

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Ayse Dietrich, Ph.D.

CAUCASUS HISTORY – Religion

Overview

From paganism to monotheistic religions, the peoples of the Caucasus practiced many forms of religion for centuries.

The peoples of the Northern and Southern Caucasus were either Eastern Orthodox Christians, Oriental Orthodox Christians, Shiah or Sunni Muslims.

Islam arrived in the Caucasus in the 17th century with Arab invaders who swept in along the Caspian Sea coast from the south. For five hundred years, Islam spread throughout Central Asia and along the Volga, but not deeper into the South Caucasus. The Mongols of the Golden Horde spread Islam in the North Caucasus in the 13th century.

Christianity is present in the Transcaucasus in various forms. The main Christian sects in the region are the Georgian Orthodox church and the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox church. The Ossetians are by a large majority Orthodox Christians. Christianity was strengthened when the Georgians and Armenians created their own alphabets in the 4th century.

There was a split between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church when the Georgian Orthodox Church turned toward Byzantium, and the Armenians stayed separate. The Armenians rejected the formulation on the dual nature of Christ agreed on by theologians at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. They argue instead that Christ was only one person with two natures, divine and human. This split drew the Georgians closer to the Greek world and aligned the Armenians more with the other Christian churches of the Middle East. The Armenians maintained links with the Syrians, Ethiopians and Copts and kept a foothold in Jerusalem after the Muslims conquered it in the 17th century.

Under the Soviets, as soon as the Civil War ended, the Bolsheviks allowed *Komsomol* (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) to carry out antireligious campaigns. For them, religion was closely identified with nationality and the bond between the religion and the nationality practicing it, the size of the religious community, and the willingness of the nations to subordinate itself to political authority was a determining factor for the implementation of policy toward a particular religion.

The Soviet regime carried out severe purges among Church officials and executed constant repression against Orthodox worship. Over a thousand churches were closed or destroyed.

During World War II, the Soviets reopened the churches and mosques and used religion in their struggle against German fascism in 1943.

After independence, all the Caucasus states provided freedom of religion and guaranteed respect and equal treatment of all religious denominations. The separation of church and state was established.

ANCIENT PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS - PAGANISM AND ZOROASTRIANISM

GEORGIA: The ancient Georgians were pagan, and worshiped multiple deities and idols. A new religion, *Zoroastrianism* arrived in the Kingdom of Iberia in the 2nd Century BCE from Persia.

ARMENIA: The religion of Urartu was polytheistic. Local people worshiped the forces of nature such as wood as a symbol of life.



During the Achaemenid Empire, under the impact of Persian culture, *Zoroastrianism* began to spread in the region.

The Armenian cross-stones (*khachkars*) carry a fiery Zoroastrian sun-circle beneath the cross.

AZERBAIJAN: Polytheistic idolatry, fire-worshipping, Zoroastrianism and polytheism all existed until Islam arrived in Azerbaijan.

Zoroastrianism: Zoroastrianism lasted from the 6th century BCE to the 7th century AD. Atropatena became the center of Zoroastrianism. One Zoroastrian temple has been found in Ganzak, the capital of Atropatena.

NORTH CAUCASUS:

CHECHNYA: The Vainakh people practiced a mix of animism, totemism, paganism and, later, Zoroastrianism. Animism is the most ancient religion, dating back to the Palaeolithic Age. The Vainakh practiced clan totemism where the clan was identified with a natural object.

Paganism: The paganism in the Vainakh society was a mixture of animism, totemism and polytheism that dated back to the Neolithic Age. Paganism lasted until the 16th century.

Questions:

- 1- Does Caucasian Christianity still carry traces of Zoroastrianism?
- 2-What would motivate a people to abandon their ancestral beliefs and adopt a foreign religion?

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POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS:

GEORGIA: Persian Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism) and Georgian Paganism were the official religion in Kartli when Christianity appeared in Georgia. By the early 4th century, Christianity was proclaimed as the state religion of Iberia (eastern Georgia). In the 4th century, first the Queen of Iberia and then King Mirian were converted to Christianity by St. Nino. With the adoption of Christianity, the Georgian alphabet was invented and the Bible was translated into Georgian in the 5th century. All of Western Georgia became Christian in the 5th century. Abkhazia and Lazica were Christianized in the 6th century.

