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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Case No.: 200701753

MAR 25 2010

I refer to your letter dated March 11, 2007 regarding the release of certain Department of State material under the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5 USC Section 552).

We searched for and reviewed the self study guides that you requested and have determined that all except one of them may be released. They are on the enclosed disc. One of the guides is being released with excisions.

An enclosure provides information on Freedom of Information Act exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made excisions, the applicable exemptions are marked on each document. With respect to material withheld by the Department of State, you have the right to appeal our determination within 60 days. A copy of the appeals procedures is enclosed.

We have now completed the processing of your case. If you have any questions, you may write to the Office of Information Programs and Services, SA-2, Department of State, Washington, DC 20522-8100, or telephone us at (202) 261-8484. Please be sure to refer to the case number shown above in all correspondence about this case.

We hope that the Department has been of service to you in this matter.

Sincerely,



for Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures:
As stated.

63934 Federal Register/Vol. 69, No. 212
Rules and Regulations

Subpart F – Appeal Procedures

§171.52 Appeal of denial of access to, declassification of, amendment of, accounting of disclosures of, or challenge to classification of records.

- (a) *Right of administrative appeal.* Except for records that have been reviewed and withheld within the past two years or are the subject of litigation, any requester whose request for access to records, declassification of records, amendment of records, accounting of disclosure of records, or any authorized holder of classified information whose classification challenge has been denied, has a right to appeal the denial to the Department's Appeals Review Panel. This appeal right includes the right to appeal the determination by the Department that no records responsive to an access request exist in Department files. Privacy Act appeals may be made only by the individual to whom the records pertain.
- (b) *Form of appeal.* There is no required form for an appeal. However, it is essential that the appeal contain a clear statement of the decision or determination by the Department being appealed. When possible, the appeal should include argumentation and documentation to support the appeal and to contest the bases for denial cited by the Department. The appeal should be sent to: Chairman, Appeals Review Panel, c/o Appeals Officer, A/GIS/IPS/PP/LC, U.S. Department of State, SA-2, Room 8100, Washington, DC 20522-8100.
- (c) *Time limits.* The appeal should be received within 60 days of the date of receipt by the requester of the Department's denial. The time limit for response to an appeal begins to run on the day that the appeal is received. The time limit (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) for agency decision on an administrative appeal is 20 days under the FOIA (which may be extended for up to an additional 10 days in unusual circumstances) and 30 days under the Privacy Act (which the Panel may extend an additional 30 days for good cause shown). The Panel shall decide mandatory declassification review appeals as promptly as possible.
- (d) *Notification to appellant.* The Chairman of the Appeals Review Panel shall notify the appellant in writing of the Panel's decision on the appeal. When the decision is to uphold the denial, the Chairman shall include in his notification the reasons therefore. The appellant shall be advised that the decision of the Panel represents the final decision of the Department and of the right to seek judicial review of the Panel's decision, when applicable. In mandatory declassification review appeals, the Panel shall advise the requester of the right to appeal the decision to the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel under §3.5(d) of E.O. 12958.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Withholding specifically authorized under an Executive Order in the interest of national defense or foreign policy, and properly classified. E.O. 12958, as amended, includes the following classification categories:
 - 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Information on weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
 - ARMEX Arms Export Control Act, 22 USC 2778(e)
 - CIA Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
 - EXPORT Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 App. USC 2411(c)(1)
 - FSA Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4003 & 4004
 - INA Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f)
 - IRAN Iran Claims Settlement Act, Sec 505, 50 USC 1701, note
- (b)(4) Privileged/confidential trade secrets, commercial or financial information from a person
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
- (b)(7) Information compiled for law enforcement purposes that would:
 - (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

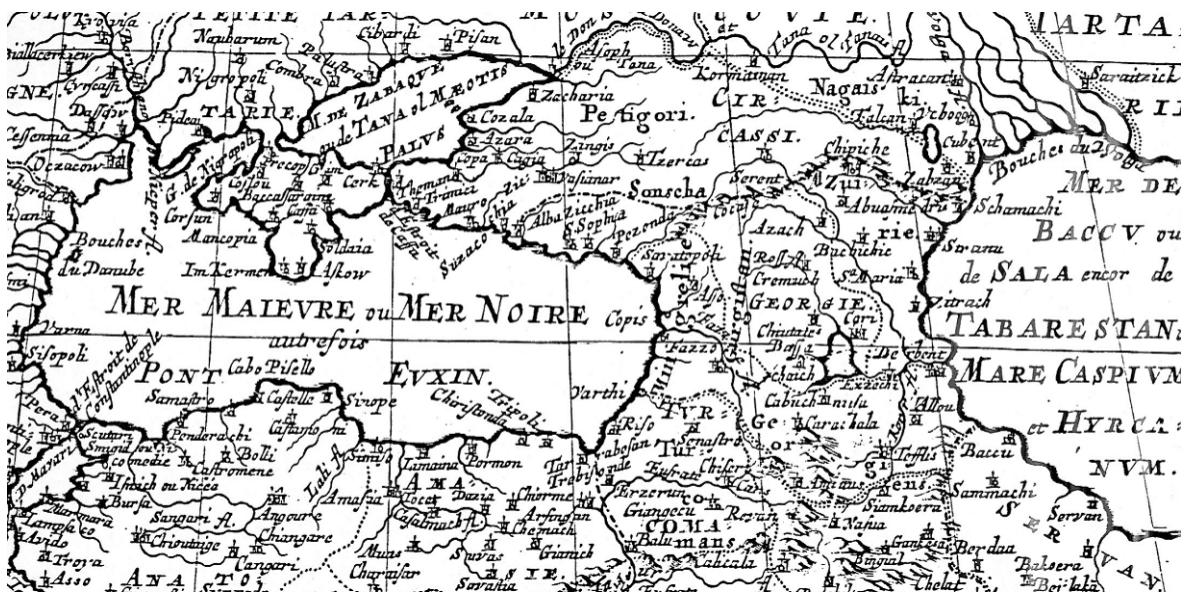
- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request, excised with the agreement of the requester

**CAUCASUS
SELF-STUDY GUIDE**





CAUCASUS SELF-STUDY GUIDE



Map published by N. Sanson, 1795, Amsterdam

SELF-STUDY GUIDE TO THE CAUCASUS

The Self-Study Guide to the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and certain aspects of the North Caucasus, Russia) is intended to provide U.S. Government personnel in the foreign affairs community with an overview of important issues related to Caucasus history, geography, politics, economics, culture, religion, media, and international relations.

The Caucasus is far too complex to be covered in depth using only the text in this Guide. The reader is encouraged to explore the questions and issues introduced, using the Internet and bibliographic sources provided in the text and in the resource sections. Most of the referenced material can be found on the Internet or in the Foreign Service Institute, Main State, or District of Columbia public libraries.

The first edition of the Guide was prepared and illustrated by Alex van Oss, Chair, Caucasus Studies, Area Studies Division, Foreign Service Institute. The views expressed in this Guide are those of the author and attributable sources and do not necessarily reflect official policy or positions of the Department of State or the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC). Staff members of the NFATC made final but minor edits to the draft study submitted by the author. All sources used for graphics and extended quotes are from the public domain, from sites that explicitly say “can be used for non-profit or educational use,” or are from the author’s own materials. This publication is for official educational and non-profit use only.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The purpose of this Guide is not merely to inform, but to stimulate the reader’s interest in the Caucasus, which is one of the most fascinating places in the world. To that end, I have taken the liberty of occasionally using my own illustrations and personal anecdotes.

Caucasus history is intricate, deeply felt, and open to many interpretations. It cannot easily be squeezed into a few dozen pages. This humble guide offers certain “glimpses” of the region, focusing especially on history and culture--or rather, histories and cultures. Parts of the North Caucasus, in Russia, have been included because events there affect the South Caucasus directly and in major ways.

My heartfelt thanks go to Carl Lankowski and Ambassador Harry Gilmore for their encouragement in this project; to Marie Gardner and Dara Hourdajian for copy-editing assistance; and to Melody Crallie for graphics design. My father, Hendrik van Oss, a Foreign Service Officer, and my brother, Hendrik G. van Oss, a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, also made many useful comments pertaining to history, geography, petroleum, grammar

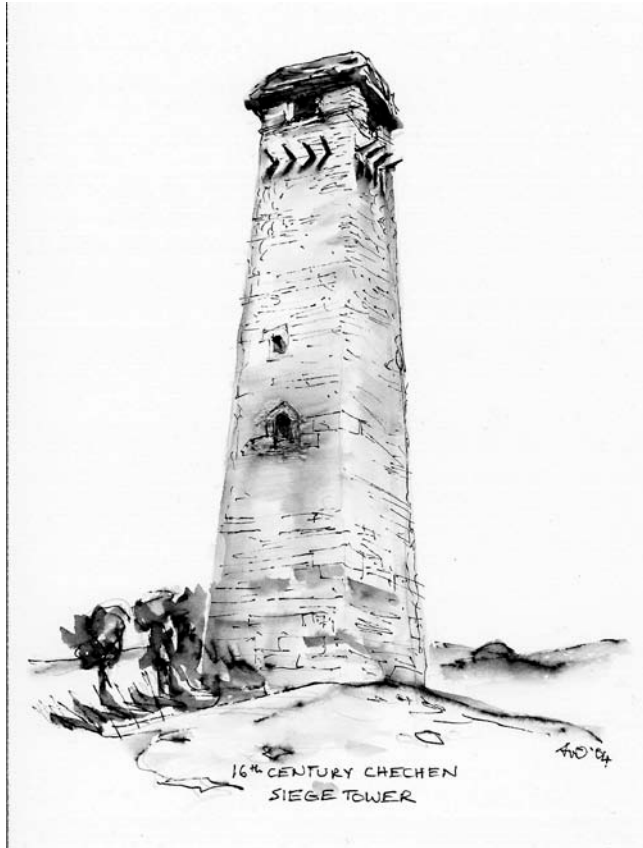
and nuance. The cover illustration, kindly provided by Charles Maynes, is taken from Sergei Anisimov's Caucasus Region Travel Guide (Government Press, Moscow/Leningrad, 1927).

Alex van Oss
July 6, 2004

Five years have sped by since this *Self-Study Guide* first appeared, during which time three events have rocked the Caucasus: Georgia's "Rose Revolution" (2003), the Russian-Georgian conflict (2008), and the worldwide economic crisis. A fourth and more positive surprise--the warming in relations between Armenia and Turkey--could potentially augur, if not an untying, at least a loosening of several of the Caucasus's intractable geopolitical knots. All this serves to remind us that events in the Caucasus do not remain local, but ripple throughout Europe, Central Asia, and further, within hours. [AvO April 2009]

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THE CAUCASUS

INTRODUCTION

“The Caucasus was always a powder keg—and now it is a nuclear powder keg!”

Murat Yagan, Abkhazian elder,
interview with the author, 2002

“All Caucasians are great liars.”
(quoted in Griffin, Nicholas. p.3.
Caucasus: Mountain Men and Holy Wars.
St. Martin’s Press. 2001.)

The word Caucasus derives from *Kaf*, a legendary mountain. The conventional, and quaint, connotation of the word Caucasian as meaning “white” may be traced to the theories of German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach who, in his treatise *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775) used skull measurements, lightness of skin color, and beauty of features to define Caucasians as the world’s most ancient peoples, and the Caucasus as humanity’s cradle.

The Caucasus figures in Greek mythology as the lofty prison of Prometheus, chained to a rock (located, depending on the myth, on Mount Elbruz or Mount Kazbek). In addition, Jason and the Argonauts sailed to the valley of the Rioni Rivier, Imeretia, south of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, and there found the Golden Fleece--and later the sorceress Medea, who seduced Jason with an herbal potion. This legendary rendezvous reputedly occurred in the fields at Ushgul, possibly the highest site inhabited all year round in the Caucasus, near the castle of the renowned Queen Tamara, under whom the country prospered in the 12th century. Apparently, Tamara’s great beauty attracted lover upon lover; each stayed for one night in the castle and was hurled from the battlements the next morning. (In another version of the story, there was only one suitor, who tricked his way into the virtuous royal bedchamber—and became impotent.).

Setting legends aside, there is one rock-solid fact about the Caucasus: its strategic nature. Empires, nations, and hordes have long sought to control the Caucasus, generally for access to other regions. Narrow passes through the mountain gorges, or along coastal zones at either end of the peaks, allowed armies, pilgrims, and nomads to move from Asia into the Middle East and Southern Europe, and from Persia north into Russia. Throughout history the Caucasus afforded access to the Black Sea and the Silk Road in Central Asia, to Arabia and Mecca, and to India. Today the Caucasus beckons not so much as a passage, but as a conduit of Caspian oil and gas.

Caucasus politics are as unpredictable and potentially turbulent as the region’s seismic terrain. Unlike earthquakes, which tend to be local in focus, human upheavals in the Caucasus—pitting old regimes against new, democracy against autocracy, and all too often Christians against Muslims—threaten potentially to spread to the Middle East or otherwise entangle major powers. The Caucasus is a demographer’s delight (and nightmare) in that it presents a crazy-quilt of interspersed peoples and nationalities. Georgia and Azerbaijan historically have been home to sizeable and influential Armenian populations. Yerevan (Armenia), from the mid-18th century until 1834, belonged first to an Azerbaijani khanate and then to Persia--which in turn, as Iran, has a large Azeri population. For centuries, Caucasus peoples have shared history and, at times, rulers. These sundry ethnic groups—Abkhazians, Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, and dozens of others—have mingled in the street, conducted business, and intermarried, making the recent slew of civil wars, ethnic cleansings, and secessions all the more bitter. Turmoil in the Caucasus can be blamed on one or more of the following factors: outside interventions (by Tamerlane, for example, or the Ottomans, or the Tsar), Caucasus obduracy, Caucasus tempers, Caucasian traditions of vendetta, and the machinations of Stalin.

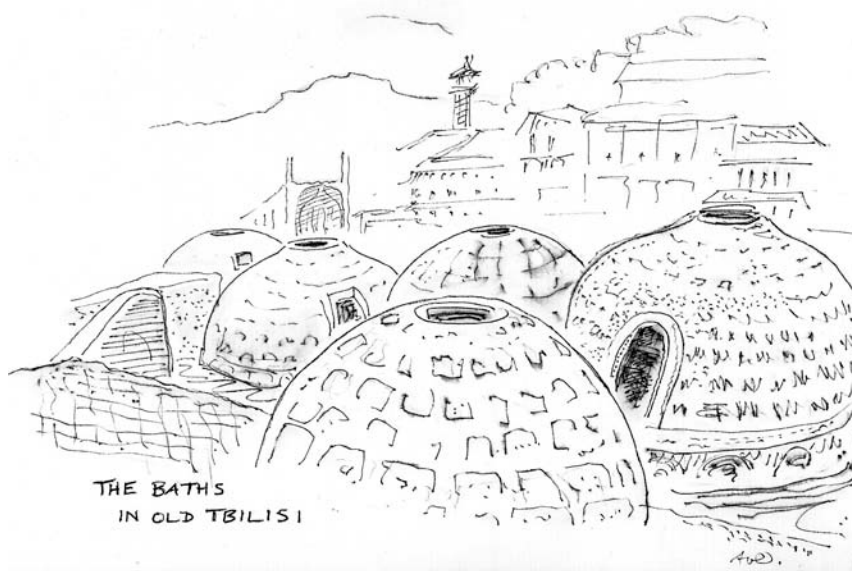
Stalin's dark Georgian genius forged the Soviet Union, but it also scorched and branded its peoples. While Stalin criticized nationalism as a threat to the Communist state, he also used it, when convenient, as a tool and devised borders in the Caucasus of exquisite complexity that served to isolate (at least on a map, if not in day to day intercourse) ethnic minorities within majorities, or cut across ethnic divides. With such boundaries, and with mass deportations of entire peoples, Stalin divided and conquered the lands and peoples of the USSR. The result—a jiggled, displaced, cultural hodge-podge—almost guarantees periodic instability throughout the Caucasus.

These tragic events, sometimes covered in the press, but more often hidden from the world, have occurred against a background of national wars and imperial expansions, not to mention today's energy resource exploration and development, regime changes, economic embargoes, arms, narcotics, and human trafficking, and anti-terrorist campaigns. And all in an area the size of North Dakota.

The Caucasus is a land consisting of "knots and 'nots'" that are at once geopolitical and conceptual, as follows:

- The Caucasus is not Russia.
- Russia is not the Caucasus.
- Even the Caucasus is not the Caucasus!

In essence what this means is that foreigners throughout the ages have been seduced into projecting their own fantasies (religious, Romantic, Imperialistic, post-Cold War, Eurasianist, Turanist, Democratic, and so forth) upon this ancient, variegated, and elusive region. During the 19th and 20th centuries, British and Russian diplomats, along with secret agents and adventurers, devoted a good deal of their lives to studying the Caucasus, learning its languages and customs, and even sometimes "going native." This is obviously not an option for the average United States diplomat. However, the Caucasus does offer a fascinating and potentially rewarding career path to anyone attracted by its cultural richness, and who understands the importance of its pivotal location and resources. Today a student of the Caucasus can refer to the work of many fine analysts, anthropologists, political scientists, journalists, and NGOs. Nevertheless, it remains the case that, while artists and poets turn to the Caucasus for inspiration, and tourists for rest and recreation, soldiers and diplomats will always find in this locale—the home of Narts and the proverbial Kaf Mountains—that their work is cut out for them...



GEOGRAPHY: A Land of Contrasts

In Tbilisi, situated in the Kura River valley, tourists may visit a synagogue, an Armenian Gregorian church, and a Georgian Orthodox church all on the same street— an indication of religious tolerance and the close mixing of peoples in Georgia. A Circassian elder, unimpressed by this story, scoffed and said: “Close? That’s nothing! Where I come from, high up in the mountains, the next village may be so close you can call out: ‘Hello...good morning!’ and they will hear you. But to get to that village on horseback takes a whole week.” (As recounted to the author.)

Maps tell fascinating stories: ancient and medieval cartographers, referring to the Bible, often drew the Caucasus Mountains (labeled as 'Armenia,' 'Abkhazia,' or 'Circassia') in a central location--next to Jerusalem--and marked it with a helpful diagram of Noah's Ark on top of Mount Ararat. In these old curiosities, much of today's European Union ('Europa') would be squeezed towards the top of the map, towards the frozen northern periphery ('Ultima Thule'). Centuries later, newer atlases left out Noah and drew attention to Byzantium, Russia, and Persia--but, alas, these maps tended to shove the mighty Caucasus off to the left or right margin, or stuff it out of sight entirely, down into the central binding where the atlas pages join together. Fortunately for all, by the 19th century the Caucasus bobbed to the surface once again as the industrial world developed a thirst for oil, and British and German mapmakers traced out, in obsessive detail, every peak and valley between the Black Sea and the Caspian. Maps are indeed marvelous, but of course "maps are not the terrain"...

The terrain of the Caucasus happens to be extraordinarily varied, with numerous microclimate zones; its weather can be mild in one place and severe a short distance away. In some Black Sea

regions the mountains plunge directly to the shore and travelers may descend from alpine regions to lush sub-tropical strands in an hour. Ancient and dense forests in certain areas have been depleted and replaced by scrubland. In the Greater Caucasus mountain range, Elbruz (elev. 18,480 feet) is the highest peak in Europe, whereas parts of Azerbaijan, along the Caspian, are below sea level. Azerbaijan's natural gas vents, eternally burning, have been known and even worshiped since antiquity, along with oil deposits oozing from the earth. The Tabriz region, formerly Azeri, now in Iran, has been called the original Garden of Eden (an honor claimed by sundry other Caucasus nations as well), whereas Armenia is largely arid plateaus and plains, hot or snowbound, according to season, and with stark mountains. A short bird-flight away, Georgia's climate ranges from alpine and temperate to hot and humid—perfect for viniculture, which Georgians say began in their homeland.

With mountains to their back, South Caucasus peoples throughout history focused their attention more towards the south and west—Persia and Anatolia—and less to the north or east, whence the occasional “uninvited guest” would swoop in from the steppes or the deserts of Central Asia. By contrast, the North Caucasus peoples, backed by those same mountains, have had to contend with a series of eastern raiders—Huns, Mongols, Tatars—and northern foes ranging from Varegs (Varyagi, Vikings) and Khazars, to Russians, Cossacks, and Germans. In a sense, the Caucasus Mountains provide a false sense of security because, though rugged and steep, they are not impassable. As a result, powerful and often violent currents and influences find refuge within those vastnesses and periodically cross back and forth between north and south. Today the North Caucasus (and parts of the South) remains under the sway of Russia, whereas Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, eternally wary of their large neighbor over the peaks, once again look to Iran and to the west—to Turkey, the European Union, and the United States—for their future. They look east as well: to China, for the Caucasus produces oil and gas, the life-blood of Western life and the western lifestyle worldwide. In all these matters, terrain, geography, and good maps, remain of paramount importance.

Armenia

As the Finns say, “You just can't get around geography.” Terrain often determines destiny and certainly does so in Armenia. “Historical Armenia” occupied considerable portions of the Anatolian Plateau in today's Turkey. This is the highest landlocked plateau in the Middle East, with an average elevation of 3000 feet (and up to 7000 feet). The volcanic Mount Ararat (also situated in Turkey) is a nostalgic symbol for Armenians and rises to 17,000 feet. This plateau, with limited points of entry, enabled occupants of historical Armenia to dominate surrounding areas of the Middle East.

