

# CAUCASUS HISTORY – Government

## Overview

The Caucasus is one of the most diverse, ethnically and linguistically, and challenging regions on earth. It has been regarded as a land of conflict, and the cultural and political history of the Caucasus is a turbulent one that reflects a complex succession of peoples and influences from many neighbouring countries.

Since the earliest urban civilizations that developed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, prehistoric communities were composed of autonomous groups and villages, and did not organize themselves into any form complex enough to be regarded as a state.

The need to follow their herds and disputes over pasture land led to increasing conflict among nomadic peoples. These conflicts stimulated the formation of large-scale alliances between tribes, and the appearance of the earliest states.

Later, a more progressive socio-economic formation, feudalism in the Caucasus appeared in order to protect against outside invaders.

Throughout its history the Caucasus has experienced numerous conquests by the empires from the north, south, east and west. The Caspian region became a very important arena for geopolitical competition for the Ottomans, the Persians, the Arabs, and the Russians. Each power carried out their own policies and made their own contribution to the political culture of the region by bringing many features from their own systems of government, however, they faced severe challenges in imposing their forms of government and implementing long-term changes in the traditional forms of government of the peoples of the Caucasus. It was not until the Soviet era that outside forms of government began to replace the previous ones.

## ANCIENT PERIOD

Proto-states consisted of several dozen tribes, and initially they were ruled by their chieftains and later by elected military leaders, who carried the title *King*. All prehistoric nomadic tribes did not form a formal government, but remained tribal in structure.

Initially, early people were organized in tribal groups, but these tribal groups were not ethnic in character. Not until the Neolithic period does it appear that tribal groups united to form larger units that would become the basis for later ethnic groups.

In addition, these prehistoric communities were composed of autonomous groups and villages, and did not organize themselves into any form complex enough to be regarded as a state. However, the formation of sedentary groups resulted in social organization at the level of chiefdoms with a fair degree of social stratification.

## SOUTH CAUCASUS:

**GEORGIA:** The Kingdom of Iberia was ruled by a king. However, when it was under Persian control, it was ruled by a *marzpan* (governor). As a result of Persian influence, the first king of Iberia, Pharnavaz adapted the governance system of the Persian Empire as a model for his state. He formed a state in which Egrisi-Colchis became an autonomous duchy, and Iberia was organized into seven duchies.

**ARMENIA:** The Kingdom of Urartu was ruled by the King and he had absolute power in the name of the god Haldi. It was a monarchic and theocratic system where the god Haldi protected the King and he was also the head priest. The king relied on a close circle of advisors. The Kingdom was a loose confederation of small kingdoms and tribal states. Each was ruled by loyal aristocrats appointed by the King.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> CE, the Armenian King was the head of the country and ruled with the help of his Court, consisted of his sons and his brothers, and members of aristocracy who were close to the King. From among them, the King appointed heads of various public services: *Hazarapet* (economy), *Sparapet* (Army), *Tagadir Aspet* (diplomatic affairs), *Senekapet* (judicial affairs) and *Krmapet* (supreme Priest).

**AZERBAIJAN:** The early state formations appeared in the southern parts of today's Azerbaijan in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. The independent State of Caucasian Albania was established at the beginning of 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE. The Albanian tribes governed by a king. There were also large tribal unions in the northern part of Albania ruled by tribal leaders. Stratification existed within the tribes. At the top of the layers the tribal leaders, followed by warriors and pagan priests. The state structure was centralized. There was also a council of elders that depended on the ruler.

## **NORTH CAUCASUS:**

**CHECHNYA:** According to the linguistic and archeological evidence, the Nakhs (Vainakh) people inhabited the highlands of the North Caucasus in the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The Nakh languages carry a few words of early Indo-European origin, testifying to relations with the Bronze Age steppe populations. They were tribal unions ruled by chieftain. They were under the rule of the Alans and the Khazars sometimes as their vassals or as their allies. Under the Hurrian and Urartu Kingdoms in 2,000-1,000 BCE, the Nakhs established a very powerful state, with strong central leadership.

The earliest state formation in the North Caucasus was *Sindika* (5<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) where the communal tribal system remained the primary form of social organization. Transition from this communal tribal system to the class system leading to the emergence of social inequality of unequal status in society was accomplished at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE.

## **Discussion/Questions**

1- What was the Persian impact on the state structure in the Caucasus?