By the 7th century, the Georgian and Armenian churches split and followed different church doctrines. Also, the Islam introduced by the Arabs affected Georgian cultural and political life for the next 1,300 years. Georgia became an autonomous vassal state of the Arab caliphate in the second half of the 7th century.

In the same century, the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church (founded in the 1st century) was administered by two ecclesiastical units under the jurisdiction of Constantinople: the Metropoly of Phasis and the Archdiocese of Sebastopolis, and the liturgy was conducted in Greek. It was in the 8th and 9th centuries that the language of the liturgy became Georgian.

ARMENIA: Christianity arrived in Armenia in the 1st century. Trdat the Great declared Christianity as the official religion of Armenia and founded the Armenian Apostolic Church in 301.

At the beginning, the liturgy in the Armenian Church was conducted in Greek and Syriac. There was a need to create an alphabet to understand church practices and the Armenian alphabet was created in 405 by Mesrop Mashtots.

In the middle of the 5th century, the Sassanians, having perceived the acceptance of Christianity to be a direct threat to their domestic and geopolitical interests, forced the Armenians to convert to Zoroastrianism. The Sassanians' relations with Armenia deteriorated and they began to conduct campaigns to destroy the Armenian church. They appointed a *marzpan* (governor) to Armenia in 428, introduced new taxes, terminated the tax-free status of the church and appointed a *mogpet* (Zoroastrian religious leader) to the supreme court. Pro-Byzantine nakharars and the church leaders organized riots against the Sassanians and also requested military assistance from the Byzantine Emperor, but they received no support. After that, the Armenian Apostolic Church was separated from the Byzantine Orthodox Church and became fully independent.

The Arabs implemented a tolerant policy towards the Armenian Christians. With the creation vassal principalities in 862, Armenia began to enjoy administrative and ecclesiastical autonomy.

Under the Mongols, the Armenian church enjoyed a privileged status. However, with the conversion of the Mongol elite to Islam in the late 13th century, the Armenian Church and the Christian faith came under attack.



The Karakoyunlu rulers were tolerant towards the Armenians and the ruler Jihanshah allowed the See of the Armenian Apostolic Catholicos to be moved from Cilicia to Yerevan in 1441.

AZERBAIJAN:

Christianity: In 4th century, *Christianity* was expanding at a fast rate in the western and the northern parts of Caucasian Albania. The autocephalic Albanian Church was founded in the 6th century continued

to exist till 1836.

Zoroastrianism

In Caucasian Albania *Zoroastrianism* exerted strong influence over the region. Some of the population refused to convert to Christianity and continued to practice *Zoroastrianism*, although some of them adopted Christianity.

To increase its influence in the region, the Russian Empire abolished the independent Albanian Church and united the Albanian Patriarchate with the Armenian Church.



Islam: *Islam* was introduced in Azerbaijan during the conquest of the Arabs in the 7th century. With the arrival of the Seljuks in the 11th century, Sunni Islam began to spread its influence in Azerbaijan, especially in Mughan, Mil, and in the territory of the Caspian Sea.

During the Mongol invasion, between the 13th and the 15th centuries, *Sufism* began to spread its influence in the region. However, in the 16th century, the Safavid Dynasty took power in Persia and declared Shia Islam as their state religion. When they established their control over Azerbaijan, Shia Islam began to exert its influence in the region. The majority of the population converted to Shia Islam in Azerbaijan, while a portion of the population remained Sunni.

Hurufism: A new sect of Sufism, *Hurufism* appeared in the late 14th-early 15th centuries in Azerbaijan. Hurufis claimed that the Koran should be interpreted via a system of letters, and the number 7 was considered sacred.

NORTH CAUCASUS:

CHECHNYA: The pre-Islamic Vainakh had an eclectic religion and believed in a plethora of deities. They adapted many religious beliefs from animism, totemism, paganism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam.

Zoroastrianism: The Vainakhs practiced pagan customs till the 16th century. Later, under Persian influence, Zoroastrianism dominated the region.

