes, of which there were many, do not matter; one should proceed from the main factors of interaction between the peoples of the North Caucasus and Russia. The desire to avoid external danger and to establish trade and economic ties was the basis for the Central and North-Eastern Caucasus peoples’ (Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya) joining Russia in the 1770–1780s. Dagestan’s joining in 1813 essentially ended the first stage in the history of relations between the peoples of the North Caucasus and Russia¹⁵. As the peculiarity of the second stage, M.M. Bliiev considered the establishment of the military-administrative apparatus in the North Caucasus using harsh methods, which caused protests of the local population.

M.M. Bliiev considered the outlined stages as different historical events and the disregard of the periodization of Russian-Caucasian relations proposed by him as the cause of insoluble contradictions and grave mistakes in covering the history of the North Caucasus peoples.

When assessing the historiography of the problem of non-Russian peoples’ joining Russia in the 1990s, M.M. Bliiev noted that it began to be viewed in the context of political separatism that engulfed the Soviet republics, with the disregard of all positive consequences of the joining. The scientist called for transferring the discussion of the problem from the socio-political discourse to the academic one, recalling both the complexity of the historical phenomena associated with the joining process and the significance of the socio-economic and political consequences of this process¹⁶.

From colonial policy to Russian statehood

A new stage in the history of the study of Russian-North Caucasian relations is considered in the paradigm of Russian statehood and all-Russian identity. Its distinctive feature is a detailed study of Russian policy aimed at spreading and strengthening the

¹³ M.M. Bliiev, “K voprosu o prisoedinenii narodov Severnogo Kavkaza k Rossii [On the Question of the Accession of the Peoples of the North Caucasus to Russia],” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 7 (1970): 43–56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

¹⁶ M.M. Bliiev, “O nekotorykh problemakh,” 68.

foundations of all-Russian identity in the Central Caucasus, identifying the consequences of the region integration into the Russian economic, socio-political and cultural space. These consequences clearly manifested themselves in the post-reform period and at the beginning of the XX century, which can be considered as one of the motives for researchers' active addressing to this period.

In the two volumes of "History of Ossetia": "History of Ossetia from ancient times to the end of the XVIII century" and "History of Ossetia in the XIX – early XX century," there were considered the socio-economic, political, confessional and cultural aspects of the development of Ossetia as part of the Russian Empire. The authors proposed a new vision of the processes of the region integration into the administrative-state system of Russia, the post-reform period and the beginning of the XX century as a stage of economic, social and cultural modernization of Ossetian society¹⁷.

In E.I. Kobakhidze's monograph " 'Not just by force of arms..' Ossetia in late XVIII – early XX centuries: the experience of historical interaction between traditional and public administration," there was conducted a comprehensive study of the interaction between traditional and public administration systems in Ossetia in the course of its integration into the territorial-administrative and political-legal system of the Russian Empire. For the first time in domestic historiography, the established traditional system of public self-government becomes an independent object of study which is considered as a complexly organized, multi-level, multi-component, hierarchically structured system characterized by internal dynamism. As a result, there were determined universal principles of the self-organization of society; there is shown the social symbolism of the patriarchal institutions of self-government; there are identified the main qualitative properties of public authority, its functional ambivalence and conditioning by a specific social context¹⁸.

In "History of Ossetia in the XIX – early XX century," it is confessional and cultural policies and the formation of the national intelligentsia as a conductor of Russian culture that are considered as social and cultural factors in strengthening Russian statehood and identity.

The government considered the Orthodox missionary activity to be the main instrument of political influence on the highlanders of the North Caucasus and had high hopes for the Orthodox missions created for these purposes, which became the basis for Soviet historians to regard the church as a method of colonization. At the same time, the activities of the Orthodox missions are reasonably recognized by modern researchers as an effective mechanism for the formation of Russian statehood and all-Russian identity, in particular in Ossetia. The specific factors in the influence of the Orthodox Church on socio-political and cultural processes were the construction of churches and development of parish life, the opening of schools and spread of literacy, the formation of the Ossetian church intelligentsia and implementation of its educational projects. Orthodoxy for Ossetians is not only the "word of God," it is the first school, the first printed book, the first magazine, the Russian language, and a fairly high level of education. For the first time, an objective assessment of the role of Orthodoxy was presented in a number of dis-

¹⁷ *Istoriia Osetii s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVIII veka* [History of Ossetia from ancient times to the end of the XVIII century] (Vladikavkaz: SOIGSI Publ., 2012); *Istoriia Osetii v XIX – nachale XX veka* [History of Ossetia in the XIX – early XX century] (Vladikavkaz: SOIGSI Publ., 2012).