Viewed more closely, historical Armenia consisted of a series of small plateaus, valleys, and gorges crossed by some 34 greater and lesser mountain ranges of complex geology, dominated by limestone and igneous rock, and with little rainfall or forests. Today's Armenia, much reduced in territory, is landlocked, with mountain steppes and meadows, and patches of forests. The

Republic (29,793 square kilometers) is about the size of Maryland—less than a tenth of the territory of historical Armenia (which was comparable in area to Great Britain).

The Araks River ('Mother Araxes'), though un-navigable, is another Armenian national symbol. It flows by many of her ancient cities, descending from the plateau in cascades and gorges 5,000 feet to the fertile plain of Ararat, where it becomes the border with Turkey and Iran before emptying into the Caspian. Prominent lakes in historical Armenia include Van and Sevan. The latter is modern Armenia's largest body of water, at an altitude of 6,279 feet. Sevan originally covered 550 square miles, but Soviet hydroelectric projects reduced its level by 50 feet, and diversions of streams to replenish the lake have instead brought pollution and destroyed much of Sevan's marine life.

Armenia's climate is continental, dry, and often harsh, with summer temperatures of up to 110° F and winters sometimes colder than Moscow's. Armenia is essentially an extension of the Central Asian deserts, with rich volcanic soil that is largely un-tillable unless irrigated. Though little rain falls, abundant water flows from the mountains and mineral springs and is harnessed for hydroelectric power. The land is highly seismic, and earthquakes have swallowed up churches and destroyed cities time and again. For example, in 1988, a devastating earthquake at Gumri killed 25,000-50,000 people and left 200,000 homeless. As a result, Armenia is a land of picturesque and plentiful ruins.

Azerbaijan

Some areas of Azerbaijan are steppe, whereas the "separate bit" of Azerbaijan, Nakhichevan, consists of arid plains and dramatic mountains. Azerbaijan's terrain varies from semi-desert regions below sea level, to the wet, muggy, forested mountains with tea plantations in the Talysh region. The capital, Baku, sits on the Absheron Peninsula, which juts into the Caspian Sea. In ancient times, the prophet Zarathustra resided in Apsheron. Today Apsheron offers a virtual cornucopia of crude oil and petroleum products--and also enjoys the distinction of being one of the most polluted regions on the globe thanks to oil spills, toxic defoliants and DDT used in the cotton industry.

Georgia

Slightly bigger than South Carolina, Georgia is largely mountainous and rugged with a mild climate on the Black Sea coast and cold winters in the highlands. Its scenery can change quickly from forest to scrub to semi-desert to alpine meadow. Rivers course through dramatic and often romantically gloomy mountain gorges. The Kura (Mtkvari) River originates in Turkey and flows through the ancient capital, Mtskheta, and then Tbilisi, before continuing through Azerbaijan to the Caspian Sea.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 How many trade and travel routes exist across the Caucasus Mountains?
- 2 Where are the region's highest and lowest points?
- 3 Read the first chapter of Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time. Where was the narrator going and what mountains did he see en route?
- 4 Whence do the major Caucasus rivers originate, and where do they flow?

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[INSERT: "Poor little Caucasus, getting it in the neck!" diagram.]

CHRONOLOGY

100 BC

ARMENIA

TIGRAN THE GREAT, expanded the Armenian

Empire to its greatest size (95-55 BC)

ROMANS conquer the Caucasus and Kartli-Iberia (66)

Then they conquer Armenian Empire (30 BC)

100 AD	And then they annex Azerbaijan ('Albania') 100-300AD
300	CHRISTIANITY accepted by Tiridates III (301 AD? 314 AD? debated)
400-600	FIRST GOLDEN AGE OF ARMENIAN CULTURE Byzantine Empire cedes Armenia to Arabs (653)
800	BAGRATID family (installed by Arabs, 806) governs Armenia. Armenian prince Ashot I (813) begins 1,000 years of Bagratid rule in Georgia.
900	SECOND GOLDEN AGE OF ARMENIAN CULTURE (862-977) (Ashot III)
1000 centuries)	BYZANTINE GREEK invasions of Armenia (continue into the 11th-14th centuries)
1000s-1300s	SELJUK TURK invasions of Armenia CRUSADES. Cilician Armenian and Georgian armies help European armies to control Holy Land. MAMELUKE TURKS conquer Cilician Armenia (1375)
1400s	OTTOMAN Empire absorbs most of modern Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.
1800	Treaty of Turkmanchay (1828) awards Nakhichevan and Erevan area to Russia "Armenian question" arises at Congress of Berlin (1878) and becomes an ongoing European issue. First Armenian revolutionary party formed (1881) Massacre of 200,000-300,000(?) Armenian subjects by Ottoman Turks (1894-96)
1900	Young Turks take over Ottoman government (1908). Reform agenda supported by Armenian population. Young Turks order massacres of 600,000-- 2 million(?) Armenians, driving others from eastern Anatolia. (1915-22) Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia form independent TRANSCAUCASIAN FEDERATION (1917). Tsar Nicholas II abdicates Russian throne; Bolsheviks take power in Russia. (1918) Independent Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian states emerge from defeat of Ottoman Empire in World War, become republics in the USSR for seven decades.
1920-30s	Industrialization, collectivization, purges, Russification.
1991	Independence from the Soviet Union. Ongoing Nagorno-Karabagh dispute.
CHRONOLOGY AZERBAIJAN Persian fire worship	

300 BC	GREEK influence
200	Parthian Empire
100	
	ROMAN influences in Caucasian “Albania”
100 AD	
200	CHRISTIANITY advances
300	
500	Attack by Turkic “Sabirs”
600	Christian Albania (Mikhranides) First big Arab attack (664)
700	
	ARAB CONTROL
800	
	Babek's Rebellion (816-837)
900	More autonomy in "Aran" and "Shirvan"
1000	
	OGUZ/SELJUK TURKS
1100	
	GEORGIAN suzerainty
	GOLDEN AGE ATABEKS (Attabeys) in Ganja/ Nakhchivan
1200	
	MONGOL RAIDS (1221,1235)
1300	
	MONGOL EMPIRES
	TIMUR's RAMPAGES (1380)
1400	Turkic Overlords (Gara-Goyonlu, Aq-Goyonlu)
1500	SHI'ITE ISLAM adopted (1501) "GREAT AZERI EMPIRE" (Persian Safayid Dynasty)
1600	Ottoman Turks, then PERSIAN CONTROL
1700	Nadir Shah Attacks 1735-47
	Small Khanates
1800	RUSSIAN COLONY
	OIL BOOM 1860s-1915
1900	Independence 1918-20 Democratic Republic
	USSR period
1991	Independence again Nagorno-Karabagh dispute 1988-present
2003/2005	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline

CHRONOLOGY

5000 BC	GEORGIA Neolithic Culture, dwelling & burial sites in Tbilisi
2000	INDO-EUROPEANS enter Georgia
1000	Late Georgia Bronze Age
900	Capture of King Asia of the Daiaeni (845)
800	Sarduri II of Urartu invades Colchis (750) SCYTHIANS & CIMMERIANS invade Georgia (730)
600	GREEK colonies
500	Xenophon and his Ten Thousand cross Southwest Georgia
400	IBERIAN KINGDOM , Tbilisi founded (458)
200	Mithridates Empator of Pontus (163-120)
100	ROMANS : Pompey's Caucasian Campaign (66-55)
0	Vespasian fortifies Mtskheta Castle (75 AD)
100 AD	Georgian ambassadors go to Hadrian
300	St. Nino “brings” CHRISTIANITY (330)
400	Peter the Iberian (409-88) King Vakhtan Gorgaslan (446-510)
500	Armeno-Georgian monophysite synod of Dvin (506) JVARI CHURCH, Mtskheta (590-607)
600	GREEKS & KHAZARS capture Tbilisi (627) ARABS occupy east Georgia (655)
700	CALIPH 's forces ravage Georgia (636-38) Prince Ashot the Great (from Armenia)
800	Adarnasse IV, King of the Georgians
900	BAGRATID DYNASTY (lasts approx. 1000 years) Bagrat III, King of Kartli (975)
1000	TVETISKHOVELI CATHEDRAL, Mtskheta (1029) SELJUK TURKS invade (1065) KING DAVID THE BUILDER (1089-1125) Georgia occupies part of Armenia (1123) Georgia captures Tbilisi from Muslim emirs (1121) Georgia occupies Derbent (1167) The Bard SHOTA RUSTAVELI (1188) QUEEN TAMAR (1184-1212)
1200	GEORGIAN/GREEK Empire of Trebizond Georgia captures Kars (1206) Georgia invades Iran (1208-1210) MONGOLS invade (1236) Georgia becomes principalities with nobles and kings, and is often vassal to the Mongol khan.
1300	THE BLACK DEATH TAMERLANE invades (1386-88), sacks Tbilisi Georgian CLANS evolve, country splits into three kingdoms + principalities (for 400 years) JEWISH, ARMENIAN, PERSIAN merchants, Silk Road

access

1500 **TURKS** "invade" West Georgia (for 400 years)
SAFAVIDS "invade" (1549)
 FEUDAL lords and princes, Georgia divided into
 Ottoman and Safavid spheres of interest (for 200 years)

1700 **RUSSIAN** contact begins (1554)
 Herekle II (1744-98) unites Kartli and Kakheti
Georgia allies with CATHERINE THE GREAT (1783)
SHAH AGHA MOHAMMAD KHAN burns Tbilisi (1798)

1800 **Georgia annexed by RUSSIA (1801)**
 Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti abolished (1801)
 Russia consolidates rule over Georgia (for 117 years)
 RUSSIFICATION of feudal system
 Military governors, Conspiracy of 1832
RUSSIA fights SHAMYL
 Georgian Socialist Democrats
 Stalin born (1878)

1900 **RUSSIAN REVOLUTION (1917)**
 Mensheviks seize control in Georgia

1918-20 **GEORGIAN INDEPENDENT STATE**
 Land reforms
 Red Army invades Georgia (1920)
 Georgia becomes a Soviet Socialist Republic

1922-26 Georgia joins the **TRANSCAUCASIAN SOVIET
 FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC**
 Farm collectivization (1930s)

1936 Georgia becomes a **REPUBLIC of the USSR**
 Purges (1936-37)

1989 Georgia/South Ossetia clashes

1990 Elections

1991 **GEORGIAN INDEPENDENCE** declared
 Zviad GAMSAKHURDIA elected president

1991-2 **WAR WITH ABKHAZIA**
 Gamsakhurdia deposed, Eduard SHEVARDNADZE returns
 from Russia (1992)
 Georgians repelled from Abkhazia
 Abkhaz ceasefire (1994)

1995 SHEVARDNADZE becomes president.

2002 **UNITED STATES** forces enter Georgia to "train-and-equip"
 Georgians for anti-terrorist operations

2003-5(?) **BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN OIL PIPELINE**
 "ROSE REVOLUTION" (2003) Shevardnadze resigns

2004 Mikheil SAAKASHVILI inaugurated
 Ajarian separatist leader Alan Abashidze toppled

2008

Clashes with S. Ossetia
Abkhazian elections
Russian-Georgian-S. Ossetian Conflict

Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region



PEOPLES

The Caucasus has been called the “museum of mankind” due to its varied and ancient cultures, as well as the “mountain of languages” (at least 40 being spoken, some by only a few thousand people, with more than two dozen languages in Daghestan alone). The Caucasus, like its neighbors, Turkey and Iran, is a cultural crossroads that has always boasted a mix of autochthonous “host” peoples (e.g. Georgians, Circassians) and various “guests”: Greeks, Mongols, Byzantines, Romans, Persians, Turks, Slavs, and many others. Few areas of the Caucasus can claim ethnic purity; indeed, the region resembles a crazy-quilt of interspersed peoples: there are Georgian Armenians, Turkish Georgians, Georgian Azeris, and every other

combination. For generations, even centuries, groups have lived in close proximity (such as the Armenians and Azeris in Nagorno-Karabagh, at least until recently), or mingled and intermarried (e.g. Abkhaz and Circassians with Georgians and Mingrelians), making current civil wars and the creation of breakaway regions all the more bitter.

Caucasus demography changes over time. Indeed, only its mountains endure, and the paths across them, while maps and political borders mean little to itinerant merchants or to displaced persons caught in a blizzard (or to fighters on sortie). In the Caucasus, anthropology and ethnography can prove to be poor guides and false friends, and books often give legitimacy to facts based on legend and hearsay. Such terms such as Caucasian, Circassian, Adyghe, and so forth, while convenient ethnographic designations, sometimes are inevitably colored by imperialistic or nationalist policies (or may even be tainted by dubious 'Aryan' race theory). Let the labeler beware! The distinctions implied by names in the Caucasus sometimes turn out to be chimera, divisive elements which distract from important commonalities.

HISTORIES:



ARMENIA

The first major state on the Anatolian plateau was Urartia, and Armenia's capital, Yerevan, stands near the Urartian citadel of Erebuni (782 BC). According to one theory, in ancient times, "Armens" arrived from the west (possibly Thrace), and slowly joined with the Urartians to form the Armenians. Other classical plateau dwellers included Kurds, Persians, Turkmens, and Turks.

Under Tigran II (the Great, 95-55 BC), Armenia stretched from the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea, but its borders shrank dramatically in the 4th century AD. Though Armenia is the world's first Christian nation (314 AD), many Armenians over the centuries by necessity converted to Islam. In addition, for over a millennium Armenians have left their homeland to pursue commerce, or have been driven away by Byzantine transfers of populations and most recently by the massive uprooting and Ottoman massacres of 1915-22.



Geghard Monastery-13th Century

Armenia, though resilient, fell to the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Sassanid Persians, Mongols, the Seljuk Turks, Ottomans, and Russians. It re-emerged, briefly, as an independent country in 1918—before being forced into Soviet Russia in 1920.

During the 15th-17th centuries, Armenia was partitioned into halves controlled by Turkey and Persia. Of the western half of Armenia, Russia took control of its eastern portions during the 1800s: a prelude to the turbulent 20th century in which the great Ottoman and Russian empires gave way to Turkish and Soviet nation states—with Armenians caught in the middle.



Armenians traditionally comprised two groups: the educated urban Armenian populations in the great Ottoman cities, as well as in Baku and Tbilisi, and, secondly, rural Armenian peasants. There were also diaspora communities. In 1894-96, rising and even revolutionary feelings of Armenian individuality and nationalism provoked harsh repressions and massacres by the Ottoman sultan. The promise of a progressive “Young Turk” regime, which toppled the sultanate, turned sour during the First World War as the authorities turned on its Armenian citizenry and scourged them out of Anatolia (1915-23). Armenians fled to Russian controlled regions and formed an impoverished, fragile nation in the area surrounding Erevan.

It is difficult to imagine the chaos in the Caucasus after the Bolshevik Revolution. While Georgia and Azerbaijan for a time had “protector” states (Germany and Britain, respectively), Armenia was on its own. Threatened by Turkish expansionist forces, Armenia cast its lot with the Bolsheviks, becoming first an Independent Socialist Republic, then joining Georgia and Azerbaijan to make up a weak Transcaucasus Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, and finally perforce entering Soviet Russia. Until this time, Erevan had been but a tsarist backwater, a provincial center with insufficient resources or expertise to administer a country.

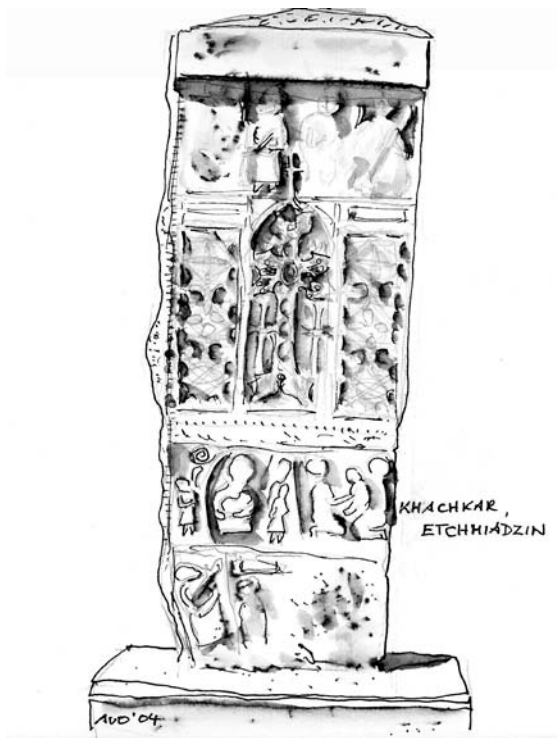
Even into the early 20th century, the majority of Erevan’s population (30,000) were Azeris, not Armenians. By contrast, Armenians at this time formed an influential majority in Tbilisi and a large component of the populace of Baku, two cities with ten times the population and wealth of Erevan. However, Erevan’s population increased rapidly, in late tsarist, early Bolshevik years, due mainly to the influx of 300,000 indigent refugees from Turkey. The fledgling nation was in dire condition and an estimated 20% of its population died of privations in the first year and a half of Armenia’s existence.

The 1920s introduced an era of intense land cultivation and industrial development in

Armenia, as Yerevan expanded, and planners built hydroelectric plants, canals, and irrigation projects. Then came “Stalin’s Revolution” which brought waves of purges and forced farm collectivization. This was firmly resisted by peasants who slaughtered 300,000 head of cattle (1928-33). For a short period Stalin backpedaled, declaring the USSR to be “dizzy with success” from Moscow’s disastrous economic edicts—but collectivization began anew in 1930. This was a major assault on Armenian (and Georgian) society, the peasantry, and Armenian’s traditional merchant and commercial classes.

At great human cost, forced industrialization virtually eradicated Armenia’s unemployment by 1931. However, the abundance of jobs was due substantially to a labor shortage, low pay, poor working conditions, and absenteeism. On the positive side, industrialization also brought with it increased literacy, social mobilization, and independence of women. For a time, Soviet authorities encouraged the use of local languages—e.g. Armenian—but imposed Russian as a Soviet *lingua franca* after 1934. Nationalism was discouraged in favor of Soviet patriotism, followed shortly by harsh suppression of artists and writers. The Great Purges of 1936-38 culled the ranks of the Armenian Communist Party, replacing old elites with more compliant new members. Agnasi Khanjian, Armenia’s leader, an ardent Marxist, died during a visit to Lavrenti Beria, Stalin’s ruthless henchman, in Tbilisi in July 1936. (Officially Khanjian ‘committed suicide.’ Curiously, in December of the same year, Nestor Lakhoba, the Abkhazian leader who had resisted Stalin’s mandate that Abkhazia be collectivized and enter Georgia as an ‘autonomous republic’ --also expired after meeting with Beria. Lakhoba’s death was ruled a ‘heart attack,’ but many people suspected poisoning.)

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Armenia declared its (second) independence in 1991. The country is small (29,800 sq km), about the size of Maryland. The major international issue facing Armenia today is the “frozen conflict” (dating from 1988, with a ceasefire declared in 1994) with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Called “Artsakh” by Armenians, Karabagh is a primarily an Armenian-populated region assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s by Moscow. Armenians presently hold not only Nagorno-Karabakh but a sizeable portion of Azerbaijan proper. The stalemate hampers the economies of both Armenia and Azerbaijan.



After independence, Armenians faced dire hardships (50% of Armenians live below the poverty line), including a major earthquake and turbulent politics. In 1999, Armenian Prime Minister Sarkisian was assassinated in Parliament. President, Robert Kocharian (elected 1998) cracked down on opposition groups, and the 2008 election of his successor, former defense minister Serzh Sargsyan, was marred by violent protests, fatalities, and opposition purges. Sargsyan has yet to consolidate legitimacy--as opposed to power; indeed, some critics suggest that Armenia's cautious overtures to Turkey in recent months, with an eye to opening Armenia's borders, is intended to distract from Sargsian's considerable domestic problems. His opponent during the elections, Levon Ter-Petrossian (Armenia's first president, 1991-1998, after independence from the Soviet Union) remains a significant adversary. In part Armenia's political drama reflects tensions between Armenians from within the country itself, and those from Nagorno-Karabagh (who include Robert Kocharian, Armenia's president from 1998 to 2008 and a former leader in the Karabagh movement, and Serzh Sargsyan, former chairman of the NK Republic Self-Defense Forces Committee).

Armenia's population (8.6 million worldwide) has declined from 3.3 million (1989) to 2.6 million today, due to emigration. Long an ethnic minority even in historical Armenia, today's Armenians make up 96% of the nation's population. By the end of 1993, virtually all Azeris--i.e. Muslims--had emigrated from Armenia. Armenia's natural resources include deposits of copper, gold, molybdenum, zinc, and alumina. During Soviet times--the era of central planning--Armenia operated large agro-industrial complexes and its industrial sector supplied machine tools, textiles, and many other manufactured goods to other republics in the USSR, receiving raw materials and energy in exchange. In those days Armenia produced top physicists and astronomers, chemicals, machine tools and textiles, and was considered the USSR's "Silicon Valley" because of its industrial and computer capability. Now all that is gone and educated Armenians have difficulty finding jobs to match their skills (which anecdotally are considerable

in trade, science and the arts, but less stellar in management and public administration). In Soviet times, agriculture accounted for only 20% of Armenia's total employment; today, however, agriculture (much of it subsistence farming, occupying approximately half the labor force) and construction form the most significant basis of its economy. Endemic corruption in customs and tax collection reflects more a systemic, rather than a personal or moral problem.