Christianity: By the 6th century some Chechens had converted to Christianity under the influence of Georgian Orthodox missionaries who were trying to spread Christianity among the Nakh peoples. They were able to convert some highland teips, and Christian influence reached its peak in the 12th century. However, after the Mongol conquest of Georgia, these proselytizing efforts to Christianize the highland teips ended because the Vainakh people lost their contact with the Georgians. As a result they went back to their old pagan practices and customs (lamkerst). The Bats (Tushetians – Vainakh people) were the only people who adopted Christianity in the 16th century.

Islam: The Mongol invasion ended Christian influence in the region, and they began to spread Islam in the North Caucasus in the 13th century. Islam began to spread to Chechnya from Daghestan in the 17th century. The Chechens followed the Shafii School of Sunni Islam. However, their religion carried vestiges of their ancient customs and the traditions of Zoroastrianism, Sunni practices, Sufi and Christian rituals.

Questions

- 1-What type of impact did the conquest of the Mongols have on the society, religion and political system in the Caucasus?
- 2- How did the Persian domination impact on the religions of the Caucasus?

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EARLY MODERN PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA:

Christianity: During the periods of invasion by Muslim powers (Persian and Ottoman), Georgians remained mostly Christian in the 18th century. However, some rulers converted to Islam.

Islam: King Vakhtang VI was summoned to receive his authorization from the Safavid Shah to rule in Kartli. However, the shah demanded his conversion to Islam. In 1703, Vakhtang VI became the ruler of the kingdom of Kartli and in 1716, he adopted Islam.

There were other Georgian kings and aristocrats like David XI of Kartli, Jesse of Kakheti and Simon II of Kartli who also converted to Islam and served as courtiers to the Iranian Safavid, Afsharid and Qajar dynasties.

Church Council: In 1705, the King Vakhtang VI established a church council and demanded them reorganize the Georgian Orthodox church and select a new catholicos patriarch.

ARMENIA:

Mekhitarists: In the 18th century, there was a religious and cultural awakening. The theologian and monk Mekhitar of Sebaste established a group called *the Mekhitarist Order* in Constantinople. The Mekhitarists were a monastic order of the Armenian Catholic Church. They contributed to the religious and cultural awakening with their publications of lost ancient Greek texts and with their research on the classical and modern Armenian languages.

AZERBAIJAN:

Sunni-Shia Sectarian Conflict: In the latter years of Safavid rule, Sunni resentment against their Shii rulers led to open rebellion that coincided with the Afghan attacks. In support of this rebellion, Sunni forces from northern Azerbaijan and Daghestan moved south as far as Shamakha and Ganja. In their wake Ottoman and Russian armies were able to occupy northern Azerbaijan, but were soon expelled when the Persians brought the region back under their domination. These developments highlighted the political significance of the deep Sunni- Shii divide in Azerbaijan, a division that was of greater social and political significance than that between Muslims of both groups and non-Muslims.

In the 18th century, there was a major attempt to reconcile the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. When the military commander from Afshar tribe Nadir became ruler of the Afsharid Dynasty in 1736, he put an end to the influence of the Safavid Dynasty in the region. Nadir introduced a series of religious reforms to ease differences between Sunni and Shia sects. First he banned the cursing of the first Rashidi Caliphs practiced in Shia prayers. Nadir began to wear a hat called *Kolahi-Naderi* indicating that he respected all four Rashidi Caliphs. Reflecting the Sunni practice of naming juridical schools after their founders, Nadir began to refer to mainstream Twelver Shias as *Jafari*, and even attempted to gain recognition of the *Jafaris* as a fifth legal school on par with the four major Sunni schools. Although this effort was ultimately unsuccessful, the Ottomans did agree to permit Shii Muslims to join Sunnis in the annual Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

After the 18th century there were no further major outbreaks of violence between Sunni and Shii in Azerbaijan. In part, this was due to the growing weakness of both the Ottomans and the Persians which left the khanates in Azerbaijan relatively independent and with populations that overwhelmingly Sunni or

Shii. The northern khanates of Derbent and Quba were Sunni, while the Shii predominated in the south. However, the religious makeup of the khanates was of little political consequence.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: When Islam finally became the predominant religion in Chechnya in the early 18th century it resulted in a mass exodus of Chechen Christians across the Terek River into territories inhabited by Cossacks. These refugees were assimilated into the Russian-speaking Cossack community over time.