¹⁸ E.I. Kobakhidze, and S.A. Aylarova, 'Ne edinou siloiu oruzhiia...' *Osetii kontsa XVIII – nachala XX vv.: opyt istoricheskogo vzaimodeistviia traditsionnogo i gosudarstvenno-administrativnogo upravleniia* ["Not by force of arms alone..." Ossetia at the end of the XVIII – the beginning of the XX centuries: the experience of historical interaction of traditional and state-administrative management] (Vladikavkaz: IPO SOIGSI Publ., 2010).

sertations¹⁹ and articles²⁰. A major role in the process of establishing statehood belonged to the Russian school which implemented not only educational, but also ideological and consolidating functions in the Ossetian society. In Ossetia, the need of a better education became a mass phenomenon²¹.

E.I. Kobakhidze and B.V. Tuaeua revealed in the monograph that the positive motivation for mastering the Russian language by local communities, for which both the Russian language and education in general became important tools for mastering a new social context, was due to the following circumstances. Firstly, for the highlanders the Russian language was a powerful resource for socialization in the overall imperial space; secondly, mastering the Russian language opened up the possibility of enhancing their own social status, and, finally, the need for mastering the state language that was formed in the local environment was, in fact, an adaptive reaction to the new social challenges smoothing down the costs of imperial unification²².

The degree of assimilation of social and cultural innovations was largely determined by the level of society urbanization. The founding of Vladikavkaz was a consequence of the establishment of Russian-North Caucasian relations, therefore its history and culture are studied in the broad context of this problem²³. A number of monographs and articles by B.V. Tuaeua are devoted to the study of the socio-cultural environment of the towns of the North Caucasus as an important factor in Russian-Caucasian interaction. The monograph *Lokalnaia istoriia: osobennosti kulturnoi i obshchestvennoi zhizni gorodov Severnogo Kavkaza vo vtoroi polovine XIX – pervoi treti XX vekov* [Local history: Features of cultural and social life of the cities of the North Caucasus in the second half of the XIX – the first third of the XX centuries] analyzes the role of urbanization in the history of the North Caucasus and examines a provincial town as a factor in the formation of the economic and cultural policy of the Russian state in the XIX – early XX century²⁴.

A considerable number of works are devoted to the formation of the national intelligentsia in the North Caucasus and its role as a conductor of Russian policy through economic, social, administrative, legal, artistic culture and education. In the era of post-reform modernization, a social stratum emerged in the region represented by professional groups actively involved in various types of professional, social, cultural and educational

¹⁹ F.R. Biragova, “Church Intelligentsia in Ossetia in the Second Half of the XIX – the Beginning of the XX Centuries Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Historical Sciences,” PhD diss., North Ossetian State University, 2003.

²⁰ Z.V. Kanukova, “Pravoslavie v formirovanii rossiiskoi gosudarstvennosti i obshcherossiiskoi identichnosti v Osetii (konets XVIII – nachalo XX v.) [Orthodoxy in the formation of Russian statehood and All-Russian identity in Ossetia (the end of the XVIII – the beginning of the XX century)],” *Izvestiya SOIGSI*, no. 20 (2016): 40–50.

²¹ K.R. Dzalaeva, “Russkaia shkola kak osnovnoi mekhanizm utverzheniia obshcherossiiskoi identichnosti v Osetii vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX v. [Russian school as the main mechanism of assertion of All-Russian identity in Ossetia in the second half of the XIX – early XX century],” *Izvestiya SOIGSI*, no. 21 (2016): 47–54.

²² E.I. Kobakhidze, and B.V. Tuaeua, *Russkii iazyk v sotsiokul'turnykh transformatsiakh na Severnom Kavkaze (vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)* [The Russian language in socio-cultural transformations in the North Caucasus (the second half of the XIX – the beginning of the XX century)] (Vladikavkaz: IPO SOIGSI Publ., 2023).