## **Reading**

1-Chernykh, E.N., *Nomadic Cultures in the Mega-Structure of the Eurasian World*, Academic Studies Press, 2017.

2-Grousset, R., *The Empire of the Steppes, A History of Central Asia*, Rutgers University Press, 2002.

3-Khachikyan, A., *History of Armenia, A Brief Review*, Edit Print, 2010.

4-Anchabadze, G., *The Vainakhs*, "Caucasian House" Tbilisi, 2009

[https://www.circassianworld.com/pdf/The\\_Vainakhs\\_George\\_Anchabadze.pdf](https://www.circassianworld.com/pdf/The_Vainakhs_George_Anchabadze.pdf)

## **POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD**

### **SOUTH CAUCASUS**

**GEORGIA:** In Georgia, the state administration was centralized, and the government structure rested on a highly developed feudal system. In this feudal state, the kings enjoyed the highest authority. There was also a royal *darbazi* (advisory committee), which could pass legislation. The nobles were allowed to keep their domains in trust from the sovereign, but in return they had to provide support to the king during his campaigns.

The central administration consisted of five viziers (ministers), the chancellor, the minister of war, the lord chamberlain, the chancellor of the exchequer, and the atabeg (lord). The provinces were ruled by *eristavi*

(frontier governor) till the 13<sup>th</sup> century and they had exceptional privileges and autonomous rights. The towns were headed by an amiri and large cities were governed by an amirt-amiri.

The Vilayet of Gurjistan was created by the Mongols and included the whole South Caucasus. It was divided into eight tumans. Five of them belonged to Georgians, the remaining three tumans were Armenian. The Mongols did not rule the Vilayet directly, instead the kings were allowed to rule their own domains after the Khan gained their trust. The governing system was different in each vilayet since the Mongols preferred to use the local, already existing governing structure. They sent their Darughachi or Basqaqs to monitor the Georgian administration closely so that tributes were collected and taxes were paid.

Under Persian rule, the Georgian kingdoms continued to reign locally over a collection of smaller states. However, under Ottoman rule, the administrative system was divided into vilayets (provinces) which were governed by a vali (governor general) or pasha (high military official) appointed by the sultan. The provinces included sanjaks (subprovinces) that were governed by a mutasarrif (lieutenant governor).

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, western Georgia and Armenia had fallen under Ottoman rule, and became Ottoman pashalyks (provinces). Within his province, the pasha had the highest administrative, financial and military authority. Provinces consisted of sanjaks (sub province) and were governed by beys (provincial governor).

**ARMENIA:** At the top of the Armenian state was the King. The King ruled the state with the help of the court. He had unlimited power and made all decisions, however, he also consulted with the State Council.

The state's ruling class consisted of major and minor feudal landlords. Major feudal lordship was hereditary. Minor landlords gained their positions based on their service. The State Council included only major landlords.

When the Mongols completed the conquest of Armenia, and captured Northern Iraq and Syria in 1244, the Georgian and Armenian states became their vassals. The Mongols followed a policy of eliminating the local ruling class and noble families, and abolished the traditional Armenian feudal statehood, incorporating their territory with the adjacent states.

After the Mongol invasion ended in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, several independent states formed in Georgia and Azerbaijan.

It was during Qara Qoyunlu, the rulers of the dynasty began to appoint Armenian princes as rulers in the provinces.

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ottoman Empire conquered the whole of Transcaucasia, the Ottoman authorities built up their relations with the local rulers following the vassal pattern.

Under the suzerainty of the Persians, Armenian administrative units were called khanates. In Armenian khanates, the khan was appointed by the Persian Shah and he was the highest authority. The Christian population had to pay head and land taxes. Only the clergy was exempt from these taxes.

In Eastern Armenia, there were a few principalities such as Zeytun, Artsakh, Syunik and Gardman that maintained their autonomy. They were ruled by meliks (kings) who held the highest authority. They had their own vassal population, troops, and holdings. However, the khans and meliks all had to pay tax to the Royal Treasury, and they were also required to join the Shah's army with their armies.