The position of Islam in Chechnya was consolidated in the late 18th century with the resistance to the Russians expansion into the North Caucasus led by Sheikh Mansur. Acting not only as a military resistance leader, Sheikh Mansur also delivered passionate sermons calling on his followers to lead moral, religious lives and practice asceticism and condemning blood feuds, ignorance, hypocrisy, greed and immorality.

Questions:

- 1- Why did Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict exist in Azerbaijan?
- 2- Why did some Georgian kings convert to Islam?

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19TH CENTURY

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: When Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire, the Russian Orthodox Church took control of the Georgian Orthodox Church, the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church was annulled by the Russian authorities in 1811, and the Catholicos Anton II was deported to Russia.

Bahá'í Faith: The Bahá'í Faith, established by Bahá'u'lláh in the 19th century, spread across the Caucasus and appeared in Georgia in 1850.

ARMENIA: In 1836, the Russian government enacted a statute, the *Polozhenie*, which reduced the political power of the Armenian religious leadership and established full control over the Catholicos and the mother church of Echmiadzin. However, the Russian authorities also allowed the Armenian Church to maintain its autonomy. Initially, the Russian government intended to establish three Christian states in the South Caucasus: a restored Albania, Armenia and Georgia. After the Turkmenchay Treaty, the Armenization of the Caucasus Albanians began and the Albanian autocephalous church was dissolved.

Azerbaijan: In late 19th century, the majority of the population of Russian Azerbaijan was Shia. Hostility between the Sunnis and the Shia decreased due to Azerbaijani nationalism which developed in the late 19th century that preached a common Turkic heritage and opposed Iranian religious influences.

The other religious sect was the Sunni. In the 1830s, Sunnis were the majority in northern Azerbaijan, however in the 1860s, Tsarist authorities deported the Sunnis to the remote region of Siberia.

Bahá'í Faith: In the second half of the 19th century, the largest community of Bahá'ís was established in Baku and they received official recognition from the authorities.



CHECHNYA: By the mid 19th century, all Chechens were converted to Islam blended with their traditional ancient customs and superstitions. Arabic was the language of religious instruction.

Zikrism: Zikrism, a Sufi branch, was introduced in Chechnya in the second half of the 19th century by the Sheikh Kunta-haji Kishiev. Kishiev required his followers (Muridists) to follow the Shariat. In their gatherings Zikrists danced and sang loudly.

Questions:

1- Why did the Russian authorities allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to take control of the Georgian Orthodox Church?

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20TH CENTURY

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: Following the Russian annexation of Georgia, the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church that was abolished by the Russian authorities in 1811. In March of 1917, the Georgian Orthodox Church regained its autonomy and Kirion became the new patriarch.

After a brief restoration in 1917–1921, the Church was once again suppressed under Soviet rule when it was placed under surveillance of the *Committee for State Security* (KGB).

The Georgian church regained its autonomy and appointed a new Catholicos-Patriarch was elected when Russian rule ended in 1918. The Soviet regime carried out severe purges among Church officials and executed constant repression against Orthodox worship. Over a thousand churches were closed or destroyed by *Joint State Political Directorate* (OGPU) and many priests and monks were shot.

The Cheka arrested the new patriarch, Ambrosi and his senior clerics, when they applied the Genoa Peace Conference in 1922 and they were tried for treason in 1924 and they were send to prison. Ambrosi was released in 1927 and died shortly after.

Kristepore became a new Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia from 1927. When Kristepore died in 1931, Kalistrate became Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia from June 21, 1932. With the help of Stalin, the Russian church recognized the Georgian autocephaly in 1943.

Georgian workers were forced to join in an organization called *League of Militant Atheists*. The organization was abolished in Georgia in 1947.

When the patriarch Ilia II became the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the late 1970s, Georgian Orthodox Church experienced a revival. The new patriarch imposed order and a new morality in church affairs. However, he was enthroned as Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia in 1978.

In 1988, the Soviets allowed the patriarch to open closed churches and consecrate them. The policy toward the Georgian Orthodox Church was harsh. Only 200 were left open in the 1980s out of 2,100 churches in 1917.

After independence in 1991, the number of churches and monasteries increased. In 1993, around 65 percent of Georgians were Georgian Orthodox, 11 percent were Muslim (Adjara, Chechen Kists and Azeris), 10 percent Russian Orthodox, and 8 percent Armenian Apostolic.