IMF-sponsored programs have resulted in positive economic growth rates; and--until the worldwide economic crisis in 2008--Armenia cut inflation, stabilized its currency, and privatized many small- and medium-sized enterprises. Chronic energy shortages of the 1990s have been mitigated by energy from the Metsamor nuclear power plant (situated, unfortunately, in a seismically active zone). Armenia maintains close economic ties with Russia; Armenia's **electricity sector, privatized in 2002, is now owned by Russia's RAO-UES**. Armenia's industries included metal-cutting machine tools, forging-pressing machines, electric motors, tires, knitted wear, hosiery, shoes, silk fabric, chemicals, trucks, instruments, microelectronics, gem cutting, jewelry manufacturing, software development, food processing, and brandy. With the unique exception of northern Armenia and Karabagh, much of the region appears barren, especially since the years of energy privation in the early 1990s when forests were cut for fuel. Nevertheless, Armenia has fruit trees and vineyards, flowers and melons aplenty. Birds abound, including the eponymous crane called the *grunk*, or *groong* (see Websites section below). Armenia's fauna include boars and bears, leopard, ibex, wolf and mouflon (a wild sheep)—as well as such insects as the tarantula, mosquito, three species of scorpion, and the fly.

A Turkish/Armenian "Thaw"?

Important to note is that, despite the massacres and expulsions of Armenians from Anatolia nearly a century ago, today some 50,000 Turkish Armenians live in Istanbul and an estimated one million in eastern Turkey. Though the borders remain closed, Armenians and Turks work in each others countries without incident. Armenians can be found vacationing in the seaside Turkish resort of Antalya, and Turkish goods are widespread in Armenia, though imported through a third country, Georgia. This shows subtle conditions can be "on the ground," as opposed to analyses published in foreign affairs journals--and just how intertwined the fortunes are of the three South Caucasus nations. If, for example, Georgia experiences Russian border closures or fuel interruptions, Armenia immediately feels the pinch. And any threat or interruption in flow through the Baku-Tbilisi-Cheyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines causes instant concern in Azerbaijan.

It has become fashionable in some academic circles to argue that Armenia's closed borders render it irrelevant to a Caucasus that envisions itself a crucial link between north and south, and east and west. Others maintain that, *au contraire*, Armenia is not isolated, that it has valuable mineral resources (e.g. copper, molybdenum, iron) and it trades extensively with Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Israel (diamonds); and it maintains close ties with Russia (indeed, Russian troops can be observed patrolling Yerevan airport and at the Turkish borde). Another argument maintains that between Yerevan and Baku, two major population centers, there is "nothing"--an economic vacuum--hence< Armenia's future lies in the west, with Europe and Turkey, not in the east.

Of Armenia's budget, almost 25% goes to defense, public order and security. By contrast, Azerbaijan spends more than \$2 billion on defense--equivalent to Armenia's *entire annual budget*. Obviously, even partial resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict would improve the situation considerably, and opening the border between Armenia and Turkey would result in decreased military spending on both sides and increased trade and transportation to Anatolia and the Middle East. For more on the "thaw," see below in the following section.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Why is Armenia considered at once outside, alongside, and “inside” Azerbaijan?
- 2 What is Armenia’s most prevalent and ancient building material?
- 3 What makes the *grunk*, or *groong*, an eponymous Armenian crane?
- 4 Where is “Noah’s Ark” and why is the question of current interest?
- 5 Which nation has the largest diaspora community: Armenia or Azerbaijan—and why?
- 6 Where and what is Cilicia?
- 7 For what were Armenians renowned in Byzantine and Ottoman times?
- 8 Which Armenian family ruled as Georgia’s longest dynasty?
- 9 How are Armenian and Georgian churches similar, and how do they differ?
- 10 Which nation accepted Christianity first, and by how many years?
- 11 Who created the Armenian alphabet?
- 12 By what strategies did the Armenian SSR survive and prosper in the Soviet Union?
- 13 What are Armenia’s strengths and weaknesses today?

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Web sites

- 1 www.groong.com (premiere e-news service)
- 2 www.armenpress.am (Armenpress official news agency)
- 3 www.virtualarmenia.am (a tourist guide originally drafted by j. Brady Kiesling, with material from Michael Gfoeller and the Gfoeller Foundation)
- 4 www.cilicia.com (contains Armenian tourism and culture-related material)
- 5 www.ameniainfor.am (Guide to Armenia)
- 6 www.armeniaemb.org (Armenian Embassy in Washington)
- 7 www.gov.am (Government of Armenia)
- 8 www.armeniaforeignministry.am (Armenian Foreign Ministry)
- 9 www.arka.am Arka business news agency
- 10 www.yerkir.am Yerkir weekly, news section updated daily
- 11 www.virtualarmenia Tourist guide
- 12 www.cilicia.com Tourism and culture
- 13 www.armeniainfo.am Guide to Armenia
- 14 www.eruasianet.com Open Society Institute, Caucasus/Central Asia news
- 15 www.rferl.org Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty news and reports
- 16 www.cacianalyst.org Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University
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- 10 www.eurasia.org.ru Russian site with English option
- 11 lcweb2.loc.gov Library of Congress site
- 12 <http://www.acnis.am/main/> Politics and policy

Deportations, Massacres, and the Question of Genocide

A large portion of the Armenian diaspora stems from Ottoman oppressions, massacres, and

deportations in the period 1915-23. Until then, Armenian citizens of the Empire formed two general groups: educated urban residents, and peasants or villagers in Eastern Anatolia, all organized into a *millet* community under the leadership of the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople. (The millet served both a religious and secular, or administrative function, it being the means by which the Sultan collected Poll Taxes from Armenians. Additional millets formed later for Armenian Catholics and Evangelicals/Protestants.)

During the 19th century, nationalistic political aspirations spread among Armenians, especially those studying abroad or in contact with Christian missionaries. After long suffering from Ottoman and Kurdish raids, double taxation, expropriations and brutality, Armenians in Anatolia and Russia, as well as the Czar's representatives in Constantinople, pressured the Sultan's government for reforms. Other nationalistic groups called for a free "Turkish Armenia."

In the 1890s, Ottoman authorities cracked down on revolutionary nationalists, killing 100,000-300,000 Armenians. The reformist Young Turk movement overthrew the Sultan in 1909, but later turned against Armenian citizens as well. When Turkey and Russia became opponents in the First World War, Anatolian and Russian Armenian communities found themselves caught in between. Some joined the Ottoman forces, others the Czar's.

In 1915, Ottoman officials seized hundreds of Armenian leaders in the capital--politicians, priests, scholars, and professionals--and deported them to the interior, along with virtually the entire East Anatolian Armenian population. (This region, 'historical Armenia,' also contained ancient populations of Kurds and Turkic groups). Eyewitness and official accounts of the highest caliber--from American and British diplomats, missionaries, and from German military and railroad personnel in Turkey--attest to the scope and brutality of the Ottomans' actions. Armenian males were either killed immediately or, if in the military, disarmed and worked to death as slave laborers, or executed. The remaining Armenians, mostly women and children, trekked hundreds of miles into the desert. Many died of hardships or were killed by hired Kurds and other irregulars. Few arrived at their destination, near Aleppo; some survived by converting to Islam and finding shelter with Turkish families.

Thousands of Armenian civilians perished during Ottoman incursions into the Russian South Caucasus and during the Turkish national revolution (1919-23). Casualty estimates range from hundreds of thousands to over a million and a half Armenians dead.

The Armenian government today supports lobbying efforts by Caucasus Diaspora communities in Russia, Europe, the United States and the Middle East to have the above doleful events recognized as genocide--a claim rejected categorically by the Turkish government. Turkey's official position is that the desperate Ottoman government sought to isolate, neutralize, and remove during World War One what it perceived to be a dangerous element posed by its own Armenian citizens. The action they chose was to force-march entire Armenian communities away from the eastern war front with Russia. Turkish authorities and most Turkish scholars maintain that the context of these, admittedly harsh, deportations was a deplorable civil war in which both Armenians and Muslim Turks lost many lives.

Governments of several countries (but not all, and not the United States), along with many

scholars, consider the Armenian deportations and killings to be genocide--a term coined in 1944 by a Polish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, which means, essentially, the *intentional* harm or destruction of a national, ethnic, religious, or racial group.

The controversy continues. In 2001, Turks and Armenians (albeit none in government positions) formed a Reconciliation Commission--reaction to which has been mixed. In 2004, *Ararat*, an award-winning film by Canadian director Atom Egoyan about the Armenian massacres, received permission to be shown in Turkey. The Cultural Ministry later rescinded its permit after nationalist Turkish political parties strongly objected to the film's release, *but Ararat has since been shown*. Following statements by writer Orhan Pamuk and the assassination of Turkish-Armenian editor Hrant Dink, in 2007, there are signs of a rethinking about Turkey's history and a desire to explore chapters inaccessible to Turkish citizens, either because these topics are not covered in their education, or because of the difficulty--indeed, impossibility--of non-specialists today reading Ottoman Turkish, which was written in Arabic. In Turkey today there is both intense nationalism, as well as more thoughtful responses to the "Armenian question," such as a recent on-line campaign to inquire into the subject of the Armenian massacres, and even to apologize for them.

Few words are as charged as "genocide," created by Lemkin and ratified by the United Nations in 1948. Over the more than six decades of its existence, "genocide" has entered common parlance and possesses now not only its original, legal meaning, but an emotionally charged conversational sense as well. To be sure, Lemkin wanted the emotional element: he wanted his new word to conjure up the odious nature and the enormity of a "crime against humanity." But he also wanted clarity about the matter and realized the need for a new legal concept that would deprive genocide perpetrators of the shield of national sovereignty. Preoccupied by the atrocities and exterminations visited upon Armenians and Jews, but he was also aware of the sufferings of many other groups as well. Today, occasionally, the charge of genocide can bring a guilty party to justice, as Lemkin hoped, but there is no guarantee. Furthermore, the legal definition of genocide can be interpreted in many ways, and this inherent ambiguity has had a major unintended consequence: it can sometimes impede dialogue between nations and communities. (See THE OTHER DIPLOMACY section, p.)

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 How did Armenian nationalism arise?
- 2 How is genocide defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide?
- 3 During the late 19th-early 20th centuries, what position did the United States take

officially, and Americans popularly, with regard to Armenians and the Ottoman government?

- 4 What must an American diplomat today say (or not say) when confronted with the “Armenian question”?

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AZERBAIJAN



The word “Azerbaijan” derives from the Greek “Atropatena” and Persian “Aturpatan”: meaning, protected by fire. Today’s Azerbaijan (86,600 sq km, slightly smaller than Maine) has long been a desired corner of the world, both as a low-lying, north-south route, and as a source of wonder due to the eternal flames and oozes emanating from the region’s oil and natural gas vents. Though often home to large Armenian communities (as Armenia has been to Azeris), more than a decade and a half of strife over the Nagorno-Karabagh enclave leaves Azerbaijan with a majority Turkic and Muslim population—the reverse situation pertaining in Nagorno-Karabagh and Armenia, which is now totally Armenian and Christian.

Bordering the Caspian Sea and pierced by the Great Caucasus mountain range, Azerbaijan (86,600 sq km), about the size of Maine, exists in three portions: the Caspian part; Nagorno-Karabagh; and a crucial “extra” bit, or enclave, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic wedged

between Armenia, Iran, and Turkey. Owing to these geopolitical complexities, Azerbaijan shares boundaries with Armenia, Georgia, Iran, Russia, and also Turkey.



Greater Azerbaijan comprised a northern region—today’s Azerbaijan—and a southern half, now in Iran, whose capital is Tabriz. In South Azerbaijan, Medians were followed by an Aechemenid state. In the north, by the 2nd century AD, a Caucasian “Albanian” kingdom appeared which became Christian. At the same time, Turkic-language groups settled in the area, leaving a linguistic imprint. By the end of the 7th century, the Arab caliphates ruled and Islam predominated, though Christianity remained in some areas. Islamic cultural centers flourished as did literature and music. Various independent Shirvan states resisted Seljuk Turk and Mongol invasions. Later Safavids united Azerbaijan, which however again split into numerous feudal states under the aegis of Persia. Thus, the Azerbaijan region, Christianized early and exposed to centuries of Islamic influence, had seen by the mid-19th century a round-robin of power struggles between Persia, the Ottomans, and local khanates.

Now came the Great Game. Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus turned Azerbaijan into an arena of diplomacy, espionage, and military adventures between Russia, Britain, and other nations over control of Central Asia and access to India. After the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) and the Treaty of Turkmanchay (1828), North Azerbaijan became a part of the Russian Empire and began rapidly to Europeanize and industrialize as it exported oil to Europe. Azerbaijan also became a thriving center of modern Muslim culture, boasting an opera house, a grammar school for Azeri girls, numerous newspapers, and a growing literary scene. The oil boom enriched Russians, Armenians, Europeans—and some Azerbaijani Turks. With increased education and contact with intellectual circles in Kazan, Istanbul, Tabriz, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Paris, feelings of Azerbaijani nationalism grew, hand in hand with pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic sentiments. During this period, Azerbaijan became increasingly ethnically mixed—and divided into sectarian factions of Armenians and other groups who had entered the region as part of Russian colonization.

At the time of the Russian Revolution, Czarist forces, Bolsheviks, Turkey, England, Germany, and Persia all jostled for influence and access to Azeri oil fields which produced half of the world's oil. With the collapse of the tsarist government in 1917, Bolshevik recruiters and Turkic activists maneuvered for control of Baku. Two massacres occurred in 1918, the first inflicted by Armenians upon Azeris, and the second by Azeris on Armenians. A Bolshevik "Baku Commune," made up mainly of Armenians, was put to flight and later executed. A benevolent, politically diverse, and all too brief period of independence ensued (1918-19), which was cut short by the entry into Baku of the Soviet army in 1920. All this resulted in huge loss of life in conflicts often instigated by such revolutionary agent provocateurs as 'Gayoz Nisharadze'—later to be known by another pseudonym, Stalin.

During the Soviet era, Lenin and Stalin (as Commissar of Nationalities and later as the state leader), purged Azerbaijan's elite, cracked down on religion, and jiggered the country's borders, rendering it into two regions separated by Armenia, and leaving Azerbaijan an amalgam of Azeri and Armenian populated enclaves and exclaves. Under Soviet rule the Azerbaijani alphabet changed from Arabic, to Latin, to Cyrillic (it is now back to a Latin alphabet). More than the other two South Caucasus republics, the Azerbaijan SSR adopted Russian as a language of intellectual discourse. A kind of inter-ethnic *pax sovieticus* prevailed, laced with corruption and privileges for the elite, which suppressed dissident nationalism and fostered a relatively peaceful status quo. At the same time, as part of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan became more isolated as the republic's borders with Iran were closed and Azerbaijanis with Iranian passports were forced to leave. Whereas before the Russian Revolution, Azeris made up 43% of the population of Erevan, in 1948, Soviet authorities separated the peoples and deported some 100,000 Azeris out of Armenia.

The Baku oil boom, which had begun in the 19th century, declined after World War Two as Soviet planners decided to develop oil resources at more politically secure locations, in Siberia. After independence (1991), Azerbaijan's economy suffered anew due to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

Azerbaijan today is ethnically Azeri 90%, Dagestani 3.2%, Russian 2.5%, Armenian 2% (almost all in Nagorno-Karabagh), and other 2.3% (1998 est.). Language and religious affiliation follow the same percentage profile, though in fact most Azerbaijanis are nominal rather than actual practicing adherents of any religion. Independent since 1991, Azerbaijan is slowly engaging in economic reforms and turning from a command to a market economy.

Azerbaijan's economy collapsed nearly 60% in 1990-95 after the country's independence from the Soviet Union. Estimates vary of Azerbaijan's oil and gas reserves, but they are large and almost certainly guarantee a measure of future economic growth. Azerbaijan has one of the world's largest natural gas fields discovered in the past two decades. Nevertheless, its oil and gas reserves are most emphatically not infinite, and its economic well-being depends upon world oil prices, the security of new pipelines in the region, careful management of resources, and control of incipient "Dutch Disease" (i.e. distortions to the economy and currency due to over-reliance upon a single export, such as oil and gas). Meanwhile, Azerbaijan remains locked in a "frozen" dispute with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabagh, which severely limits its present economic development. As with Armenians in Armenia, close to 50% of Azerbaijanis live in poverty.

Azerbaijan trades less with Russia and other former Soviet republics these days, and more with Turkey and Europe. Its industries include petroleum and natural gas, petroleum products, oilfield equipment; steel, iron ore, cement, chemicals and petrochemicals, and textiles. Its agriculture produces cotton, grain, rice, grapes, fruit, vegetables, tea, tobacco; cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats. Azerbaijan exports mostly oil and gas (90% of Azerbaijan's total exports value), as well as machinery, cotton, and foodstuffs (e.g. pomegranate juice and in the future, hopefully, water buffalo mozzarella cheese).

Azerbaijan is strategically important for its oil and gas reserves, and also for its ability to provide air access to Central Asia and Afghanistan. Aspects of its government and business community are notoriously corrupt and unhesitant about silencing dissent. Journalists, upon occasion meet a sorry fate, while others report freely; in 2009 Azerbaijan curtailed foreign news broadcasting. Its current, Ilham Aliyev (the son of Azerbaijan's late president, KGB-trained Geydar Aliyev), may be in power for a long time, as, according the wishes of a "majority" of Azerbaijani voters in 2009, presidential term limits have been removed. That said, Aliyev has shown himself to be a capable leader, able to maneuver between competing clans and "strong" families, while at the same time consolidating power and, in effect, "branding" the Aliyev family name through a wide range of philanthropic ventures funded by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation (headed by the president's wife, Mehriban Aliyev, who was elected to the Azerbaijan National Assembly in 2005). Azerbaijan has enthusiastically sponsored a new academy of diplomacy in order to train a new generation of government professionals; and Azerbaijani journalists participate in international training programs (some hosted in Baku). In a new program, qualified young students who gain admissions into top international educational institutions receive bursaries from the government, in exchange for a promise to devote five years afterwards to working in Azerbaijan before, if they so choose, seeking their fortunes abroad. Internationally, Ilham Aliyev has successfully handled competing demands by Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the United States, keeping his Azerbaijan's and his own options open.

Anti-Armenian rhetoric waxes and wanes in Azerbaijan, and particularly worrisome is the growth of Azerbaijan's military budget (\$2.46 billion in 2009). While Azerbaijani may believe that time is on their side and that Nagorno-Karabagh can be retaken militarily, outside analysts consider Armenian-supported troops to be in an advantageous position due to superior fighting capability and their occupation of the high ground in Nagorno-Karabagh.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Who were/are Azeris, versus Azerbaijanis, versus Azerbaijanians, versus Azerbaijani Turks, etc.?
- 2 Why is a Selucid not a Seljuk or a Safavid?
- 3 Why is Azerbaijan in two pieces?
- 4 Where, for the most part, is the Azeri diaspora?
- 5 Where is Tabriz, and what was it, historically?

- 6 Why has Azerbaijan, though Muslim, been called the most “European” of Caucasus nations?

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Nagorno-Karabagh



The ‘autonomous region’ of Nagorno-Karabagh (‘Mountainous Black Garden’) has harbored Azeri as well as Armenian communities. Conflict, ethnic cleansing, and atrocities committed by both groups over the last 20 years (and counting) leave the region currently with an Armenian majority and under Karabagh-Armenian control--and with annual sniper fatalities.

While sharing many customs, Azerbaijanis and Armenians differ in their racial, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds—and also in their historical memory. The 20th century rise in

Azerbaijan's national consciousness (and Armenia's somewhat earlier) played a part in these divisions, as did economics and class: many Armenians came to Baku in the 19th and early 20th centuries to work in the oil industry and, as an "exploited proletariat" class, served as prime fuel for revolution makers. The "Armeno-Tatar War" of 1905-07 resulted in regional Turkish populations relying less on Christian and Jewish inhabitants for goods and services, and it boosted Armenian political aspirations. **The Turkic Azeris regarded Ottomans as kin and allies, and they supported Turkey when it invaded the Caucasus in 1918, desiring to expand and unite Anatolia with the Turks 'ancestral' regions in Central Asia. During this military thrust, Turks victimized "Russian," or "Eastern" Armenians and helped establish the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 1920, clashes occurred in Azerbaijan between pro-Turkish, pro-Soviet, and multinational factions--hostilities which later, during the Soviet era, led to much historical revision: Azerbaijanis were forced to paint their fellow-Turks as villains and reactionaries, while glorifying an Armenian and Bolshevik martyr, Stepan Shaumian. After the USSR fell, Azerbaijan revised its history once again and rapidly 'anti-Shaumianized' and 'de-Armenianized' itself in the process.** Nagorno-Karabagh became an autonomous region in Soviet times, and over a span of 65 years Azerbaijan authorities cut Karabagh Armenians' ties to Armenia and downplayed Armenian culture. They encouraged Azeri settlement into the region, and bolstered Turkic census populations by listing Kurds and Talysh (who are of Iranian stock) as ethnic Azeris.