²³ Z.V. Kanukova, *Staryi Vladikavkaz. Istoriko-etnologicheskoe issledovanie* [Old Vladikavkaz. Historical and ethnological research] (Vladikavkaz: SOIGSI Publ., 2002).

²⁴ B.V. Tuaeua, *Lokalnaia istoriia: osobennosti kulturnoi i obshchestvennoi zhizni gorodov Severnogo Kavkaza vo vtoroi polovine XIX – pervoi treti XX vekov* [Local history: Features of cultural and social life of the cities of the North Caucasus in the second half of the XIX – the first third of the XX centuries] (Vladikavkaz: IPO SOIGSI Publ., 2010).

activities. They identify the conditions for the formation of this social stratum, propose a classification of the intelligentsia by professional groups, and determine the main types of its activities. Particular attention is paid to the role of the intelligentsia in the processes of interethnic communication, which is an independent factor in strengthening Russian statehood and identity²⁵. The emergence of the intelligentsia in the second half of the XIX century is considered to be the result of the region's involvement in the system of the all-Russian market, urbanization, increased social mobility and integration into the Russian socio-cultural space²⁶.

Based on a wide range of diverse sources, S.A. Aylarova and E.I. Kobakhidze conducted a study of the political and socio-cultural aspects of the transformation of highland society in late XVIII – early XX century in terms of the possibilities of its adaptation to external modernizing changes identified, among other things, through the prism of social consciousness and socio-political thought. There were analyzed various aspects of the government's administrative practice in line with the "unification" policy, and the complexity and inconsistency of the processes of imperial unification in the sphere of management were shown. There were identified the main problems and creative dominants in the heritage of the North Caucasian intelligentsia of the period under study, determined by the search for nationally oriented development of the region, ensuring the economic and cultural prosperity of the region, while relying on the vital interests of the highland peasantry²⁷.

Conclusions

The main trends in the regional segment of Soviet historiography updated in modern discourse are the timing of the Central Caucasus' joining Russia, the nature of this process and the methods of colonial policy of the Russian Empire studied during the Soviet period within the framework of the concepts of "absolute"/"lesser" evil, revised in the second half of the XX century within the framework of a new methodology for the history of Russian-Caucasian relations.

In modern regional historiography, a new direction is emerging – the study of socio-cultural aspects of Russian-North Caucasian relations.

As a result of the multifaceted studies of the region's post-reform modernization, there was revised the assessment of socio-cultural institutions that served the purposes of the non-military conquest of the North Caucasus peoples, and there was revealed their positive role.

The Orthodox missions and such forms of urban culture as theatre, libraries, museums, cultural and educational societies, educational institutions that expanded the social functions of the Russian language are considered as effective factors in strengthening Russian statehood in the era of post-reform modernization of the Central Caucasus in the second half of the XIX century – early XX century.

²⁵ Ye.Sh. Gutieva, *Sotsiokul'turnoe razvitie poreformennoi Osetii (vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX v.)* [Socio-cultural development of post-reform Ossetia (the second half of the XIX – the beginning of the XX century)] (Vladikavkaz: IPC SOIGSI Publ., 2013).

²⁶ K.R. Dzalaeva, *Formirovanie rossiiskoi gosudarstvennosti i obshcherossiiskoi identichnosti na Severnom Kavkaze v XIX – nachale XX veka* [Formation of Russian statehood and All-Russian identity in the North Caucasus in the XIX – early XX century] (Vladikavkaz: SOIGSI VNC RAN Publ., 2017).

²⁷ S.A. Aylarova, and E.I. Kobakhidze, *'Budushchie deti Rossii...' Problema integratsii v administrativnoi praktike i obshchestvennom soznanii (Tsentralnyi Kavkaz kontsa XVIII – nachala XX vv.)* ['The Future Children of Russia...' The Problem of integration in administrative practice and in public consciousness (Central Caucasus of the late XVIII – early XX centuries)] (Vladikavkaz: IPO SOIGSI Publ., 2011).

It should be noted that the study of the socio-cultural aspects of Russian-North Caucasian relations was formed without any ideological guidelines; the motive for addressing the problem is research interest in the modernization processes of the post-reform era.

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