Several Protestant churches were left open. Ethnic Armenians living in Georgia belong to the Gregorian Christian Church. Judaism was practiced by the Jews residing in Tbilisi and Kutaisi. There were smaller denominations like Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, Buddhists and Kurdish Yezidis.

The Georgian Constitution provided freedom of religion and guaranteed respect and equal treatment of all religious denominations. The separation of church and state was established.

ARMENIA: The government was convinced that the liberation movement was guided by the Armenian Church. In 1903, by the order of G. Golitsyn, the Governor of the Caucasus, all property of the Armenian Apostolic Church was requisitioned and Armenian schools were shut down.

The Catholicos of All Armenians Mkrtych Khrimian denounced the anti-Armenian policy of Tsarist Russia. Armenian political parties-Dashnaks and Hunchakians together with Russian social democrats got involved in the struggle against the Tsarist regime. During the summer of 1905 there were strikes in Kars, Alexandrapole, Alaverdi and other cities of Eastern Armenia. The Tsar's government, concerned about the developing revolution and Armenian resistance, canceled its previous decree and returned the property requisitioned from the Armenian Church.

The Soviets committed themselves to shifting the values from traditional and religious to secular and socialist ones. The government strategy was to separate Armenians from their loyalty to their national church and replace it with a commitment to building a socialist Armenia. Many churches were closed and many priests were persecuted. The Catholicos Kevork V refused to recognize the atheist Soviet regime till 1927.

In the 40s, the persecution of the church stopped and some of the closed churches were reopened, and exiled clergy were allowed to return from Siberia in the late 1942. The clergy supported the state in their struggle against fascism, and the church leaders raised funds for Armenian military forces.

Armenia is a secular country and church and State are separated. Although the Armenian Apostolic Church is considered as a State church, it does not receive state fund.

Armenian constitution guarantees religious freedom with the law "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" enacted in 1991.

In Armenia, 95 % of the population belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Other ethnic denominations in Armenia are Catholic Church, Protestant Church, Assyrian Church, Nestorianism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Molokans, Islam, Judaism, Bahá'í Faith, Yezidism and Hinduism.

Hetanism: Hetanism is a neo-paganist movement in Armenia which was based on the work of the early-20th-century politician and philosopher Garegin Nzhdeh and his doctrine of *Tseghakron* (rejuvenation through national religion).

AZERBAIJAN: Freedom of religion in Azerbaijan is guaranteed in the constitution. The majority's religion in Azerbaijan is Islam, two thirds are considered Shia and one third are Sunni.

Azerbaijan is a secular country and its Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and each religion is equal before the law.

Other ethnic denominations in Azerbaijan are the Orthodox Sunni Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, Judaism and various Christian sects like Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism. Azerbaijan also has Molokans, Judaism, and Bahá'í Faith.

Islam: With the establishment of the Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, the authorities cancelled *the Ministry of Religious Conviction* and *Sheyhulislamism* on 15 May 1920. Many mosques were shot down, muslim seminaries were closed and their clerics were persecuted. Between 1928 - 1980, the number of mosques in Azerbaijan fell from 1,400 to 16. Due to differences in practices and beliefs the Sunni and the Shiite muslims generally do not pray together, however after the closure of many mosques in Azerbaijan, these two groups began to worship together in mosques that were left open.

During the World War II, the Soviets reopened the mosques and used religion in their struggle against German fascism in 1943. The Soviet authorities allowed the Azerbaijanis to establish the *Religious Department for Transcaucasia Muslims* was established in Baku and it became a center of all other religious communities of Islam. Akhund Agha Alizade was the first elected Sheyhulislam and he controlled *The Religious Department of Transcaucasia Muslims*.

Bahá'í Faith: In the early 20th century, the Bahá'í believers resided in Baku. During the Soviet rule, under the atheist policy of the state, the Bahá'í community has almost disappeared and it was reactivated during Perestroika when state loosened controls on religions. The Bahá'í believers elected their own *National Spiritual Assembly* in 1992.

Traces of Zoroastrianism: Fire has strong associations in Azerbaijan. There are flares, 'eternal fires', arising from the surface seepage of oil and gas in Baku.

Fire also indicates that the peoples of Azerbaijan had under the cultural influences the fire-worshipping religion of Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism of Persia.