In 1988, after Nagorno-Karabagh voted to secede from Azerbaijan, thousands of Azerbaijanis fled from southern Armenia to Baku. Meanwhile, in an effort to prevent Azeri-Armenian hostilities, Communist Party officials closed Baku to thousands of Karabagh-Armenian workers and commuters from the nearby city of Sumgait, on the Caspian. They also settled Azeri refugees from Armenia into two villages near Sumgait. In February, Azerbaijani gangs rioted against Armenians in Sumgait, killing dozens and wounding hundreds. Some 14,500 Armenians fled the city; many went to Nagorno-Karabagh. In September 1988 all Armenians in Susa, Nagorno-Karabagh, had been driven from the city; and, correspondingly, all Azerbaijanis were forced to flee from Stepanakert, five miles north of Susa. Later, Armenian forces would burn Susa to the ground. In 1989 Azerbaijan imposed a rail blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh. By January 1990, there were anti-Armenian pogroms in Baku and subsequent killings of Azeri protestors by Soviet troops.

The late 1980s saw mass exoduses and "sorting out" of populations: some 200,000 Armenians left Azerbaijan in two weeks, and Azeris claim that the Armenians expelled 165,000 Azeris from Armenia (the Armenians dispute these figures). It has been argued that the resurgence of violence in and concerning Nagorno-Karabagh precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union. Certainly the Kremlin could not contain the problem or the disruptions caused by the movements of peoples, and it is sobering to think how much misery has been generated by Nagorno-Karabagh (whose area is only 1,700 square miles, approximately the size of Rhode Island and Martha's Vineyard combined).

In the Karabagh dispute, it is not just two ethnic groups but two entire concepts of international law that collide: one principle affirms the territorial integrity of internationally recognized states, while the other insists upon the self-determination of peoples. Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis accuse the other party of aggression, and uphold distinct and divergent

demographic, historical, cultural, and economic arguments. For example:

Armenians point out the lack of ancient Azeri artifacts in a land abounding with *khachkars* (Armenian cross-stones) and churches. Azeris, who are Muslim, say: no matter, many famous Azeri poets and composers came from the region. Azeris stress their Turkic past and kinship with ancient “Caucasian Albanians,” (see map, circa 1540, below) who they claim were victimized by Armenian imperialism. Some Azeris claim that the native Karabagh population, even if self-identified as Armenian, are the progeny of these same Caucasus Albanians—and therefore they cannot be *genuine* Armenians. As for the ancient *khachkars*, they are not Armenian “cross-stones,” but are actually Turko-Azerbaijani, for the Caucasus Albanians adapted Christianity before the Armenians did...and so forth and so on.

Meanwhile, Armenia argues that Azerbaijan has no right to Nagorno-Karabagh because the region was assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan by the Russian Communist Party at a time when that body lacked juridical standing under international law. During the 1920s (as well as seven decades later), Azerbaijan officials responded to Karabagh Armenian resistance with threats, forced disarmament, economic blockade, and even military action. In 1991, the “Republic of Mountainous Karabagh” (Armenian *Artsakh*) unilaterally seceded, whereupon the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet, in a tit for tat, dissolved Karabagh’s autonomous status—and the region declared independence (as yet unrecognized) in 1992. In that year the United States imposed aid restrictions on Azerbaijan as punishment for its blockade and use of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh. In addition, as a matter of policy—though not law—the United States refrained from providing military aid to either Azerbaijan or Armenia so long as the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict was underway. These restrictions were suspended post-9/11, 2001, as America made new, anti-terrorist, alliances.



Woodcut map of the Caucasus and Historical Armenia published about 1540 by Sebastian Munster in his edition of Ptolemy's *Geographica*.

Azeri militia began continuous bombardment of Karabagh's capital, Stepanakert, from surrounding heights (much as Serbs bombed helpless Sarajevo in that same decade). Armenian forces prevailed; Azerbaijan's Communist government fell; the conflict proceeded, and once again Armenians seized additional Azerbaijani territory. Until 1993, Armenia denied its active engagement in the war and for a period even refused to recognize the Karabagh Republic, fearing "complications." This posture shifted as Armenia grew increasingly assertive about the right of Karabagh Armenians to self-defense. Armenia's president (until 2008), Robert Kocharian, formerly served as Karabagh's president and prime minister.

The two sides reached a cease-fire in 1994. Azerbaijan lost considerable territory in the war (estimates range from 13-20% of its area) and must care for some 800,000 refugees and internally displaced persons. Potential resolutions of the crisis include land-swaps (however the 1992 'Goble Plan,' which proposed connecting Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh, and Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, was quickly dropped as a concept) and economic inducements, including oil pipeline proposals (Armenia does not benefit from any Caspian-to-Turkey oil routing plans). Unfortunately, both Armenia and Azerbaijan appear to favor a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict later rather than sooner.

The following Nagorno-Karabagh chart may be of help:

NABORNO-KARABAGH: Differing points of view

AZERBAIJANI vs KARABAGH-ARMENIAN and ARMENIAN

Azerbaijan is the aggrieved party-- its territorial integrity violated and its land occupied by Armenia.

Armenia is not a party to the conflict and will not accept Turkish peace-keepers in the region.

Karabagh is historically Azeri. Armenians came into the region in large numbers *after* the Russian conquest (in 1813 and 1828) of the area of present-day Armenia and Azerbaijan.

"Artsakh" is the ancient cultural and religious center of Armenians. "Nagorno-Karabagh" is a mongrel Russian-Turkic imposed name. The "Bagh" were actually Balayi, an ancient tribe of *Armenians*.

Armenians in Karabagh during USSR times did *not* suffer discrimination. Indeed,

The 60 years in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic was, for Karabagh-Armenians, a period of cultural *repression* and economic *underdevelopment*.

most economic indicators in Nagorno-Karabagh were *higher* than in the rest of Azerbaijan

The USSR government was pro-Armenian (Gorbachev had Armenian advisors). World opinion favors Armenians & Armenia as ‘eternal victims’ though 20% of Azerbaijan is occupied by Armenian forces and approximately 1 million Azeris have been displaced.

Azerbaijan is trying to restore its *sovereignty*.

Armenia is Azerbaijan’s main negotiating partner, not representatives of the so-called "Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh"

Demands withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied Azerbaijan., as a precondition for negotiations.

Approx. 13 % of Azerbaijan is under Armenian control.

Nagorno-Karabagh declared independence in 1992 (though this status remains unrecognized). It seeks *self-determination* against outside repressive powers.

As an "independent" country, Azerbaijan should negotiate directly with *Karabagh-Armenians* (i.e. not with Armenia).

Insists on self-determination for Nagorno-Karabagh; Demands security and “special status” for Azerbaijan territories neighboring Nagorno-Karabagh; and guaranteed access to Armenia.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Play the “Game of Hats”: How would an Armenian explain events in Nagorno-Karabagh?
- 2 How would an Azerbaijani?
- 3 How would a Russian, or a Turk?

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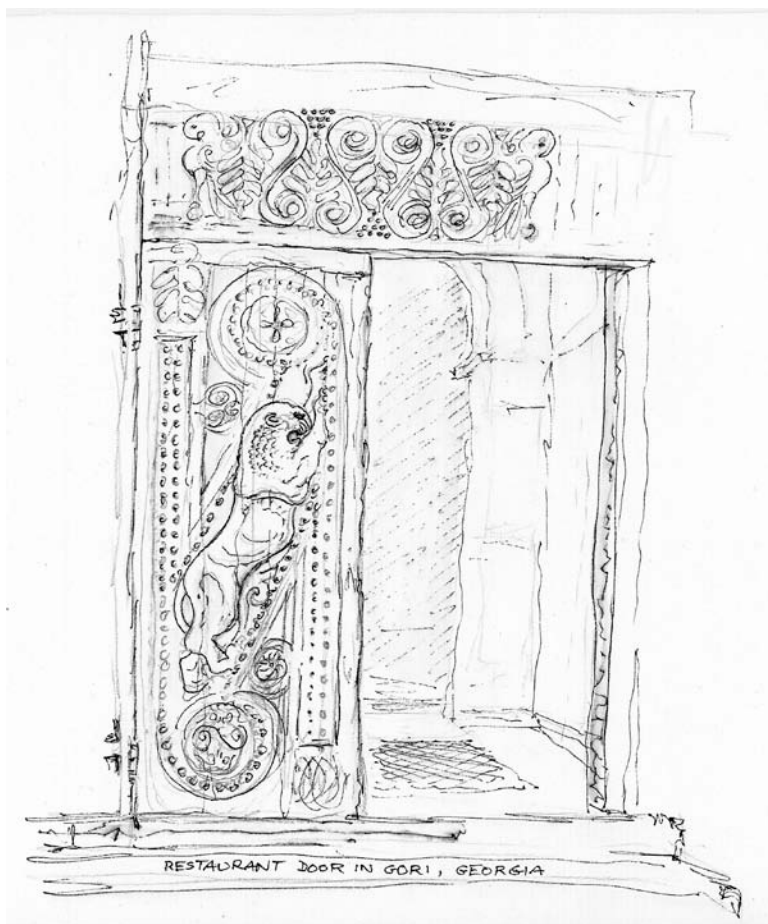
GEORGIA

Georgia's recorded history extends back more than 2500 years; it has prehistoric dolmens (stone monuments), the earliest known remains of humans who walked upright, and the most ancient evidence of winemaking. The Georgian language is one of the world's distinct and oldest; and it is said that songs sung in the polyphonic style of the sixth century BC can still be heard at many a Georgian feast table today! Many Georgian church frescos predate the ecclesiastical glories of Byzantium and Rome.

Tbilisi (founded in 458 AD, pop. 1,066,000⁴--2004 figures) stands on sites of dwellings and burial grounds dating to 5000 BC and has been destroyed and rebuilt many times over the

centuries. Georgians officially adopted Christianity in the early 4th century (though almost certainly Christianity existed in Georgia earlier), and the Georgian Orthodox Church, along with the unique Georgian alphabet and language, helped preserve the country's sense of identity through the ages. Sometimes unified, at other times broken into principalities, Georgia suffered incursions from Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Mongol, and Turkish armies from at least the First century B.C. through the 18th century—and from Russians, British, and German forces in more recent times.

The most celebrated rulers of Georgia as an independent kingdom were King David the Builder in the 11th and Queen Tamara in the 12th century. In the late 18th century, Georgia appealed to the Russia's Catherine the Great for protection from the Persians, and signed a treaty by which Russia agreed to make Kartli, the kingdom of eastern Georgia, a protectorate. This turned out to be the first squeeze by which the Russian empire began, in 1801, to disenfranchise Georgia's aristocracy and ancient Bagrationi dynasty and to absorb, annex, unify, and rule the entire region. This relationship prevailed in one form or another until 1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union.



Despite a major Georgian uprising attempt (1832) and 25 years of war against various tribes in Daghestan and Chechnya, Russia's domination of the Caucasus caused one of the world's largest diasporas when hundreds of thousands of Abkhaz, Chechens and other Circassians moved

to the Balkans, Anatolia, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Under Russia, Georgians absorbed modern European ideas of nationalism and self-determination. During the chaos of the Russian Revolution, Georgia declared independence under a Menshevik government in 1918, prompting the Red Army to invade in 1921. From 1922-36, Georgia belonged to the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. After the federation dissolved, Georgia became a full republic of the Soviet Union.

Georgia's most famous son, Joseph Stalin, imposed forced land reforms, collectivization and Russification campaigns on the Caucasus, along with political repressions and purges. Nevertheless, for Soviets in general, especially artists and writers, Georgia remained a verdant "Riviera"—a place for rest, recuperation, and inspiration—and after World War Two Georgia became known as the wealthiest of the Soviet republics, with flourishing industry (manganese, coal), agriculture (tea, citrus fruit, wine, and tobacco), and high education standards.

In the waning years of the Soviet Union, ethnic tensions resurfaced in the Georgian autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which led to clashes. During anti-Abkhazian protests in Tbilisi, Soviet forces killed 19 demonstrators, mostly women. Georgia held elections in 1990 and seceded from the Soviet Union in 1991, installing ultra-nationalist writer and former dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia as president, who was deposed in January of the following year. Eduard Shevardnadze, former head of the Georgian Communist Party and USSR Politburo member, returned from Moscow to assume leadership.

Georgia signed a cease-fire with Ossetian separatists in 1992, but that same year, during a period of ongoing confrontation between the government and opposition militias, Georgia also battled Abkhazian forces and invaded Sukhumi. Russia, ever keen to keep the Caucasus off-kilter, helped Georgia put down an insurrection by Gamsakhurdia supporters in western Georgia—while it also extended military aid to Abkhazian separatists, who drove Georgians out of the region in September, 1993. Georgia then signed a ceasefire with Abkhazia in 1994. This ongoing "frozen conflict," costing some 10,000 lives and resulting in almost 200,000 internally displaced persons (mostly ethnic Georgians and Mingrelians), was monitored by Russian "peacekeepers", the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Shevardnadze was re-elected in 1995 and 2000. Russian troops departed from the Vaziani military base in Georgia, but remained at bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki, which celebrated the 175 years of Russian presence. (Russia subsequently withdrew even from these positions and moved its troops to Armenia; however, after the Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008, Russia again enlarged its military footprint Georgia by establishing new bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.)

Strife with Abkhazia resumed in 2001. Fighters from the North Caucasus joined the Abkhazian cause and also entered Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, sparking Russian accusations that Georgia was intentionally harboring Chechen rebels (which, true or false, Georgia denied). Plagued by severe infrastructure breakdown and rampant government corruption, the Georgian populace demonstrated against Shevardnadze. In the wake of 9/11, 2001, United States Special Forces arrived to "train-and-equip" Georgian military to oppose terrorist groups (2002), and Moscow

continued its threat of taking military action if Chechen fighters remained in the Pankisi region. Georgian forces killed or captured dozens of Chechens and guerillas in the Pankisi Gorge and extradited a few to Russia. (See *Kisti*, in the North Caucasus: Panoply of Peoples section below.)

It is difficult for the outsider to "read" Georgia's boisterous political scene, due to its heightened rhetoric and the paucity of objective local media. Georgian politics reached an almost operatic climax in 2003 when President Shevardnadze, after highly irregular parliamentary elections, was ousted in a "Rose Revolution" and replaced by a 36-year old American-educated lawyer and Georgian parliamentarian, Mikheil Saakashvili, who vowed to crack down on corruption and to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. After this peaceful, though illegal, "regime change," Saakashvili was duly elected without opposition and with an overwhelming 96% mandate. In May, 2004, he confronted the rebellious leader of the autonomous region of Adjara, Aslan Abashidze, who fled to Moscow. Over the years, Saakashvili instituted many reforms, but his popularity has waned due to high inflation and the lack of "trickle down" economic benefits to many sectors of Georgian society. While enjoying the strong financial and moral support of the United States (and the personal enthusiasm of the the Bush administration), Saakashvili has faced growing disaffection within Georgia, manifested by frequent street demonstrations--which the Georgian government has at times put down by force--and calls for resignation and new elections. Even former allies from the Rose Revolution now criticize Saakashvili, who in the meantime has continually replaced and reshuffled top government and military figures in recent years. It must be said, however, that President Saakashvili--a dynamic and extroverted personality, and a cunning politician--remains popular in many parts of Georgia. Many of his political troubles stem largely from Georgia's failure to improve relations with Russia, which imposed boycotts of Georgian wine and bottled water, cut off transportation links, and expelled Georgian workers (resulting in severe declines in remittance payments to Georgia). This sorry situation culminated in out-and-out military conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 (see below).

Georgia's People and Economy: Georgia's population (4.4 million by the 2002 census, excluding Abkhazia or South Ossetia) comprises ethnic Georgians 70.1%, Armenians 8.1%, Russians 6.3%, Azeris 5.7%, Ossetians 3%, Abkhazians 1.8%, other 5%. (1989 figures). The official languages are Georgian and Abkhazian (in Abkhazia); and major religions include Georgian Orthodox 65%, Muslim 11%, Russian Orthodox 10%, Armenian Apostolic 8%, other 6%.

Georgia's natural resources include forests, hydropower, nonferrous metals, manganese, iron ore, copper, citrus fruits, tea, and wine. While much of its industry remains stagnant, Georgia in the past produced steel, aircraft, machine tools, foundry equipment (automobiles, trucks, and tractors), tower cranes, electric welding equipment, fuel re-exports, machinery for food packing, electric motors, textiles, shoes, chemicals, wood products, bottled water, legendary semi-sweet and dry wines, and excellent brandy.

Georgia's modest increases in GDP growth and foreign investment during the mid-1990s slowed dramatically with the Russian financial crisis of 1998, its woes compounded by drought

and tax collection failures. Georgia completed during this period the Baku-Supsa “early oil” pipeline, and, and in 2003, work began on Georgia’s section of the new Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (Turkey) oil pipeline (scheduled to open in 2005). Georgia is a member of the World Trade Organization, though its progress is hindered by corruption—a state of affairs that Georgian President Saakashvili has vowed to change.

Georgians have suffered recurring electricity shortages. In 1998, Georgia began, unsuccessfully, to privatize its energy distribution system in order to generate income. The 2004 award-winning documentary, *Power Trip*, directed by Robert Devlin, vividly portrays the attempt of an American firm, AES, to rebuild Georgia’s electricity distribution sector. After AES’s departure from Georgia—a major economic setback—electricity distribution fell under Russian control.

Georgia’s transportation and communications infrastructure remains in poor condition. Up until the 2004 elections, rampant government corruption hampered domestic and foreign investment, economic development and growth, and undermined the government’s credibility.

The United States is Georgia’s largest foreign investor. Major investor projects include the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Shah Deniz gas pipeline. Georgia markets its natural spring water, of which one source is in the Borzhomi national parkland region—directly in the path of the BTC pipeline—prompting environmental concerns.

The United States, Canada, China, Britain, and Switzerland have each explored for oil and natural gas in Georgia. New “lateral” drilling techniques indicate potentially promising oil deposits, as does the discovery by oil companies of Georgia’s remarkable “burning water” springs, bubbling with methane. Locals light these with a match and use them for cooking as a natural “stove.”

Though small in size, Georgia’s strategic location between the Black Sea, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, gives it hope of becoming a “gateway” to the Caucasus and Caspian. Georgia, since the dramatic political changes of 2003-4, encourages the world to view it as part of “wider Europe.” Georgia signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with the European Union and participates in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. United States humanitarian and military assistance has helped Georgia to recover from civil war and post-independence hard times and to better patrol its borders. In addition, the United States provides assistance to humanitarian, technical, and institution-building programs, such as training opportunities for government and law enforcement officials and economic advisers—in addition to educational exchange programs. **United States spending-per-capita in Georgia is high, and \$1billion has been pledged to help pay for damage during the 2008 Georgian-Russian conflict.**

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Who was Shota Rustaveli?
- 2 When was Gori founded, and who is memorialized there?

- 3 What is the *Dede Ena* and why is it an important Georgian book?
- 4 To whom do the Georgian and Armenian churches owe allegiance?
- 5 When was Stalin born, who was his father, and how did he die? (Attempt to confirm your answers.)
- 6 Did Georgia suffer during Stalin's time? How so (or how not)?
- 7 Georgia's first flag after independence had three colors: what were they and what did they symbolize? Its current flag (actually, a 14th century one) has five crosses—what do they symbolize?
- 8 What positions did Eduard Shevardnadze hold during long his political career?
- 9 Where are the “breakaway” regions and other potential hot-spots of Georgia?
- 10 Where, precisely, is the infamous Pankisi Gorge? **And the Khodori Pass? (Find them on a map.)**

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- 16 www.cacianalyst.org Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University
- 17 www.transcaspian.ru Russian site with English option
- 18 www.eurasia.org.ru Russian site with English option
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- 20 www.agbdc.com Georgia America-Georgia Business Dev. Council
- 21 www.georgiaemb.org Georgian Embassy in Washington
- 22 web.sanet.ge/usembassy U.S. Embassy Tbilisi

STALIN

Recent biographies of Stalin, based on archival research until now impossible, shed new light on his early life. These views of the young "Soso" Djughashvili, later known as Koba, offer clues to Stalin's character and actions. Even as an adolescent this "Georgian" Stalin was ruthless, complex, and never to be underestimated. A prolific reader and "culture vulture," Stalin was a poet with a fine singing voice who, throughout his life, made perceptive editorial comments about the press, theater, music, and public relations. (He was, if you will, a kind of dedicated 'editor' of Soviet society who would defend his views and editorial choices to the death--yours!)

The question often arises as to whether Stalin favored his native Georgia after becoming USSR dictator. The answer is complex: basically, Stalin promoted the concept of the Soviet Man (and Soviet Mother) over ethnicity, and in fact came into conflict with Lenin, who warned against antagonizing Georgians unnecessarily by promoting "Great Russian Chauvinism." But Stalin played a cunning and ruthless game and dealt the ethnic cards as he as he saw fit--so long as his face was each and every one. Stalin knew all about the ethnic intricacies of the Russian empire; for a time he served as Commissar of Nationalities, negotiating and delineating the borders of the new union republics and autonomous entities of the Soviet Union. He promoted Georgian emigration into other parts of the Caucasus and also enjoyed drinking Georgian Khvanchkara red wine and singing Georgian songs. Many of his close associates and drinking companions were Georgian family members or comrades from early revolutionary days. However, close relationship or Georgian origin was no guarantee of security, and Stalin had many of these nearest and dearest imprisoned or executed. Thus, Stalin favored Georgia when it suited his purposes; otherwise, Georgians suffered along with the rest of the Soviet Union during periods of collectivization and ideological purging. Ironically, Stalin's ruthless henchman in these matters, Lavrenty Beria, was also a Georgian (actually a Mingrelian, born in Abkhazia).