**AZERBAIJAN:** The Caucasian Albanian state was ruled by a prince who was entitled to issue laws and lead the military forces. There was also an Advisory Council and the head of the Council was the Albanian prince. Caucasian Albania, which included today's territory of Azerbaijan, dissolved in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

During the Abbasid Caliphate, Azerbaijan became part of the Caliphate's territory. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, as the Caliphate lost its strength this led to the appearance of a number of independent states like Shirvanshahs,

Shaddadis, Ravvadids, Sallarids and Sajids in the Caliphate. These states were ruled by individual commanders and former Arab successors. Urban administrative institutions formed and improved in this period.

During the period of the Seljuks, the territory became the vassal of the empire and was governed by atabeys and the states of the Shirvanshah (located in the modern Azerbaijan Republic, from the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century) and Eldenizs dynasties governed by an emir. The members of ruling dynasty were called khass or taj.

The Mongol conquest left a devastating impact on the Azerbaijani people, and from 1239 to 1358-1359 the territory was the part of the state of Ilkhanate. During this period, the territory was ruled by Mongol generals and divided among the ruling dynasty and the military-nomadic aristocracy.

Under the Ottomans the seat of provincial governance was built in the Ganja-Qarabagh vilayet (province) governed by a vali (governor).

Provinces were composed of sanjaks (district) ruled by a sarasgar. The sanjaks were split into smaller military-administrative units called mahal and nahiyas. There were also smaller areas like sanjakeks, naibs and katkhudas that were controlled by local feudal officials.

### **NORTH CAUCASUS:**

**CHECHNYA:** The tribal Vainakh society was organized as clans (Teips or Taips) and the clans were incorporated into the larger feudal structure with a èèla (the prince) ruling over a number of vassals. There were feudal principedoms established like Simsim.

Within that society people were united in family groups called *Tsa* (house). The Teips were united by a tribal group of *Gars* (branch) and *Tsa*'s were part of these *Gars*. The Teips had their own council of elders, the *Mexk-kxel*, and the members of the Teips were democratically elected member of the *Tsa*. The unions of the Teips were called *Tukkhum* which supervised the clans with a Board of Participants called *Teipan-Khelli* and united the clans to fight outsiders.

Many Vainakh clans tended to be established either in the mountains or in the plains. Within Vainakh society, there were also free highland communities of independent peasants residing in the mountains.

### **Discussion/Questions**

1- What factors prevented regions of the Caucasus from being influenced by the forms of government in nearby neighboring states, despite being influenced by their cultures? What made them conservative in this aspect?

2- How were the societies in the North Caucasus classified?

### **Readings:**

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6- Akhundova, N., *The History of Azerbaijan, "Short course of lectures"*, Baku Business University, 2018.

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## 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### SOUTH CAUCASUS:

**GEORGIA:** Georgia was a feudal monarchy in which the king had control over everything, but his power was limited by the nobility. The central administration was led by *the vizirs* (ministers) appointed by the monarch. The local administration of provinces was carried out by *the eristavs* (civil servants). The merchants in cities established special committees to provide economic aid to the eristavs. The king summoned the council of senior nobility, *the darbasi* to discuss affairs of state. Most high level positions were filled by the hereditary nobles or by royal appointments.

**ARMENIA:** The king was the highest authority in Armenia, however, the second class, the *nakharars* (princely lords) of the country were the real land owners and masters.

During the Ottoman period, Armenia was divided into *vilayets* (provinces), governed by pashas appointed by the Sultan. Within a vilayet, the pasha held the highest administrative, financial and military authority. Judges called *kadis* were selected by the Muslim clergy. Vilayets consisted of *sanjaks* (sub-province) governed by *beys* (lord).

During the Persian rule, the administrative units were called *khanates* ruled by khans. They not only had administrative, but also financial, judicial and military authority, and were appointed by the Shah.

After the Russian conquest, the Armenian king, chosen by the Russian tsar, had the authority to have his own seal and create his own currency.

**AZERBAIJAN:** In the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the death of Nadir Shah the Afshar Dynasty lost power over the territory of Azerbaijan, and the country disintegrated into khanates, sultanates and meliks ruled by khans and sultans. The khanates were not independent political entities, and the southern khanates were still under nominal Persian suzerainty. The feudal fragmentation of the country into local states resulted in the political and the military decline of the country and unification of Azerbaijani lands as part of a single state failed.

During Russian rule, a military officer was appointed to establish control in the Caspian regions by dividing these regions into *mahal* (districts). The districts were governed by district lords and naibs, whose positions were inherited. Districts were divided into *nahiya* (areas) and ruled by a *yuzbashi* (lieutenant). Villages were governed by *yuzbashi* and *kendkhuda* (village headman). Cities were ruled by *kelenter* and *galabeyi*. Russian officers were in charge of military-political power.