One of the great four fires that dominates the Zoroastrian world the King of Kings is located at Ganja in Azerbaijan (Land of Fire - Odlar Yurdu).



Zoroastrian Ateshgah (fire temple) is found in Baku and in Khinalig.

Zoroastrianism still manifested in the culture of Azerbaijan by lighting bonfires and candles on the eve of Novruz Holiday.

Even Caucasian Christianity still bear marks of the pagan and Zoroastrian world.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia's power in the North Caucasus was weakened and the political influence of the local leaders were diminished. They urgently needed to strengthen their relationship with the local elites, rather than to built institutions to improve the conditions in the region. Yeltsin concerned about regional leaders and their arbitrary attitude.

Russia's bilateral arrangements to keep the stability in the region increased the privileges of the executive leaders of the republics, rather than promoting democratization. As a result, the Russian government lost their control of the Muslim communities there.

This resulted in emergence of fiefdoms legitimized by pseudo-democracy in the North Caucasus, and appearance of fragmented Islamic religious groups: some were the adherents of traditional forms of Islam emerged along ethnic lines like the Sufis, the others had more radicalist approach like the Salafis.

Sufis (Traditional Islam): The supporters of traditional Islam did not want to accept the new muftis since it belonged to Avar ethnic group in Dagestan. This resulted in a power struggle over who would control over the Islamic institution. There were clerics in remote areas who stayed outside the control of the muftiat. They began to assert their influence in the region and to fight for legitimacy.

Salafis (Wahhabists - Radical Islam): The Salafis appeared in Dagestan in the late 70s. Their main objectives were to attract young people with their radical ideology, especially with the movement's combination of religious faith. Socially active young people began to support them. Salafism had influence on the insurgency in Chechnya from the mid-90s. The Salafis kept themselves outside the system and distanced themselves from the authorities and did not get involved in any ethnic competition. A violent rivalry erupted between those who followed the traditional Islam and the defenders of radical Islam. Spreading crime and corruption in the region helped the Salafists. The Federal government did not know how to handle this new situation and decided to support the traditionalists, the Sufi Islam, but the complex political and social situation in the region kept the Russians on the margins of the events.

Until Gorbachev, Islamic practices operated in its illegal form, but after 1990s, the North Caucasus experienced religious revival. Nationalist sentiments provided a major impulse for this religious revival.

However, the spread of crime and corruption continued because of the inability of the authorities and the traditional clerics to develop any strategy to contain the local conflicts.

Spreading crime and corruption in the region helped the Salafists. The Salafis appeared in Dagestan in the late 70s. Their main objectives were to attract young people with their radical ideology, especially with the movement's combination of religious faith. Socially active young people began to support them.

Salafism had influence on the insurgency in Chechnya from the mid-1990s.

To fight against the influence of the Salafism, religious and secular authorities decided to cooperate and declared *Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan* in 1994 to be the only institution representing the interest of Dagestani people.

The Salafis began to receive financial help from international Islamic organizations. The government sent troops into Dagestan. They surrounded some villages in Dagestan and began to arrest Salafist imams, destroyed their buildings and mosques and burned all propaganda publications.

This policy sent the Salafis into hiding, and they stopped struggling with the Sufis, and began to struggle with the regional and central authorities causing further instability.

The radical Islamist movements began to spread across the region after the persecution of Salafis. However, their influence in the region was limited because they showed no tolerance to any national cultural traditions in the North Caucasus.

To avoid the government military operations many people began to migrate, and taking advantage of this situation, the Salafis shifted their location by joining the masses of migrants and began to operate in other republics.

The Salafis now appeared in the capitals of North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria; in Nogay villages in Dagestan, Stavropolsky kray and Karachay-Cherkessia.

Sharia Law: The animosity between pro-Russian Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev increased. It resulted in a struggle for power. Basayev sought to gain support from local fighters and wanted to start Islamization process in the North Caucasus. Pro-Russian Maskhadov lost control over the local forces. In order to reduce Basayev's monopoly over Islam, Maskhadov imposed Sharia law and a Shura in 1999.

Question:

- 1- Why did Stalin obliterate religion in the Soviet states?
- 2- Why was Stalin particularly hard on the Georgians?
- 3- How did the Salafis increase their influence in the North Caucasus?

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