Much remains enigmatic, however, including the exact nature of Stalin's relations with the Tsarist secret police. Was he a double agent? More cautious historians point to the lack of hard evidence; however, there are considerable circumstantial indications of this possibility. For example, after expulsion from the seminary where he trained for the priesthood, Stalin held but one steady job: with the Tiflis Meteorological Observatory where, for a few hours, three times a week, he read thermometers and barometers. This was Stalin's *only* salaried job until he joined

the revolutionary government in 1918, and he held this position for only two years (1899-1901). Furthermore, a timeline of Stalin's life reveals a startling phenomenon: for his first two decades years Stalin remains, essentially, a local Georgian lad. Then, for a decade and a half (again, with no apparent source of income), Stalin suddenly starts to travel abroad to Scandinavia, England, and Western Europe (attending Bolshevik gatherings and meeting Lenin); and domestically, throughout the Caucasus (doing agitation work from Baku to Batumi); to St. Petersburg and Moscow, and to sundry far northern and eastern Siberian villages as an exile (venues from most of which he soon 'escapes'). It is a most curious pattern, indeed. How did Stalin manage to do it? Who helped him? Who paid?

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ABKHAZIANS, SOUTH OSSETIANS, AND OTHER GROUPS IN GEORGIA

Just as one may learn much about a book from its footnotes and marginalia, so too with history: time and again seemingly marginal regions of the world turn out to have a major effect upon nations. The Caucasus is a prime example and, for this reason, its various autonomous regions and ethnic groups bear close scrutiny. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are diminutive territories, in a small nation, in a compact part of the world, but should not therefore be underestimated. Though seemingly peripheral to world events, the frequently intractable interactions of these and other Caucasus peoples repeatedly have wide ripple effects.

Abkhazians and Ossetians: As the Soviet Union crumbled and disintegrated (1991), Abkhazians and South Ossetians formed their own parties and the Kremlin, seeking to constrain Georgia's independence, supported both. Georgia declared independence in April 1991 and elected a strongly nationalistic president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who, along with the Georgian Parliament, abolished South Ossetia's autonomy and renamed the territory as the "District of

Samachablo" (the *Georgian* word for the land). This set off a devastating war of several months duration.

At the same time, tensions arose in Adjara—another autonomous region of Georgia—and in Abkhazia. Abkhazia and Georgia had a long history of ill-will. Abkhazians, at only 17% of the population (1989 census) were a minority in their own homeland and bitterly resented periodic colonization efforts by Georgians (45% of the population). On the other hand, Georgians protested the disproportionate allotment of political and administrative positions 67% of which went to the Abkhazian minority.

The Abkhazian parliament, with its slim majority of Abkhazians over Georgians, debated whether to secede from Georgia. Gamsakhurdia, ousted in a "democratic coup" in Tbilisi, was replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, who had returned from Moscow. In August, 1992, Georgian forces entered Abkhazian territory—ostensibly to protect Georgia's rail and road supply lines—and, without notifying Shevardnadze, occupied the Abkhazian Parliament.

The ensuing war continued until October, 1993. Abkhazians, aided by North Caucasian militaries (primarily Chechens) and also by Russians, proved victorious. Some 250,000 Georgian residents of Abkhazia (Georgians, at 45% of the population, made up the Republic's majority, compared to Abkhazians, who were only 17%) fled east across the mountains to Georgia. Abkhazians declared independence in 1992, but to this day it remains unrecognized as a nation.

During the conflict, Georgian forces burned the Abkhazian State Archives and the Institute of History, Language and Literature, destroying irreplaceable documents and manuscripts—an attack, say Abkhazians, on their very identity and historic memory. (These archives are presently being replenished, slowly and in increments, from outside sources, in the 'Idica' project.)

Kept apart by Russian "peace-keepers," a tense status quo prevails between the two sides. Georgia demands the return of refugees to their homes and restoration of Abkhazia to its former status with "the highest level of autonomy." Abkhazians, however, refuse the return of refugees, for fear of becoming once again a minority in the Republic with subsequent ethnic cleansing by Georgians or forced emigration.

Abkhazia, caught in an ongoing economic blockade enforced by Georgia and Russia, exports hydroelectricity and fruit to Russia, along with illicit goods (e.g. timber) to Turkey and Europe. The blockade also interrupts an important railroad link between Russia and Armenia. In the last couple of years, Abkhazia has begun to attract several hundred thousand Russian tourists, lured by cheap hotel rates, no visa restrictions, and beautiful beaches. Still, Russia withholds full endorsement of Abkhazia's secession so as not to set a precedent for giving up Chechnya. Russian (and American) official policy is to support Georgia's territorial integrity.

Tensions remain high between Georgia and Abkhazia to this day as both sides consider Abkhazia to be homeland. The current ceasefire and "frozen conflict" threatens at any time to thaw and re-ignite. Meanwhile, politicians and historians debate the various and complex Georgian and Abkhazian claims of being autochthonous. Others argue for an overall "objective" view of history—a difficult task at best. **After the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict, Abkhazia**

declared “independence,” but this status is recognized by only a handful of nations.

Adjarians: Ethnically Georgian, but nominally Muslim—the result of Turkish domination of this region on the Ottoman border. Until 2004, Adjaria was the “fiefdom” of Aslan Abashidze and palpably more affluent than the rest of Georgia.

Kisti: These ethnic Chechens settled in Georgia’s Pankisi Valley during the 19th century. They speak and write in Georgian, have Georgianized names, but retain Chechen customs.

Meskhetian Turks: Also known as Ahiska Turks, these are either Turkified Georgians, or related to Turks or Azeris. They lived next to Javakheti, a western region of Georgia with a large Armenian population, and were deported en masse in 1943-44 to Krygyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. (Stalin deported Chechans, Ingush, Karachais, Balkars and Volga Germans as well, ostensibly fearing their support of the German military during the war; but the Ahiska/Meskhetians were never so charged). Unlike Chechens, Crimean Tatars, or other deported populations, the Meskhetian Turks have never been “rehabilitated” or repatriated. Some moved to Nagorno-Karabagh, but, as Muslims, were forced out during the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict. Others live in Russia and a very few have returned to Georgia. Their plight remains unresolved.

Mingrelians: Ethnically related to Georgians and speaking a distinct, but Georgian-type language, the Mingrelians live in the western, sub-tropical region which is near the Black Sea, next to Abkhazia in the northwest and Adjaria to the south. Many prominent Georgians were Mingrelian, and there has been much intermarriage. The shift of Mingrelian populations into Abkhazia during the 1930s-40s helped spark ethnic conflict and violence half a century later during Georgia’s early independence.

Khevsur: Ethnic highland Georgians, the Khevsur, or Khevsuretians, live in near isolation. They are neither Muslim nor manifestly Christian. Traditionally chosen as elite guards of the kings of old Kartli, the Khevsur were known to wear chain mail armor, leading to speculation that their ancestors included lost Crusaders (!).

Svans: Traditionally “wild” in character (and reputedly most like the original Georgians), the Svans live in the western Caucasus highlands near Mount Ushba and Shkhara. Villages have ancient stone towers, used for protection against raids and avalanches. The Svans have no churches, but harbor precious and old crucifixes and icons. Their region has never been invaded.

Georgians and Abkhazians: Some more history

The Georgian/Abkhazian conflict arises, paradoxically, out of both something and nothing: that is to say, out of actual historical events and also out of ideas or interpretations of those events dating back two hundred years--or two thousand! It's a question of focus: Abkhazians tend to concentrate on the Middle Ages and on brief periods of the Soviet era as times when they enjoyed a measure of autonomy. Georgians, however, point to other decades in the Middle Ages and to periods in antiquity when the two regions were one.

In ancient days the territory of modern Abkhazia belonged to the Kingdom of Colchis (6th to the 1st centuries BC). Later it adjoined and eventually became an integral part of the Western Georgian kingdom of Lazika (Egrisi). In the 8th century, with the weakening of the Byzantine Empire, the Abkhazian Kingdom arose and absorbed the whole territory of today's Western Georgia.

With the death of the last Abkhazian king, power shifted to the Georgian Bagrationi (Bagratid) dynasty, originally from Armenia, who ruled as "Kings of Abkhazians and Georgians." This arrangement lasted from the 12th to the early 14th century, until the Mongol invasion, whereupon the kingdom, including Abkhazia, broke up into principalities. Abkhazia became a rival of the neighboring Georgian principality of Megrelia (Mingrelia). North Caucasus tribes related to Abkhazians took part in these conflicts and settled in Abkhazia. Christianity declined in Abkhazia with the spread of Islam under the influence of the Ottoman Empire.

Russia began its conquest of the Caucasus region in the early 1800s and the Abkhazian principality joined the Russian Empire in 1810. As the Tsar came to dominate the eastern Georgian kingdoms of Kakheti and Imereti, along with Megrelia in the west, Abkhazians rebelled continually but fruitlessly. After the Russian-Turkish war (1878-79), Russia encouraged the massive emigration of some 30,000 Abkhazians to Turkey, of whom hundreds perished during the voyage over the Black Sea. The Georgian national movement strongly criticized this Tsarist policy, as well as the conscious resettling of Russians and other nationalities into the Caucasus. Georgian writers and pedagogues, educated in Russia, returned to encourage Georgians to use their own language and resist attempts at Russification. At this time, and later when the Caucasus was under Soviet control, many Georgians moved to Abkhazia, shifting the region's ethnic balance and leaving Abkhazians a minority in their own homeland.

During the Russian Revolution and Civil war period, Georgia proclaimed independence and its army entered Abkhazia to oppose the Bolshevik rulers there. Abkhazians today view this as an invasion. Although Abkhazians comprised only a minority of the population (and Georgians the majority), Georgia affirmed, in theory if not totally in practice, Abkhazia's full autonomy—but only if it remained within the borders of Georgia.

Members of the Abkhazian National Council conspired with the Russian Menshevik Army to oust Georgian forces from the region; but the Georgian government dissolved the ANC, called for new elections, and in March, 1919, decreed that Abkhazia was part of the Georgian Democratic Republic, with autonomous rights.

The Bolshevik occupation of Georgia in 1921 brought the region into the USSR as the Soviet Republic of Abkhazia united with the Soviet Republic of Georgia. Stalin reconfigured this ambiguous relationship a decade later, making Abkhazia an autonomous republic within, and essentially subservient to, the Soviet Republic of Georgia. Abkhazians claim that Stalin, who was of Georgian birth, favored the national interests of Georgia by this maneuver. Furthermore, they accuse Stalin's henchman, KGB head Lavrenty Beria (a Mingrelian born in Abkhazia) of purging nearly all the Abkhazian intelligentsia, suppressing the Abkhazian language, and further changing Abkhazia's demographic balance by encouraging Georgians to work in the region's new factories.

After Stalin and Beria's death in the 1950s, Abkhazians negotiated with the Kremlin over the possibility of separating from Georgia. They won the right to establish a national university in 1978 and set up daily television broadcasts in the Abkhazian language. Meanwhile, as always, Abkhazians and Georgians continued to live and work together, and even marry.

To this day Abkhazian and Georgian historians and linguists debate whether Abkhazians are in fact the territory's original people, and the Georgians late intruders. Georgia's first president, the ultra-nationalistic Zviad Gamsakhurdia, called Abkhazians latecomers from the North (that is, essentially, 'Chechens'). The question remains: Did an ethnically distinct people found the Kingdom of Abkhazia (8th-9th centuries)? If so, then Abkhazian statehood extends back 1200 years and secession from Georgia would have an "objective" justification. On the other hand, if the Georgian "radical" view is correct, that Abkhazians arrived only in the 17th century then Georgia's argument for territorial integrity gains legal merit.

Even language enters the debate. Radical Georgians point out that the Abkhazian words for "sea" and "boat" come from other languages, and that this "proves" that, instead of being autochthonous to the land, Abkhazians descended from the Caucasus Mountains to the shore as latecomers. Opposing historians, however, cite ancient Greek references to Abkhazians in the region and point to other linguistic traces supporting their claim.

Meanwhile, "arbitrator" scholars say that Abkhazians never occupied the territory exclusively. In ancient times it was part of the kingdom of Lazika (the Laz/Mingrelians being of Georgian ethnicity and still very much extant in Georgia and northeast Turkey), and even before the common era Lazika submitted to the kingdom of eastern Georgia to make a stronger political union so that they could face common enemies together.

Arbitrators argue that the 8th century Abkhazian kingdom was not founded on a purely ethnic basis, nor were there signs of Georgian/Abkhazian hostility as Abkhazia expanded to absorb the whole of Western Georgia (incidentally, at a time when the majority of Abkhazia's inhabitants were Georgians). Other evidence of harmony lies in the fact that, in the 9th century, the Abkhazian church, formed on the Byzantine model and using Greek texts and liturgy, voluntarily moved under the authority of the Bishop of Mtskheta, in Eastern Georgia, and adopted the Georgian language. This is proved by ancient inscriptions to be found in Abkhazian churches. Georgian was also the language of state administration, as no Abkhazian alphabet existed until the end of the 19th century. When the Abkhazian Kingdom shifted to the aegis of the great Georgian Bagrationi royal dynasty (10th-19th century), "Abkhazia" had come to mean Western

Georgia. In short, Georgians and Abkhazians appear to have formed a single political unit, and the common language used during the height of the Bagrationi state administration and cultural flowering was Georgian.

To add to the puzzle, Georgian historical figures at this time were sometimes called “Abkhazian,” not because they were Abkhazian, but because the term referred to the western portion of Georgia, and indeed, sometimes to the whole of the Georgian-Abkhazian kingdom. Some modern Abkhazian historiographers deny the existence of a united medieval kingdom without ethnic autonomies or with a common culture. After the Mongol invasion, the region broke into feuding principalities; Georgian, however, remained the language of the church and administration.

Abkhazians claim that ethnically related mountain people from the North Caucasus aided them in opposing Megrelian (Georgian) intruders. This is countered by assertions that these highlanders, though noted good fighters, were actually mercenaries hired by both sides. Both interpretations have their modern counterparts. During the 1992 war between Georgia and Abkhazia, Chechen fighters did indeed cross the mountains to assist their Abkhazian “brothers” against Georgian forces. And throughout the late 19th and early 20th century (indeed, to this day) Circassian and Chechen descendents of the original diaspora from the Caucasus joined the military throughout Anatolia and the Middle East. There they served honorably, valiantly, and effectively—and not infrequently on both sides of those regions’ many conflicts.

The breakup of the kingdoms into principalities, along with the spread of Islam and the settlement of northern peoples into the region during the 16th-17th centuries, caused “alienation” from Georgia. These mountain tribes, though related to Abkhazians, felt little sense of being part of a larger Georgian-Abkhazian cultural whole. It is also claimed that many Georgians in Abkhazia “saved” themselves from the newcomers by adopting their customs and religious practices (and thus many modern Abkhazians are descendents of Georgians and bear Georgian names). Language divisions emerged, with the Abkhazian nobility retaining Georgian, while lower social classes spoke other languages. Some historians charge that Russian rulers in the 19th century, and later the Soviets, used ethnography and philology as tools of conquest to pit groups against one another and to widen or create divisions where none in fact existed.

Contemporary critics say that Georgia’s educational system has attributed the glories of Medieval Georgian culture only to ethnic Georgians, while at the same time marginalizing other groups—for example, Armenians, Jews, Ossetians, Persians, Kurds, Syrians, and others. They assert that this is a mistaken interpretation and an outgrowth of 19th century ethnocentric Russian historiography. Today’s call is for an objective yet inclusive reconsideration of past events so as to restore the universal sense of dignity and full citizenship guaranteed by the Georgian constitution.

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Webs sites:

ABKHAZIA

Some of these are neglected and out-of-date, nevertheless they remain of interest for their historical details and photographs.

- 1 <http://www.abkhazia.org/georgia.html> Professor George Hewitt, Prof. of Caucasian Languages, Univ. of London, married to an Abkhazian.
- 2 <http://hypatia.ss.uci.edu/gpacs/abkhazia/> Interesting pictures and links.
- 3 <http://www.apsny.org/> Advocacy website of Abkhazia ('Apsny')
- 4 <http://www.abkhazia.com/> Abkhazia site (in Russian)
- 5 <http://www.qsl.net/yb0rmi/abkhazia.htm>
- 6 <http://fashion.hobby.ru/abkhazia/abkhazia.htm>
- 7 http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/5CJJM6?OpenDocument&style=custo_final Red Cross site

LAZ (Mingrelians, Megrelians): In the Georgian family, yet with cultural distinctions:

- 1 <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/9479/laz.html>
- 2 <http://www.scimitarmusic.com/pontos/laz.html>. About Laz and "Pontic" music and culture.

LANGUAGES: Philology, ever fraught with complexity and bias, remains fascinating:

- 1 <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Kartvelian%20language>
- 2 <http://social.iatp.org.ge/axal/history.htm> Interesting GEORGIAN SITE about regional history and culture, and antiquities

COLOR REVOLUTIONS

Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, for all their differences, shared several characteristics in the years 199_ to 200_. Each underwent political and social turmoil and a change of government driven largely by peaceful, technically savvy youth movements bearing names like Otpor, Kmara, and Pora, meaning, basically, "Enough!" Conversant in English, often educated abroad, or at least exposed to contemporary American and European culture, these NGO-trained groups knew how to use computers and mobile phones, how to monitor elections and conduct exit polls among voters, and how to propagandize effectively, for example, by literally painting the town with the abovementioned slogans. The results were dramatic: three corrupt governments folded, quickly; three new governments arose with substantial, even overwhelming popular support, and all three immediately began to undergo the briefest of honeymoon periods. The aftermath of Serbia's elections, and Georgia and Ukraine's Rose and Orange Revolutions (later reinforced by election results), have had positive outcomes, including a boisterous, sometimes even chaotic political debate. There have also been neutral and negative consequences: exacerbated opposition rhetoric, lack of governmental transparency, confrontations in the international sphere, and even suspicious deaths.

All three countries have had to contend with Russia, which has viewed "color revolutions" on her border or among Slav brethren nations with horror and disdain. In official and media assessments, Russia calls these tidal shifts occasions of sinister influence and espionage, and has stringently curtailed NGO activity on home soil of such groups as the Open Society Institute and the British Council. Another influence on the Color Revolutionaries was the Albert Einstein Institution, in Boston, which has widely disseminated writings by American activist Gene Sharp (b.1928), such as *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973) and *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (1982??). These works discuss nearly 200 methods of nonviolent means; many of them, such as street campaigning, peaceful resistance, raising awareness (consciousness-building), agitation, network building, political marketing, debating skills, media relations, mobilization and recruiting--characterized efforts to effect change not only in the three countries above, but also in Byelarus, Albania, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Lebanon, and Venezuela.

Since 2004, the Saakashvili government has experienced notable successes and failures. Among the successes are:

- professionalization of the police force and a reduction in its corruption
- reduced corruption in education and electoral procedures
- attraction of foreign investment (e.g. from Kazakhstan and Israel)
- overall westernization, establishment of jury courts (partial)
- infrastructure improvement
- "placement" of Georgia on the world map

- increased "confidence-building" measures between Georgia and its break-away regions (see below)
- re-establishment of control over break-away Adjara and the Kodori region in Abkhazia
- solidification of relations with Europe and the United States

Negative outcomes include:

- cronyism (especially in the judiciary and television media, but not necessarily in print media)
- dramatic deterioration in relations with Russia (largely due to Putin's and Saakashvili's clashing personalities): boycott of Georgian bottled water, wine, produce; cutting of transportation links; expulsion of Georgian workers; decline of remittances; 2008 invasion by Russia, with bombings and seizure of Georgian territories.
- increased presidential control over the Georgian parliament
- little trickle-down benefit to ordinary citizens from foreign investment
- increased inflation
- poor relations with political opposition, heightened rhetoric, resulting in demonstrations and strong-arm government reactions
- strong-arm movements against S. Ossetia and Abkhazia resulting in probably long-term loss of these regions

August 8, 2008

Matters have only deteriorated after Russia's invasion on this date. Several murky and conflicting chronologies exist concerning Georgian bombardment of Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, and Russia's occupation of the area and its subsequent bombings and seizure of areas beyond South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Generally speaking, Saakashvili gave orders to Georgian military to respond to Russian and S. Ossetian provocations in S. Ossetia. This set off disproportionate actions from a motley combination of Russian, North and South Ossetian, Abkhaz, and Chechen military units who seized roads and cities, bombed civilian areas, airports and military targets, killed indiscriminately among villages, and advanced to within 20 miles of Tbilisi. Russia claims to have saved S. Ossetians from "genocide." The United States's close ties with Georgia threatened to turn events into a test of will between major powers. Despite a withdrawal agreement brokered by the French president and international support for Georgia, whose army was routed, Russia remains in control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The latter have declared "independence," recognized so far only by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Belarus, Transnistria and Hamas. The aftermath:

- Fatalities and thousands of displaced Georgians from S. Ossetia (joining the multiple thousands of earlier IDP's from S. Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts dating back to 1992).
- immediate plunge of foreign investment in Georgia
- immediate diminution of gas and oil flows through the BTC and Baku-Erzurum pipelines
- \$4-5 billion dollars in aid promised by the United States and Europe
- Georgian political destabilization with increased calls for Saakashvili's resignation and new

elections. Distancing from him by former Rose Revolution allies, who have joined the opposition.