The Ottomans established their control by dividing the country into military-administrative units, provinces and beylerbeyis. Provinces were divided into *sanjaks* (administrative district), and the sanjaks were also divided into smaller military-administrative units, *mahal* (sub-district) and *nahiyas* (rural sub-district). The local feudal officials appointed *sanjaksbeks* (head of sanjak), *naibs* (governor) or *katkudas* (deputy) to rule the smaller districts.

### NORTH CAUCASUS

**CHECHNYA:** Until the Russian conquest, the Chechens were a semi- independent nation with many autonomous clans headed by a respected elder and all decisions were made by elected national councils.

#### Questions:

1- How did the governing structure in three Caucasus states change after the conquest of the Russians?

#### Readings:

1- Forsyth, J., *The Caucasus A History*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

## 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### SOUTH CAUCASUS

**GEORGIA:** In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Georgian princes had unlimited power over their estates. The king appointed the highest noble official, the *mouravi*, to govern the towns and the countryside. This position was a hereditary privilege.

In 1801, Georgia was forcibly incorporated into the Russian Empire. With the annexation of Georgia by the Russians, the previous social structure of Georgian society, *patronqmob*a (lord-vassal relationship), was transformed into the structure of *batonqmob*a (master-serf relationship).

The Code of Laws of Vakhtang, the *Dasturlamali*, a collection of directives and instructions on state government, remained in effect under Russian rule into the 1840s.

In 1891, the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire was complete. The Russians abolished the Georgian Statehood, did not allow the Georgians to practice their culture, traditions and Georgian language, and they closed the Georgian Church. The ruling of the Russian monarchical state in Georgia lasted until the collapse of the monarchy in 1917.

### ARMENIA:

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Armenia fell under Russian government control and they established a centralized state. Tsar Nicholas passed a decree approving the creation of the Armenian Province. The Russian government granted the Province a communal self-government. However, Nicholas dissolved the Province in 1840 and many Armenian nobles and religious notables were exiled beyond the Caucasus. After the Armenian nobility disintegrated, peasants and middle-class people (craftsmen or merchants) formed the majority of Armenian society.

In 1836, the Russian government passed a statute, the *Polozhenie*, reducing the political power of the Armenian religious leadership and the Catholicos. However, the Armenian Church was allowed to maintain its autonomy, and the Armenian Church became the dominant element in the affairs of the Russian Armenians by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1844, Nicholas united all of Cis- and Transcaucasia into a single *Caucasian Viceregency* (Kavkazskoe Namestnichestvo) under the control of the central power of the Sixth Section of His Majesty's Own Chancellery. Prince Mikhail S. Vorontsov was appointed as the first viceroy. Armenian leaders began to support the Russian administrators.

In 1846, the Transcaucasus was split into the *guberniya* (governorate) of Tiflis, Shemakha, Kutais and Derbent, and these in turn into *uyezdy* (counties) and *uchastki* (districts). Tiflis guberniya included Erevan, Nakhchivan, and Alexandropol counties constituting Russian Armenia.

**AZERBAIJAN:** The Russian government abolished the khanates and created a curfew system of governance based on a commandant management system. Russian officers, who were assigned as commandants, had the same rights than former khans and were loyal to Russia. The administrative and judicial reform introduced in 1840 cancelled out the curfew system of governance. Khanates and sultanates became provinces and districts. Provinces and districts were governed by a *commandant*. Villages were under the control of *kandkhudas* and *yuzbashis*.

### NORTH CAUCASUS

**CHECHNYA:** When the Russians took power in the Caucasus, they began to disperse the local inhabitants. 22,000 Chechens were sent to the Ottomans as elements known for their political unreliability and several thousand more were executed or exiled to Siberia.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there were nine *tukkhums* and a hundred *teips*. Each teip had a council of elders headed by *thamda* (civilian chief) and discussed current problems with the representatives from each of the teips. Tukkhums were formed as a union with common territory and a common language. Normally, *tukkhums* had no leader, but when there was an outside threat, they would elect leaders quickly and give them authority to deal with it.

The village elders, *dai*, also played an important role in preventing conflict and keeping their society stable.