Journalist Thomas Goltz, who was in Tbilisi at the time, facetiously refers to the whole affair as the "Russian-Georgian Sochi 2014 War," referring to Russia's desire to stage the Winter Olympics in Sochi, a few miles away from Abkhazia. Russia maintains that "regime change" in Georgia is needed before peace can prevail. Georgia fears renewal of hostilities during warmer weather as snow melts and movement becomes easier. United Nations peacekeepers and OSCE monitors are inadequate or hold no mandate to police border regions with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The United States continues to support Georgia's territorial integrity.

GENERATIONS

In Georgia, a new generation rules. Its "Rose Revolution" president and his partners have barely entered their 40s, and most government officials are still in their 30s and even 20s. Georgia's small political arena lacks *eminences grises*, or low-profile functionaries, with experience and administrative skills. Meanwhile, citizens over 50 tend to be sidelined in the workforce, either because they have fewer computer and English-language skills, or because they seem tainted by their Soviet-era upbringing and outlook. In a country that traditionally reveres elders, this is an unnatural and unbalanced situation. In the rest of the Caucasus, governments may retain old "survivors" from previous eras; nevertheless, general change is still important. It may, for example, affect the rhetoric over "frozen" or "legacy" conflicts in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabagh. On the one hand, young people born during or after the expulsions and ethnic killings of the early 1990s do not have the same memories of these events as do their parents--but nor do they have personal acquaintances on the other side. Whereas in the past Armenians and Azerbaijanis may have attended the same school, or served together during military conscription, now the populations have separated. Similarly, young people in Abkhazia have no chance to get to know their counterparts in the rest of Georgia, or vice versa, should they even care to. The result is: heightened antagonism and receptive audiences for nationalistic rhetoric.

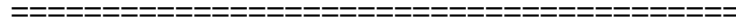
QUESTIONS:

- Aside from headline news, what are relations between Georgians, Abkhaz, and South Ossetians actually like?
- When Caucasus hostilities flare, what weight should be given to "back-channel" diplomacy and efforts at conflict resolution? Are they moot or as important as before?

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THE NORTH CAUCASUS: Panoply of Peoples

While U.S. diplomats serve only in the three nations of the South Caucasus, the north part-- Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, and Adyghea--in southern Russia, must also be factored into the overall "Caucasian equation." However one views the map, it is a fact that the North and South Caucasus are intertwined culturally, politically, and to a degree, economically (e.g. through smuggling). On the Black Sea coast, Sochi, too, was part of the Caucasus: it was the port from which much of the Caucasus Diaspora departed their homeland in 1964-1867. (Their descendants in Caucasus communities in Anatolia, Jordan, Syria, and Israel maintain ties with kin in Abkhazia and other regions.) Today Sochi is in the news primarily as the venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics.

The more than 40 North Caucasus peoples can be divided linguistically as follows:

- 1 **Northwest Caucasians:** the Circassians
Western or 'Adyghe': Shapsughes, Bzhedugs, Temirgoys, Abzakhs, Ubykhs, Abkhaz-Abazinians;
Eastern: Besleneys and Kabardians
- 2 **North Central Caucasians:** the Karachai and Balkars, who speak Tur and, though present since ancient times, are ethnically unrelated to other North Caucasus peoples.
- 3 **Northeast Caucasians/Daghestanians:** Ingush, Chechens, and the Dagestani (of which the Avars, Dargins, and Lezgins are the most important).
- 4 **Other** North Caucasus groups and subgroups, such as the Kumyks.

The Andi, Botlikh, Godoberi, Akhvakh, Bagulaal, Khvarsh, Kryz, Tskahur, and many others, can only be mentioned, for the sum of the Caucasus' ethnic parts can easily overwhelm the whole—and the reader. It is important to note that many of today's conflicts in the Caucasus can be traced back, not to ethnic differences or the tenets of religion, but to the impositions of foreign governments—that is, the movements of populations and the brutal deportations of some South and virtually all North Caucasus peoples by Stalin during the 1940s.

Some North Caucasus Peoples:

Balkars: (see **Karachais**)

Chechens: Chechens fought the Russians for three decades in Daghestan and other regions during the Murid Wars of the 19th century under the leadership of Imam Shamil (see Islam section, below). Deported by Stalin to Kazakhstan in 1944, thousands of Chechens died in exodus and exile, and returned to a russified Chechnya in the 1950s. (There is evidence that some of those too old or feeble to be deported were burned to death by the Soviets.) A former Soviet air force general, Jokhar Dudayev, declared Chechnya's independence in the early 1990s, whereupon Soviet leader Boris Yeltsin attempted to regain control of the region. The "First Chechen War" raged from 1994-96, during which time Russian forces first regained, then lost control of Grozny (an old Russian fort named 'awesome,' or 'dreaded'), which became the capital of Chechnya. Dudayev was killed in 1996; a short peace prevailed until 1999, when the new Russian president, Vladimir Putin, ordered a new assault on Grozny. During the resulting devastation, many inhabitants fled to neighboring Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and to Georgia. The war continued as a relentless series of ambushes, sabotages, assassinations, and exterminations little documented or noted by the world. **Today, Chechnya is ruled by Ramzan Kadyrov, who has been brutally effective at rebuilding Grozny and eliminating opposition (in recent years those falling out of favor with him have been assassinated, even abroad).**

Circassians: The Circassians comprise indigenous Adyghe, Kabardians, and Cherkess groups with distinct, but mutually intelligible, languages or dialects. Their numbers are considerably reduced after an extensive (estimates range from 600,000-2 million people) migration to Turkey, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Thousands died from hunger and shipwreck during the voyage over the Black Sea. Today, some groups (Ubykh) are extinct or nearly so. Circassians, loyal army fighters, served in the Balkans and the Middle East; the Ottomans settled them in the most unstable areas of the Empire—for example, in Syria, where local Beduin did not obey the central government. Circassians brought stability and founded a town on the relics of ancient Philadelphia—today's Amman.

Dagestan peoples: Comprising Avars, Dargins, Lezgins, Kumyks, Nogais, Laks, Tabasarans, Rutuls, Aguls, Tsakhurs, and many others.

Kabardians: Also called Kabardins, these people have always been considered the most pro-Russian of all the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and actively assisted the Russian Czarist army.

In general, Islam is not as strong among Circassians as among Karachais or Balkars. Nevertheless—and because of Soviet policy to divide Moslem groups—Kabardians were

deported in large numbers in December, 1943, to Central Asia and Siberia. Diaspora Circassians today live mainly in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Germany, and the United States. During the 1990s, a Circassian national movement arose in diaspora communities and a few thousand Circassians re-emigrated to the Caucasus.

Ingushetians: Traditionally an indigenous mountain people, the Ingush resettled more recently in valleys and towns as part of Russia's policy to "civilize" the Caucasus. Their language is akin to Chechen and they are largely Sunni Moslems. Ingush—along with Chechens—were deported in February, 1944, to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Siberia in 190 trains and some 12,000 train carriages. They returned to the Caucasus in large numbers, starting in 1954.

Karachai: Of Turkic origin, moved in the 13th century to the high valleys in the Central North Caucasus and were deported along with their cohabitants, the **Balkarians**, in 1944. The Karachai, Balkarians, Circassians, and the Kabardins inhabit roughly the same areas.

A geopolitical note: some argue that it would have made sense in the 1920s, to create a Karachai-Balkarian (i.e. a southern, Turkic, Moslem, mountainous) republic and a Kabardino-Cherkess (i.e. northern, pagan, indigenous, Christian) republic. But Soviet authorities, true to form, sought to divide and conquer: instead of drawing the boundary from east to west, they traced it north to south, thus cutting *across* ethnic divisions. As a result, instead of a theoretically sensible "Karachai-Balkaria" republic and a "Kabardino-Cherkessia" republic, we have today's heterogeneous and ethnically contentious Karachai-Cherkess and Kabardino-Balkar republics.)

Ossetians: The Ossetians Early 6th century AD "immigrants" to the Caucasus. Their communities straddled the mountains just west of the important Georgian Military Road and were divided between Georgia and Russia. Ossetians speak a distinct Indo-European language of the Persian group and call themselves Ir, Iron, or Os. The ancestors of the Ossetians are reputed to be the Alans, a nomadic people from the steppe northeast of the Black Sea whose specialty was warfare and horse breeding. Many fled the Huns in 370 AD and crossed into Gaul and Africa. **Research suggests that the Alans, wearing armor and bearing lances, were the origin of western knights, and that the Arthurian legends have both Celtic and Alanic roots, particularly when compared with the Caucasus Nart sagas. The Alans intermarried throughout Western Europe and left archaeological traces in Italy, France, Britain, Spain, and North Africa. It is tantalizing to think, as some scholars do, that Sir Lancelot might have been originally "Alanus [Latin for 'Alan'] à Lot [a river in western France]. Certain Alan, or Os, groups settled in the Caucasus. Largely Orthodox Christian, a northern Ossetian minority accepted Islam, and pagan traditions remain alive today in Ossetia (as they do in Abkhazia). Ossetians traditionally held the high passes of the Caucasus. South Ossetia has tried several times to merge with North Ossetia (in Russia). As an autonomous region of Georgia, they opposed Georgian nationalism during the 1990s and sealed themselves off and declared "independence" after the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008.**

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Why are there Karchai/Balkar and Kabardin/Cherkess tensions—but no Kabardin/Karchai or Cherkess/Balkar tensions? (Or are there?)
- 2 Why and how did Stalin deport Caucasus peoples?
- 3 How do North Caucasus politics impinge upon the South Caucasus?
- 4 How can a region of the Caucasus be at once Christian, Muslim, and pagan?

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BRONZE (MIDDLE IRON AGE)
FERTILITY FIGURINE
DAGHESTAN (1870s)

Why study the North Caucasus, or “little peoples”?

The regions of North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Adygheya, Karachai-Circassia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Krasnodar Krai lie north of the Greater Caucasus mountain range, in Russia, and hence beyond the scope of this (South) Caucasus self-study guide. Nevertheless, events in the north shape what happens afar and hence bear close monitoring.

For two centuries, the Caucasus served Russia much as India served Britain (and during the same period): as a testing ground and cultural “mirror.” Just as the Raj, the United Kingdom’s “Jewel in the Crown,” gave luster and meaning to the idea of empire and British-ness, so too the Caucasus enabled Imperial Russia, and later the Soviet Union, to conceive of itself as an empire and superpower.

But the Russians weren’t the only ones to dream powerful Caucasus dreams: in 19th century Daghestan and Chechnya, militant Sufi and Islamist movements proclaimed *jihad* and kept the Czar’s armies at bay for decades. During the height of the Caucasus wars of the 19th century, Imam Shamyl (1797-1870) and his fighters raided fearlessly, even into the heart of Georgia, capturing hostages and scooping them back up into the mountains. For decades no army could defeat him, for the mountain passes were too narrow and precipitous to admit any but a single stream of soldiers on foot or horseback: easy prey for mountain warriors. Eventually, by cutting down acres of forest cover, by building bridges in impossible places, and through bribes, Russia managed to put down the mountain people—at least for a time.

These conflicts now rage anew in Putin’s Russia. Even today, among diaspora Caucasus groups in the Middle East and Anatolia, Caucasus culture clubs, with libraries of books in exotic and sometimes extinct languages, with dance classes and feasting halls, often prominently display on their walls the stern portrait of Shamyl. Brandishing a saber he rides his horse into battle, or sits tamely in a photograph taken in St. Petersburg, his curly red beard balanced by a tall sheepskin hat, his chest covered with bullet belts and sundry swords and daggers tucked into his belt. Shamyl’s two grown sons stand by his side, similarly garbed.

Imam Shamyl is worth careful study. He commanded (and among many people still commands) respect for his valor and ruthlessness, his toughness, shrewdness, and ultimately his pragmatism, for Shamyl surrendered and ended his days as an honored “guest” of the Czar.

Judging from events and history, the Czars are gone—while Shamyl endures.

**[INSERT: Shamyl
portrait]**

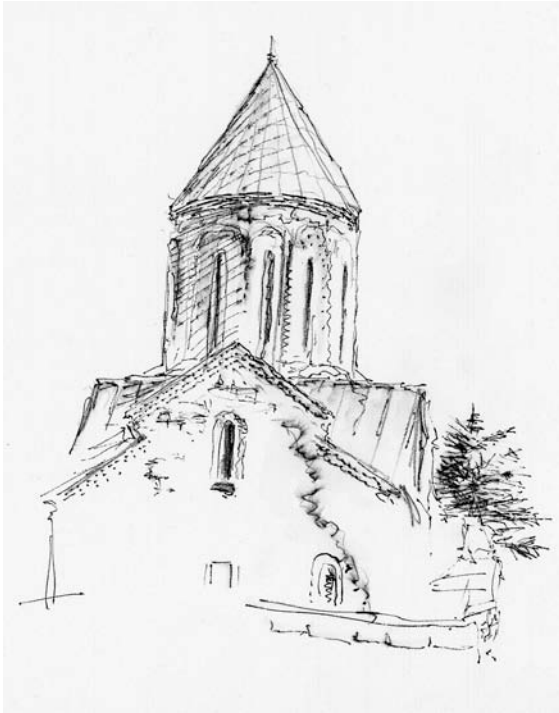
[INSERT above: Shamil portrait]

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 By what means did Russia fail, and then succeed, to conquer the Caucasus?
- 2 Which parts of the Caucasus aided Imam Shamil and which refused—and why?

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CHRISTIANITY

It is a challenging to try to define the architectural differences between Georgian and Armenian churches yet they are distinct. Sometimes Armenian churches seem more faceted and angular, and Georgian more rounded (though not always). Some Armenian basilicas have separate chapels built in each direction off the nave; Georgian ones often have three parallel naves put together. Perhaps the main difference lies in their construction material: Georgian stone churches seem lighter, whiter, whereas Armenian churches, built from the local tuff, a porous volcanic rock, take on pink, ochre, or reddish hues.

Of extreme interest are the cave monasteries built at David-Garedzha (in Kakheti, eastern Georgia) and Vardzia (near Turkey and Armenia). David-Garedzha lies in a silent and rather inaccessible region which, ironically, could turn out to be a promising oil field. Vardzia is a vast complex of originally 3,000 man-made caves carved out of the tuff cliffs above the Kura (Mtkvari) River.

Armenia proudly claims to be the world's first Christian state (debated dates range from 301 to 314 AD), with Georgia coming in a close second (330 AD). However, Christians lived among Greek colonies along the Black Sea coast in the first and second centuries, and Armenian church history attests to conversions in Armenia by the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew (hence the Armenian 'Apostolic' Church). Certainly Christians lived in both Armenia and Georgia from the earliest times--and Jews long before.

Georgia's conversion to Christianity resulted in the suppression of the wealthy and powerful class of pagan priests and a cultural reorientation towards Rome, Byzantium and the west. A

church schism developed over the nature of Christ ('human and divine' vs. 'beyond human understanding'), resulting in the creation of the Monophysitic ('beyond human understanding') churches: most importantly the Armenian, as well as the Syrians, the Egyptian and Ethiopian Copts, the Indian church, and the Nestorians in Persia. The Armenian Apostolic Church belongs to the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches. During the 19th and 20th centuries, missionaries in Anatolia ('Historical Armenia') established Protestant and Catholic Armenian churches.

With Constantinople's permission, in Georgia the Iberian Church established a bishop at Mtskheta and became autocephalous, which the Orthodox Church of Georgia remains to this day despite long periods of Persian and Arab domination.

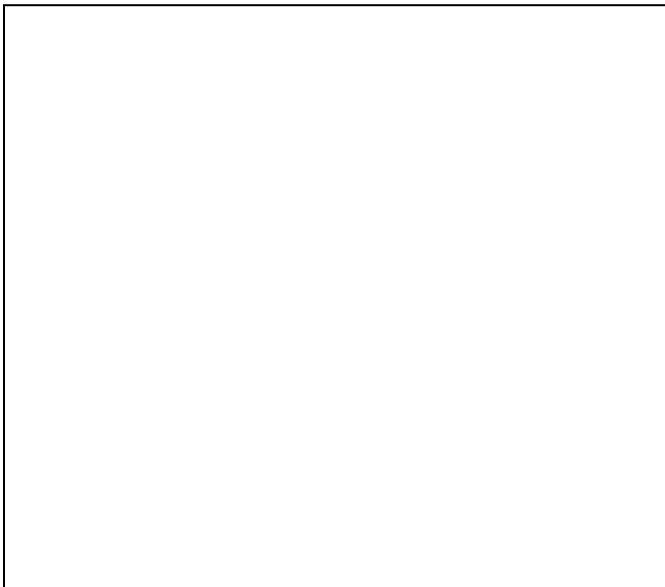
Writing came to both Armenia through Biblical texts. In the 5th century, St. Mesrop (Mashtots) invented an Armenian alphabet based possibly on Greek and Persian scripts. Some sources say St. Mesrop also devised the Georgian alphabet, while others maintain it appeared earlier, invented by King Parnavas in the third century, or else that it arose in the 5th century BC from Aramaic with later Greek influences. The earliest known Georgian inscription is in the Judean desert, 433 AD. Georgia's ecclesiastical alphabet, Khutsuri, gave way in the 11 century to the secular Mkhedruli alphabet. Azerbaijani, a Turkish/Altaic language, first used Arabic, then the Latin alphabet (1928-38), then Cyrillic letters (1939-91), and after independence reverted to a Turkic Latin script.

Armenian and Georgian religious painting possesses its own inimitable style and predates much European church art. The homophonic Armenian and polyphonic Georgian liturgies are unforgettable and utterly different from Gregorian chant, or the Slavonic or Catholic service.

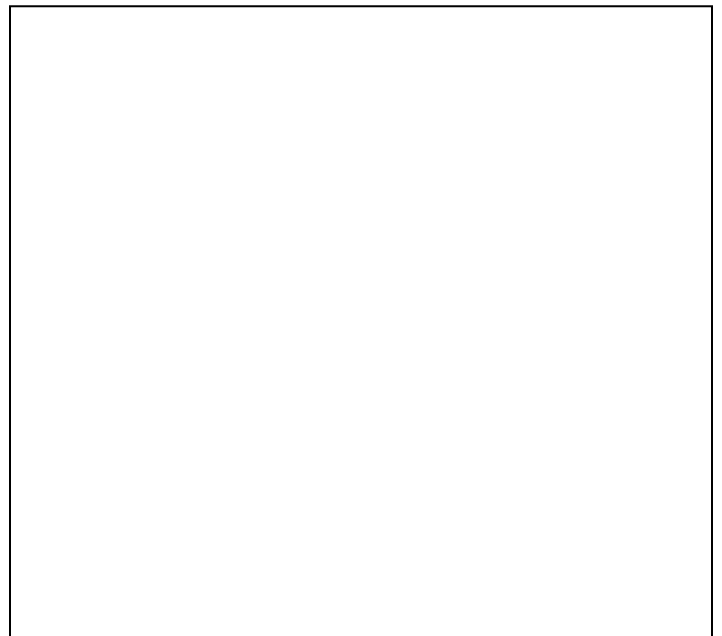


Often entwined with politics, the Church has played a significant role throughout Armenian and Georgian history. Two examples: During the 19th century, missionaries in Anatolia from England and the United States, hoping to win converts to Protestantism, offered Armenians travel and education opportunities. This catalyzed the idea of independence and nationalism among Armenian Ottomans receiving a western education. And more recently: in 1999, the Shevardnadze government arranged to send priceless ancient Georgian artifacts to the United States on a tour. When the Georgian Patriarch forbade the inclusion of icons or ecclesiastical chalices, the project turned into a virulent parliamentary election issue and the art tour foundered.

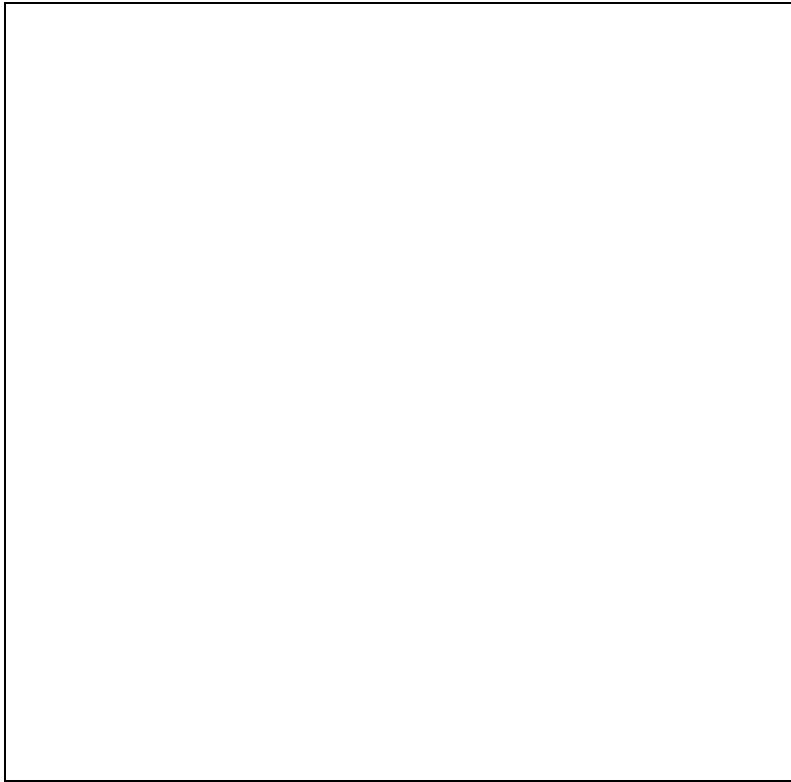
Spheres of interest in the Caucasus



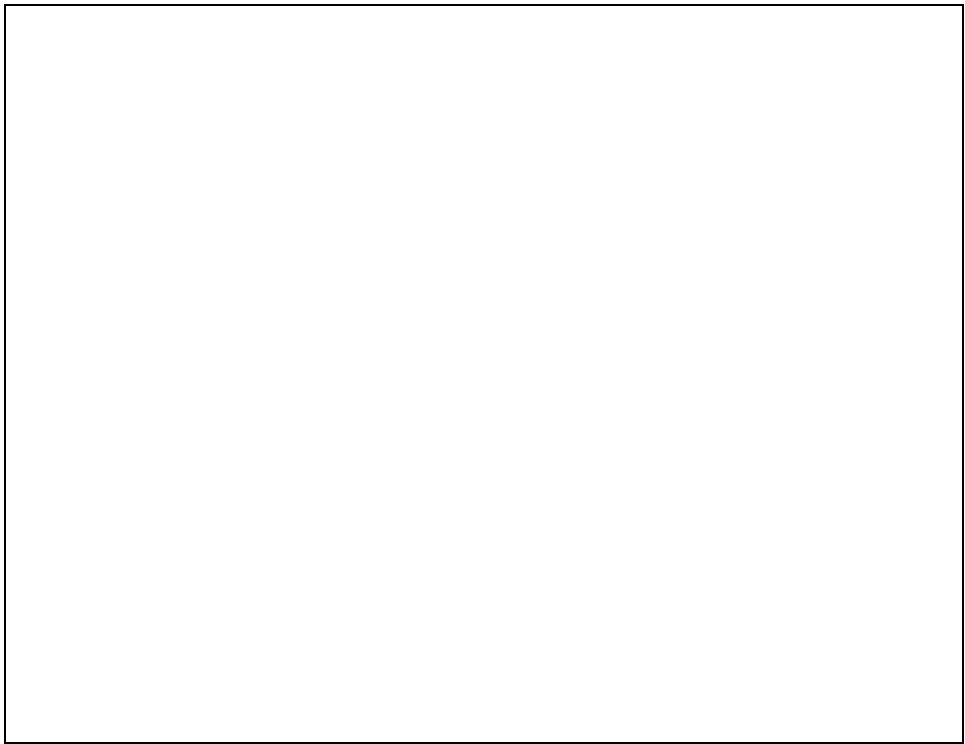
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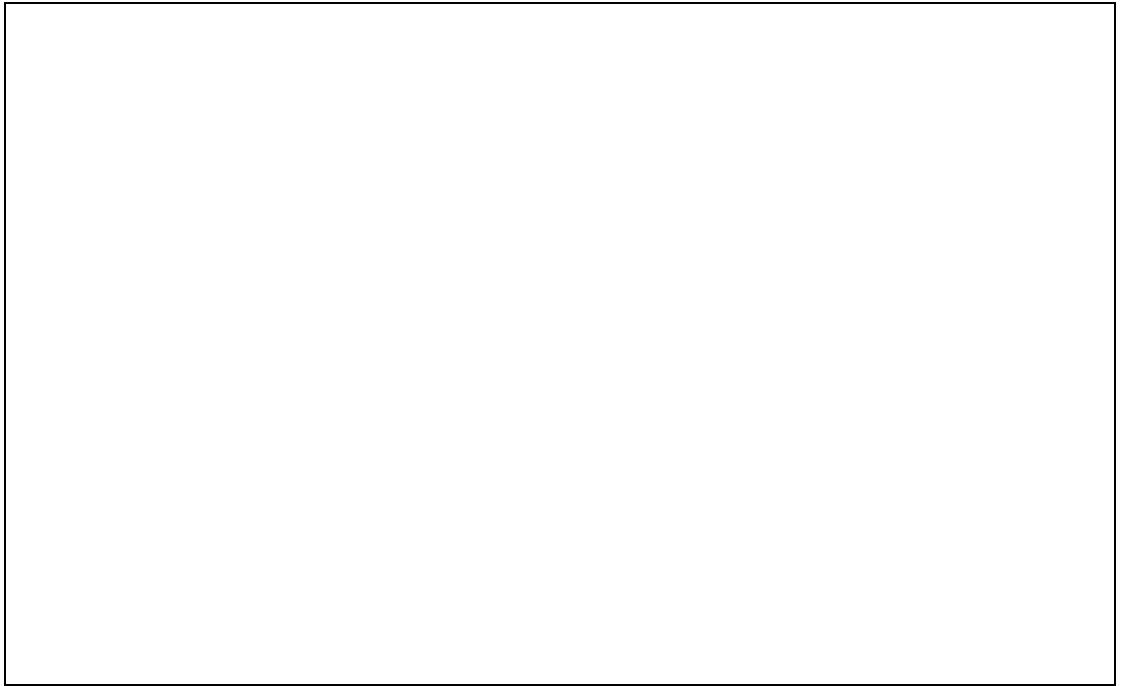
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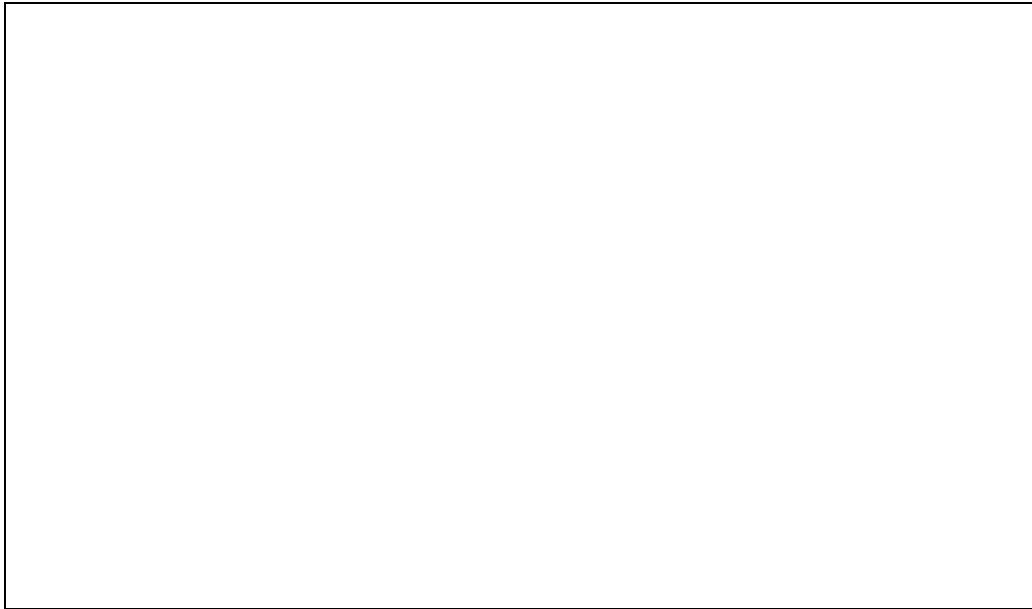
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ISLAM

Along with pagan traditions, Judaism, and Christianity, Islam has a long history in the

Caucasus. Islam came to the Caucasus in waves from the Ottoman Empire, and from Persia and the Arabs. Islamic culture is particularly old in Dagestan, where an Arab army occupied Derbent in 643 AD, just eleven years after the death of Mohammed. As the numbers of faithful grew, Moslem *murids* of Daghestan from 1830-59 obstructed Russian expansion into the Middle East and did so largely unaided by outside forces. Daghestan at the turn of the 20th century had hundreds of Moslem religious schools and thousands of mosques, and Dagestanis reputedly spoke the most beautiful Arabic in the entire Islamic world.

An interesting episode in Soviet cultural history occurred, in the 1920s, over the question of Dagestan's official language—aside from Russian. The choice was either Arabic or a Turkic dialect. However, the Soviet authorities dropped this simple option in favor of making *each* of Dagestan's 11 main indigenous languages official (out of 33 spoken in the region). This guaranteed the predominance of Russian, for the sake of convenience, as a “language of inter-ethnic communication.”



In “Caucasian Albania” (roughly, Azerbaijan), Arabs set up a satrapy in 705 AD. The aggressive anti-Christian Abbashid dynasty (750) provoked a series of rebellions through most of the 9th century. Arab power waned and Azerbaijan divided into fiefdoms in the 10th century, until the arrival of Muslim Oguz and Slejuk Turks who established a decentralized rule with regional principalities. Conversions to Islam occurred more through the immigration of Turkic peoples than by force. Islam flourished even under periods of Georgian control. Mongol raids (1225-1386) pushed Turkic and Turkmen nomads into Anatolia and east, from Nakhichevan, into Azerbaijan. Sub-khanates fought the Ottomans, and among themselves, until the defeat of the Ardebil Khanate ushered in the Saffavid dynasty (which was Shi’ite Moslem).

Until the mid-16th century, the North Caucasus was divided into a Christian west (Adyghe, plus some Kabardians and Ossetians); a Muslim east (Daghestan); and a pagan center (Chechens and Ingus). There were no serious conflicts. Relative calm prevailed from 1604-1783 as Cossacks moved into the East Caucasus and Islam pushed into the west. During this time, the Ottoman Sultan Ahmad III and the Crimean Khan campaigned against the Kabardians and defeated them. The Moslem conquerors appointed an imam for each highland *aoul* (village), killed all priests and monks, and took the princes’ and nobles’ sons to Crimea as hostages for conversion. These assaults ended in 1729 with the expulsion of the Khans, but some Kabardians remained Sunni Moslems thereafter. The defeat of the Crimean khans brought Russians ever closer to the North Caucasus peoples.

In 1783, terrified by the prospect of imminent Persian invasion, Georgia signed a treaty with Russia. In reaction, seeking to undermine the Czar’s growing influence in the Caucasus, the Ottoman Sultan sent a “caliph” to the Caucasus—a Chechen Naghshbandi (Sufi) mystic named Mansur who was known for his piety and hatred of non-Moslems. As Arabic language and culture spread west from Daghestan to Adyghe (Circassian) regions; many pagan *aouls* converted to Islam in the 1860s, and Sheikh Mansur galvanized Caucasus Moslems and briefly united them against the Russians. He became known as the “Mahdi,” the awaited leader of the Moslem jihad. Eventually Sheikh Mansur was captured and his movement (or mystical *tariqat*) vanished, but only for three decades: the *jihad*, or struggle unified around Islam, remained hidden and it evolved into the *murid* movement led by Shamyl.

Shamyl’s imamate (1824-59) was a Sufi-inspired military jihad mixed with a clannish mountain “democracy.” Though it ended in Shamyl’s defeat, his influence endured and stimulated recurrences of anti-Russian unrest in 1877 and 1920. Over the decades, Islamic law (*shariat*) quietly took its place alongside traditional mountain law (*adat*).

One tends to think of the Russians, and later the Soviets, as being in total control of the Caucasus. In actuality smaller or larger revolts and Holy Wars dragged off and on from 1824 to as late as 1922. During this period, North Caucasus feudalism gave way to clans and peasant societies, but even with an overlay of Soviet culture, the old Sufi order spread.

From 1922-92, sporadic rebellions occurred, which have been little documented, and Soviet authorities deported entire North Caucasus nations. Even in exile, the Chechens maintained their integrity, to a great extent through adherence to their Sufi orders (*tariqa*). Meanwhile, Russians and Cossacks resettled the Chechen homelands. (It is argued that one reason why deportations

from Chechnya would not work today is that the Russian birthrate is in severe decline, whereas Moslem populations throughout Russia are increasing dramatically, and hence Russians could not easily repopulate the deracinated areas).

Today most North Caucasus indigenous populations are Moslem. But such simplifications soon give way to fractal complexities. While it is true that Islam defines social life and ethnic identity in the *Northeast* Caucasus, it can only be considered a minor social factor in Northeast Ossetia and in the *Northwest* Caucasus, i.e. Abkhazia. However, one cannot stereotype the Abkhaz, for while those indigenous Abkhazians living in the Caucasus are predominantly Christian, *Diaspora* Abkhazians, in Turkey, are, with few exceptions, Moslem. This can be explained in at least two ways: either most Abkhazians converted to Islam prior to moving to Turkey in the 19th century, perhaps as a precaution. Or, Islamic Abkhaz joined the Diaspora precisely *because* they were devout Moslems in the first place.

Several thousand diaspora (i.e. Moslem) Abkhazians returned to their homeland in the 1980s and discovered to their shock that their Caucasus relatives were, if religious at all, Orthodox Christians; and that—even more horrifying—other Caucasian peoples of the Northwest, though officially Moslem, were not interested in religious teaching. To its credit, the Abkhaz government constructed a mosque in order to satisfy the needs of the returning devout.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 How did Islam come to the Caucasus?
- 2 Is Caucasus Islam “pure” or mixed with other traditions?
- 3 How do the Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches differ, and in what regards are they related?
- 4 Describe, in detail, a Georgian and an Armenian church?
- 5 What is an Armenian *khachkar*?
- 6 How did the church and the Soviet state interact in Georgia and Armenia?

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SECURITY ISSUES AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE

Under-funding and conflict continue to plague the military forces of all three South Caucasus nations. During the 1990s, Armenia and Azerbaijan established control over paramilitary groups; indeed, the war in Nagorno-Karabagh galvanized their respective armies. By contrast, Georgia until recently has suffered continual infighting between clan ('mafia') groups, gangs, and government forces.

Russia still maintains 8,000 troops in Georgia (Batumi and Akhalkalaki bases), and peacekeepers in Abkhazia (approx. 1,600) and South Ossetia (600). Separatist groups also maintain armed forces: in Abkhazia (300-5,000, with 45,000 on mobilization call); South Ossetia (2,000-6,000?); and Nagorno-Karabagh (20,000, with 40,000 on mobilization call). During the Soviet era, approximately 40,000 Armenians (including Karabagh-Armenians) served as officers in the Soviet forces. This in part explains why Armenia retains close military ties and alliances with Russia, while Georgia and Azerbaijan seek military and security assistance from the West.

In 1997, Moscow and Yerevan signed a "Friendship Treaty" which includes a mutual military assistance provision. Armenia receives from Russia military equipment and training, parts and supplies. By treaty, Russian troops may remain in Armenia until 2005, and the two nations have agreed to form a jointly run "counter-terrorism" brigade. Post 9/11 military assistance also comes from the United States. Armenian troops maintain economic and logistical ties with Karabagh forces, and Armenian personnel appear regularly in Nagorno-Karabagh.

Georgia receives material and advisory support from numerous international groups whose goal is to reform and restructure Georgia's security force. Assistance comes in the form of military education and training; instruction in resource management, peacekeeping activities, budgeting and planning; language training (English, French, German, Greek, Italian, and

Turkish)—all of which will facilitate communications with NATO, PSO and other programs; and other areas. Participating groups include the International Security Advisors Board (ISAB) and Americans in the US European Command (EUCOM) Joint Contract Team.

The 1994 Partnership for Peace Program (PFP) aims to foster trust and reduce the risk of conflict among its 30 members by establishing a working relationship between them and NATO. Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia joined the PFP in 1994.

Turkey provides funds, training, as well as instructors for the Georgian Commando Battalion and at Marneuli Air Base. Turkey also advises in the reform of the Georgian Military Academy and provides support for the Georgian platoon in Kosovo. Greece assigns an advisor to the Georgian Navy and will supply a missile cruiser and train its crew. Germany offers logistics and NGO training; and an advisor from the UK assists the Georgian Procurement Policy Board. Georgia sends cadets, officers, and staff for training to Estonia, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, US, USA, and to Turkey.

The United States' \$64 million Train-and-Equip Program (2002-2004, May) boosted the Georgian army's counter-terrorist capabilities by providing special operations and tactical training, combat skills, land navigation, and human rights education. Additional US security assistance funding to Georgia increased from \$39.6 million (2001) to \$41.4 million (2003)—approximately double of what is given to Azerbaijan. These funds have helped Georgia monitor and patrol its borders after Russian guards departed in 1998. Supplies from the US range from uniforms, vehicles, communications and surveillance equipment, to computers. Georgia hopes one day to join NATO and is shifting from Soviet to Alliance military standards. However, Georgia's military faces ongoing problems: desertion, low morale, lack of planning, and ineptitude.

Unlike Armenians, few Azerbaijanis served as Soviet officers (the result of anti-Muslim discrimination in the Soviet military). Immediately after independence, Azerbaijan, with few trained personnel and little equipment, had to create a military to contend with Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabagh. Army morale and the chain of command collapsed in 1992 when a regional commander, Surat Husseinov, defected from the front line in a bid for power through an attempted coup.

From 1991, Azerbaijan's military could be described as Soviet in style, being still essentially a branch of the Soviet military rather than an effective national defense force. Azerbaijan's military still uses ageing Soviet equipment and faces manpower shortages, low morale, poor living conditions and training, and other problems. After the Husseinov episode, the government is reluctant to trust the military, which is prone to internal political feuding, lack of professionalism, and corruption. (Azerbaijan is not alone in this regard.) With increased revenues coming to Azerbaijan from foreign investment and oil sales, funding for the armed forces has increased since 2000. Azerbaijan has superior air power to Armenia, but spare parts and adequately trained pilots have come into short supply. Moreover, Armenia may actually have what has been described as a surrogate air force in the form of MiG aircraft transferred between Russian bases in Georgia to Armenia. Azerbaijan shows signs of improvement in performance of their armed forces and in peacekeeping troops in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and

Iraq. Training teams from Turkey are working to help Azerbaijan bring its techniques and procedures up to NATO standards.

In 1991, Azerbaijan cut off Armenia's supply of natural gas from Russia and continued a sporadic rail blockade. Transportation and communications links to Stepanakert were cut as well. Open warfare began in December. Responding to Armenian lobbying efforts, the United States restricted its military assistance to Azerbaijan (and to Erevan, according to some sources). This scenario changed radically after 9/11: to reward Azerbaijan for supporting the "US campaign against international terrorism," American military assistance has increased from \$2.3 million (2001) to more than \$20 million (2003). Assistance includes upgrading air-space control and air-traffic safety; training officers in the United States; training Azerbaijani peacekeeping units and border patrols; improving Azerbaijan's navy; as well as English language training. However, Azerbaijan, with its ageing Soviet equipment, still relies on Russia for replacement parts and assistance.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Why does the United States have a military assistance program with Georgia and other South Caucasus nations?
- 2 What is the Russian military presence in the Caucasus and what is its history?
- 3 Why does Armenia maintain closer military ties with Russia than do the other South Caucasus nations?

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PETROLEUM

"Oil was first found in the Caucasus thousands of years ago. Then it trickled down to Arabia-- and there has been trouble ever since!" (Abkhazian elder, in conversation with the author, 2002)

The Caucasus Mountains arose as the result of a cataclysmic "train wreck" millions of years ago when continental plates collided, closing up the ancient east-west "Tethys Sea" and crumpling the landscape into huge ranges extending from the Alps to the Himalayas. Thus, proto-"Georgia," which once was coastal region before the African and South American tectonic plates crashed into Europe and Asia, now lay in the midst of mountains. This suturing of continents, which occurred ages before the appearance of humans, gave rise to the Caucasus region's earthquakes, scenery, volcanoes and hot springs—and to its petroleum geology.

Despite initial enthusiastic media claims about the Caspian Sea's oil capacity making it a "second Persian Gulf," in terms of crude petroleum or hydrocarbon reserves--it is not. Indeed, some analysts point out that the three major Caspian oil fields (Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli: ACG) combined produce five times *less* than Qatar, the smallest OPEC producer. However, for the next decade the Caspian may indeed be the world's largest growth area for non-OPEC oil. This makes oil a vital resource for the Caucasus, whether in the capacity of oil provider or as a conveyor and

terminus. The United States and other western nations, anxious to disengage themselves from dependence on Middle East oil, take keen interest in Caspian oil and natural gas reserves. (Less optimistic analysts maintain that the ACG fields will satisfy only a little over the 1% of the world's global oil demands in 2008. Still, the profits seem to be there.)

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia ratified treaties dividing up the Caspian Sea bed for oil exploration based on equidistance. By contrast, Iran (whose nearby Caspian seafloor is relatively oil poor) pushed for an even division of the Caspian, which would give it more sea-bed territory to explore. The dispute continues. In fact, Iran on July 2001 sent a jet plane and gun boat to chase off an Azerbaijani vessel operated by British Petroleum that had entered contested waters to test drill for oil. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan desires to move its sea border further west, closer to Baku, and hence improve its oil exploration opportunities.

The Caspian is not uniformly rich in oil treasures. Kashagan, in the north, is the fifth largest oil field ever discovered. But in Azerbaijan, whose primary export is petroleum and where commercial oil production began as early as the 1870s (adding considerably to the wealth of the Rothschild and Nobel families, and many others), no new oil field discoveries have been made since 1994. Such shifting tides in the affairs of oil result in intricate diplomacy and business negotiations over oil pipeline routes, oil "quality banks," shipping rates, access to current and projected markets, and environmental and human rights trade-offs.