**Caucasian Imamate:** The Caucasian Imamate was an Islamic theocratic state established by the imams in Dagestan and Chechnya to fight against the Russians during the Caucasus campaign in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Imamate was split into military administrative units called *naibats* ruled by *naibs* appointed by the imams. They had administrative, military and judicial power. They sometimes commanded military operations. In 1839, the Russian authorities decided to put an end to the Imamate.

#### **Questions:**

1- Based on the readings, did the Russians implement cultural assimilation or administrative assimilation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

#### **Readings:**

- 1- Hovannisian, R. G., "Russian Armenia. A Century of Russian Rule", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* Neue Folge, Bd. 19, H. 1 (MÄRZ 1971), pp. 31-48.
- 2- Jaimaoukha, A.M., *The Chechens: A Handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.
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## **20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

### **SOUTH CAUCASUS**

**GEORGIA:** When the Bolsheviks came to power, the Russian Provisional Government established a *Special Transcaucasian Committee* (Ozakom) to govern the region in March 1917. In November 1917, the *Transcaucasian Commissariat* was replaced by a *Special Transcaucasian Committee*. They were anti-Bolshevik and sought the separation of Transcaucasia from the Bolshevik Russia.

From 1918 to 1921, Georgia was an independent state. The Red army occupied Tbilisi in February of 1921, and the government of Georgia was forced to flee. From 1921 to 1991 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia was one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union.

First Secretaries of the Communist Party of Georgia began to rule from 1921 to 1991.

On 6 January 1992, Georgia was governed by a *Military Council* for two months. In 1995, the Constitution of Georgia was adopted and presidential and parliamentary elections were held to elect a president and his cabinet.

**ARMENIA:** After the fall of the Empire, the newly established Provisional Government abolished the Governor of the Transcaucasia in March, 1917 and formed the *Special Transcaucasian Committee*. Regional, province (marzer), city and rural commissariats were formed to act as local government institutions. In May 1919, the cabinet authorized the Ministry of Internal Affairs to organize Zemstvos (local assemblies). Local authority at the community level was held by mayors or village elders. There were also the district (gavarak) assemblies and the county (gavar) assemblies.

The Bolsheviks established the *Armenian Committee* (Armenkom) within the structure of the Russian Communist Party in September 1919. First Secretaries of the Communist Party of Armenia began to rule from 1920 to 1991.

In 1996, the presidential elections were held to elect a president and his cabinet ministers.

**AZERBAIJAN:** A *Provisional Revolutionary Committee* took control in Azerbaijan on 28 April 1920, and established a new government called the *Council of People's Commissars of Azerbaijan SSR*.

However, after the announcement of the Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR in 1921, the *Revolutionary Committee* was abolished and *Central Executive Committee* took over as a supreme legislative body. The Central Executive Committee was also replaced with the legislative body *Supreme Soviet* in 1937.

In Azerbaijan SSR, the President was the head of state, and the state government was established on the principle of the division of powers: legislative, executive and judicial.

The *Milli Mejlis* (National Assembly) replaced the Supreme Soviet in 1994, and after a semi-presidential system was formed it was officially abolished in 1995.

## **NORTH CAUCASUS**

**CHECHNYA:** During Soviet rule, Chechnya and Ingushetia were united to form the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. A centralized form of government was established during the Soviet Union. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, an independence *Chechen National Congress* (Chechen Republic of Ichkeria), was established. Some Chechen tribes were under the control of regional major *teips* which began to struggle for control the territory causing instability in the region. In October 1991, Dudayev became the elected president of the Chechen-Ingush Republic. On December 10, 1992, the Chechen-Ingush Republic was officially divided into the Ingush Republic and the Chechen Republic. Both republics were ruled by the Kremlin-appointed officials.

Besides the Russian controlled regional government, there was also a dual power, the secessionist government of Ichkeria which was not recognized by the Soviets. In 1991, Ichkeria became a member of the *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*. Aslan Maskhadov became president of the Republic of Ichkeria. The Republic lasted till 2000. Since the declaration of independence in 1991, there has been an continuing conflict between secessionist officials and federally appointed officials to establish control over the same territory.

### **Questions:**

- 1- Why did the *Special Transcaucasian Committee* (Ozakom) last short?
- 2- When there were that many tribes in Chechnya that were under the control of regional major *teips* how would the Russian state establish control over the territory and exercise their policies?

### **Readings:**

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