Today's Caspian and Caucasus energy map is festooned with a network of current and proposed pipelines designed to move oil from on- or off-shore deposits to tankers plying the Black Sea; to Turkey; or to the Russian "Transneft" system to Europe; or through Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to India. There is even an as-yet unrealized vast pipeline destined to cross the Asian continent to China. Europe's need for oil will grow an estimated 20% by the year 2020 and China's by even more. China, hungry for petroleum to support its huge and growing economy, is an active player in the oil fields of Central Asia.

The new Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline eases certain "choke-points" or transportation bottlenecks that result from having to use Russia's existing Transneft and Gazprom system overland through the former USSR, or from shipping through the hazardous Bosphorus Straits. The BTC pipeline runs almost 1100 miles from Baku, on the Caspian, through Tbilisi to the Mediterranean; oilflow began in May, 2005 and took nearly a year to reach its destination at Ceyhan, Turkey. Partially following the BTC route, but only to Erzurum, Turkey, is the BTC natural gas pipeline (also called the Shah-Deniz or South Caucasus Pipeline). With an expected lifetime of 40 years, the BTC pipeline skirts Nagorno-Karabagh in Azerbaijan and Kurdish regions in Turkey, passing through Georgia rather than Armenia. On August 6, 2008, an explosion in eastern Turkey closed the pipeline temporarily; a few days later, Russian bombs in Georgia exploded pointedly close to the BTC pipeline. Both events forced delays and re-routing of Caspian oil, partially through Russian pipelines. BTC shipments restarted on August 25th. The BTE gas pipeline also closed temporarily due to security concerns during the South Ossetia conflict.

Development of onshore oil fields in Georgia, employing new "horizontal" drilling methods may, in time, give that country an extra economic boost, but so far, these are high-risk projects.

The most significant hurdle to oil transport and development is getting supplies safely and consistently to their export terminus.

For a long time, Armenia did not stand to gain from any current oil or gas negotiations--an isolation that threatened to continue so long as its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey remained closed. However, an Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline has existed since 2006 (extending from Tabriz to Meghri, Armenia, but no further inland), and in March, 2009, construction on an Iran-Armenia oil pipeline began, intended to transfer diesel from Tabriz refineries to Eraskh, in Armenia.

The future, like fuel itself, is in flux: will older pipelines (e.g. the Baku-Supsa line): be mothballed or perhaps maintained at lower outputs? Where will new oil and gas markets emerge and for how long? Projections and risk assessments add to the giant puzzle of oil and gas projections. One plan is to connect the BTE gas pipeline with Nabucco, an as-yet unbuilt gas conduit through Eastern Europe to a distribution hub in Austria. The Caucasus's and Central Asia's central locus as energy provider means that Azerbaijan and its neighbors are in constant negotiations with the West, and with Russia, Iran, and China. Russia strongly desires to retain decisive control over natural gas shipments to Europe. Turkey, in the meantime, uses its status as a transit nation and way-station for the planned Nabucco gas pipeline project (from the Caspian to Austria) as leverage in its efforts to enter the European Union. The world economic crisis makes the Caucasus energy scenario all the more kinetic and fraught with surprise.

Any given energy deal can be viewed as sinister or advantageous, and presented in stark terms of ensuring or betraying Europe's and the Caspian's "independence" from Russian energy dominance. But there are subtleties: e.g. in the case of Russian control over Georgia's electricity grid: is this necessarily bad for Georgia's independence? Can it be viewed as a pragmatic arrangement? Does it leave Georgia with certain advantages, given that it is an electricity intermediate, or transit nation, between Russia and another highly desirable energy market (Turkey)?

Maneuvering over oil and gas transport makes for the creation of a new "Great Game": one affecting economies throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. At any given moment there seem to be winners and losers in this game, yet they can change places in a matter of weeks and months as oil prices rise and fall, and market demand shifts. Other variables include the appearance of new transport choke-points, or instances of sabotage, conflict, or accident that close off one or another pipeline. Another complicating factor (and not a new one) is the lack of transparency in much energy wheeling and dealing: how is a reputable energy company, even if it wanted to, supposed to "partner" with a foreign corporate entity that has an obviously false address, fake staff, and murky accounting practices?

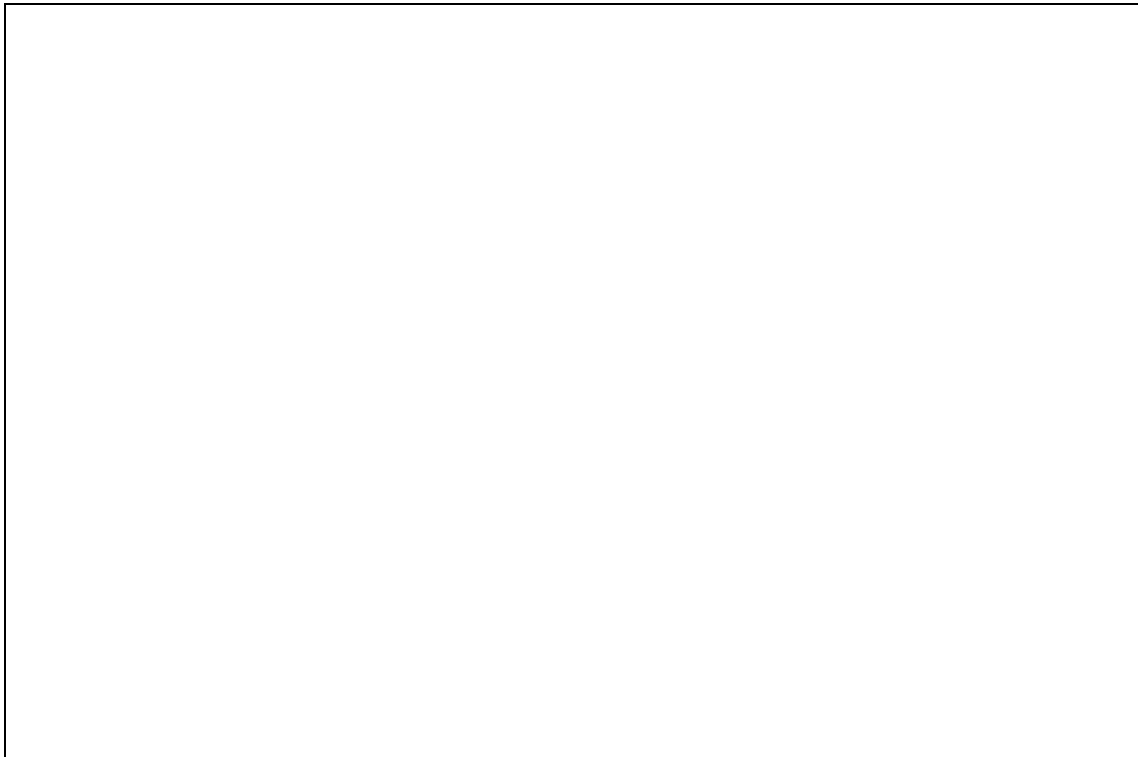
Crucial to US policy about Caspian oil and gas will be its evolving relations with Iran, which currently has energy ties with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.



ISLAM

Along with pagan traditions, Judaism, and Christianity, Islam has a long history in the Caucasus. Islam came to the Caucasus in waves from the Ottoman Empire, and from Persia and the Arabs. Islamic culture is particularly old in Dagestan, where an Arab army occupied Derbent in 643 AD, just eleven years after the death of Mohammed. As the numbers of faithful grew, Moslem *murids* of Dagestan from 1830-59 obstructed Russian expansion into the Middle East and did so largely unaided by outside forces. Dagestan at the turn of the 20th century had hundreds of Moslem religious schools and thousands of mosques, and Dagestanis reputedly spoke the most beautiful Arabic in the entire Islamic world.

An interesting episode in Soviet cultural history occurred, in the 1920s, over the question of Dagestan's official language—aside from Russian. The choice was either Arabic or a Turkic dialect. However, the Soviet authorities dropped this simple option in favor of making *each* of Dagestan's 11 main indigenous languages official (out of 33 spoken in the region). This guaranteed the predominance of Russian, for the sake of convenience, as a “language of inter-ethnic communication.”



Oil and Water:

These elements ordinarily do not mix--but in theory they should, at least in discussions about the Caucasus's resources and economic prosperity. Unfortunately, all too often water remains a "sleeper" issue, though the need for access to water has sparked conflicts often attributed to

other, more overtly political, motivations. What is more, maneuvering for oil and gas also, directly or indirectly, touches upon water concerns. For example, the planning for new pipeline projects is driven not merely by the desire to get fuel to market, but by the urgent necessity of protecting the Black Sea, and particularly its narrow outlet to the Mediterranean through the Bosphorous, from oil spills, explosions and fire. While water is less "sexy" and receives less attention in the press, it is in fact more vital than fuel. The imminent drying up and disappearance of the Aral Sea will cause huge health problems and demographic shifts in Central Asia and Russia; and these in turn will affect the economies of entire regions, including the Caucasus. Joint water (and forestry) conservation and monitoring projects offer important opportunities for cooperation between former adversaries in the Caucasus.

Environmental Concerns:

Most existing or projected Caucasus pipelines run through regions that are seismically active, politically unstable, or environmentally fragile. Oil companies have therefore been forced to take extra precautions to ensure pipeline durability, resistance to attack and vandalism, and ease of maintenance. To encourage local cooperation, companies were advised set up training programs to give local governments and communities some stake in the oil venture: that is to say, a sense of responsibility (or, indeed, actual responsibility) for, say, an exploratory oil-rig or a pipeline running through a particular region. To this end, BP and consortium members paid some \$60 million to support community projects and village programs along the BTC route through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey—money considered well spent. The ideal was to prepare a safe social "bed" for the pipelines. This meant increasing the overall lawfulness of the countries involved by boosting the transparency and dependability of its businesses. However, oil resources per se do not guarantee continuing wealth, or economic growth and stability. For example, comparing the GDP of Norway with that of Middle Eastern nations over the past decades: Norway's GDP has climbed steadily, whereas Middle East economies peaked from oil, and then tended to fall and bump along. In theory, oil funds can help spread oil wealth throughout an entire society; but to do this such revenues must be harbored and protected from institutional and private corruption.

Environmental concerns include:

- 1 The BTC pipeline and oil development's impact on the already polluted Caspian Sea and its endangered sturgeon.
- 2 Its impact on two dense primary forests in Georgia, as well as the buffer zone of a protected natural park with several rare and endangered species. (The BTC pipeline requires a 500-meter wide clear-cut corridor crossing.)
- 3 In Turkey, the pipeline corridor contains more than 500 endemic plant species, and a third of the country's threatened vertebrates are found within 250 meters of it.
- 4 The route crosses two sites protected under national legislation, including habitats for the threatened Caucasian grouse, as well as two critically endangered plant species and 15

bird species with fewer than 500 numbered nesting pairs.

Other concerns focus on the potential vulnerability of the pipeline to vandalism and earthquakes. The pipeline passes close to the Borzhomi mineral water springs and to landslide zones in Georgia. Meanwhile, Turkey has experienced 17 major seismic shocks in the past 80 years; thus there is a high chance of a major earthquake occurring during the 40-year projected span of operation for the BTC line.

Pro-environment and human rights groups criticize British Petroleum's control over the BTC project, claiming that, through legal agreements, BP virtually governs the BTC corridor, stripping local people and workers of their civil rights. Recently, whistleblower critics of the project complained of incorrect materials being supplied, of BTC pipeline crews being forced to begin work before land surveys could be completed, and of pipeline installed before mandatory inspections could take place. In August 2004, Georgia called a temporary halt to construction to its portion of the BTC pipeline, ostensibly over environmental concerns. Additional concerns have been raised about Turkey and its ability to meet social, environmental, health, and safety commitments while maintaining construction on schedule.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 Look at a map of the Caucasus and Caspian region. With an eye to physical geography and political boundaries, where would *you* put a new pipeline?
- 2 On a map showing pipelines, choose one and trace it with your finger. Why does it follow the course shown? Over what terrain does it pass?
- 3 Which countries invest most in Caspian/Caucasus oil and gas exploration?

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DRUGS, TRAFFICKING, CONTRABAND:

Major drug routes from Iran lead through the Caucasus to Europe and Turkey. In many regions corruption, instability, and separatist conflicts lead to an "ecology," or cycle, of dependency wherein contraband- and drug-running supports state agents (for example, in the 'break-away' regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabagh). Two (possibly cynical) points can be made: none of this is new, in the sense that the Caucasus has for centuries been a source of slaves, and opium and other drugs have deep cultural roots. Secondly, all this is but one piece of a much larger, international picture in which illegal gains from trafficking, narcotics, and contraband (even of the mundane, such as cigarettes) are soon to exceed even the astronomic income from arms sales worldwide. So far, however, these matters remain a "soft," though serious, security concern in the South Caucasus.

THE "OTHER" DIPLOMACY

New methods exist to augment diplomacy in the Caucasus, especially in sensitive matters, such as planned ethnic killing. These include the establishment of "truth commissions" (where immunity is extended in exchange for truthful testimony), "confidence-building" measures and "conflict resolution" workshops. Other terms for these approaches include "second tier diplomacy," "people-to-people," "outreach," and "peace-building" ventures) play a modest but promising role in international affairs. Unfortunately, they tend to be underused and under-reported in the media, and all but ignored by think-tanks and foreign policy journals (which focus on more traditional considerations, such as national interests, 'carrots and sticks,' and 'signal sending').

Nevertheless, educational exchange programs, joint cultural projects, and "trust enhancing" gatherings can have a considerable effect, dollar for dollar, over the long term. Incrementally, such "other" diplomacy works to strengthen civic society and develop ties between younger people in governments and NGOs who otherwise would not meet. Protocols for the Other Diplomacy (and its conceptual partner, the Other Journalism--for reporters and editors, too, can play a key role in these endeavors) are evolving in numerous university departments and through USAID-sponsored programs.

In popular literature, too, much valuable information can be gleaned about negotiation and reconciliation from individuals of recognized moral stature, such as the Dalai Lama and South Africa's Bishop Mandela. Particularly intriguing—and useful for diplomats-- is Ekhard Tolle's

concept of something he calls the "Pain Body," which refers to any memory, individual or collective, of past trauma. To a person (or a nation), the Pain Body, writes Tolle, no matter how excruciating, may also sometimes seem beneficial, like a protective shield or something integral to one's individual, group, or national identity. This is an illusion, for in reality the Pain Body is a "parasite" nurtured by negative headlines, nationalistic rhetoric, remembrance of ancient atrocities and vendettas-- and thus is concerned only with *its own* survival. Tolle suggests that humble recognition of the other party's experience of pain, as well as one's own, is a vital step to reconciliation.

CAUCASUS CULTURES AND TRADITIONS: Some personal glimpses

"You are interested in Kebeh because you are an American. But I am not 'interested' in Kebzeh—because I am Abkhazian!" (author interview with Turkish Abkhazian, Istanbul, 2002)



Pirosmanashvili was a self-taught, wandering artist who painted on tin, black oil-cloth, inn walls. This picture is in the Georgian Art Museum, which was a seminary when Stalin studied there (1894-1898).

In the long run, everything in the Caucasus—everything except the mountains themselves—arises out of its cultures. It is easy to romanticize the Caucasus. Indeed, it is irresistible, and most foreigners first encounter the region through the classics of Russian 19th century literature, particularly the verses and stories by Tolstoy, Lermontov, and Pushkin, who depict the interaction of Russians and mountain peoples. Lermontov, in particular, vividly conveys his Caucasus obsession in *The Hero of Our Times*, and also, as a painter, in his marvelously atmospheric landscape sketches, oils, and watercolors.



Lermontov: Mount Kazbek



Lermontov: The Maidan in Tbilisi

Tradition: For centuries, visitors have noticed something "different" about highland dwellers, especially those far removed from trade and invasion routes in the valleys and lowlands. Perhaps it was their physical beauty or nobleness of bearing; or an inexplicable tenaciousness, even ferocity; or, throughout the mountains and valleys, various permutations of generosity and obduracy.

This Caucasus "something" has been called a code of honor or courtesy system, typified by lavish hospitality shown to guests, in the veneration of elders, and in the intricacies of vendetta, war and peacemaking. Somehow this special quality of character—this ethical "backbone"—was

linked to *adat* (strict mountain law), or to something called “Kabsa,” “Khabsa,” “Kebzeh,” “Adyge habza,” the “Circassian code of law” or even “Caucasian yoga.” It was, in short, a system of education and edification, “laws, rules, etiquettes, and ethos” little known outside the region: the rules of behaviors and morals that in other parts of the world are handed down through religion. To an American it may seem akin to Southern Honor or to military honor; it is the fruit of inheritance, upbringing, discipline, and training. Its focus is to bind together the community by building up the character of each individual, instilling such virtues as forbearance, honesty, dignity, sensitivity, and guts.

Scholars have tried to pigeonhole the phenomenon: it is simply mysticism, they say, or paganism or Zoroastrianism—or else it is animism, Sufism, Islamic fundamentalism, fanaticism, asceticism, esotericism—or merely “good Middle Eastern manners.” Confusion occurs because it, whatever “it” may be, is more easily experienced than studied. Much of this cultural tradition vanished under the Soviet regime, though elements endure—again, more easily sensed than documented.

Groups: Traditional Caucasus societies are traditional and focused on family; that is, upon village, clan, and community allegiance rather than individual attainment or competition. Caucasus nations are small: in effect, big “villages” where gifts go a long way and personal contacts are important. The flip side of such hospitable, family-oriented, sensual cultures is that they also have traditions of violence and vendetta. Today’s “mafias” are often clan-based.

Myths: Circassians lived primarily in the highlands and North Caucasus, but also on the Black Sea. Ancient history books describe such groups as the Achins (Abzech), Zych (Kemirgey), Hemochs (Nat-Khuaj), Anychs (Bzedough, or Shapsug), and many others. The historical name of the Circassians is Nat, or And (Ant); the Nats became known as the Narts, who are also legendary gods and giants that gave rise to the fabulous Nart Epics of the Caucasus.

Customs: In Georgia, both the tourist and the diplomat soon encounter Caucasus feasting customs, especially the toasting rituals led by the appointed *tamada*, or master of ceremonies. Toasts are made to peace, to Georgia, to guests, to ancestors, to parents, to brothers and sisters, to the deceased, to the children, to friendship, and to the “feet”—i.e. to the workers who have crushed the grapes to make wine. (A personal anecdote: The author, as part of a delegation of American journalists, once witnessed a candle-lit feast, high in the Georgian mountains, during which the *tamada* exuberantly proposed a toast to ‘the eyes of the most beautiful women in the world—*who happen to be in this room!*’ This caused considerable alarm among some of the foreign guests, unaccustomed to having their eyes toasted, but they smiled and raised their glasses anyway. What else could be done?)

Circassian, or Cherkess, may be a corruption of *Kerket*, a Greek word. Circassians call themselves *Adighe*. The character of the ancient Adighes included chivalry, dignity, sagacity, bravery, and horsemanship. They lived an austere life and grew hardy and acetic as a result. They chose their war leaders from within the ranks, and developed the skill of fighting on great heights and on narrow necks of land. To the Circassians, guests came from God, and thus were to

be considered as honored members of the family and given the best food and drink, and, upon departure, escorted and protected from harm. Cooperation was common among neighbors, be it in raising a house or in agriculture; and it was no shame to ask for help from others. Brigandage and horse rustling, in moderation, was considered more of a virtue than a crime--as was the kidnapping of brides.

Modesty was admired, and husbands did not accompany brides directly home. Dancing, at times decorous, at others extraordinarily acrobatic (putting *Riverdance* to shame) was communal, reflecting the stages of life and involving all present, in turn. Though complicated and often sensual ('*Caucasus dancing is simple,*' said one Abkhazian elder, *Murat Yagan, to the author: 'The man is the peacock, and the woman is the peahen!'*), dance serves as a discipline, a "harnessing of sexual energy," in which the partners never touch, merely gaze into each other's eyes.

In traditional Caucasus society, parents not infrequently "loaned" their children to other families from infancy to adolescence. This was a sign of respect and it created ties of kinship. Two unrelated children thus reared as "milk" brothers or sisters remained close throughout their lives and were forbidden to marry one another.

Other examples of "Tradition": Younger persons stood up when parents or elders entered the room, and refrained from smoking or drinking in their presence. This occurs today even in Circassian diaspora communities in Turkey that have been assimilated and absent from their homeland for nearly one and a half centuries. (It should be noted that such courtesies are performed naturally and gracefully. Spending several days in such a household, the author never failed to be astonished, and embarrassed, when his hosts, decades older, stood up whenever he came into the room—for he was the guest.)

In the past, Caucasus society had classes: princes, nobles, and commoners. (As one old joke puts it, '*He who is not a prince in Georgia—is a sheep!*') But princes, while owning land and exercising executive powers, were, in theory, humble and egalitarian. They took seriously their responsibilities of selfless public service. In legislative matters the leaders worked through consensus and submitted draft laws to a "Council of Elders," which passed on its approved proposals to a "Council of the Nobility"—and so the discussion passed back and forth. (This is similar to the working procedure of the centuries-old traditional Six-Nations, or Iroquois Confederacy in the United States.)

Other aspects of Tradition involved martial arts training, horse and swordsmanship, and certain physical and mental exercises. At its most refined level, the Tradition concerned itself with spiritual matters, with the order of the natural world and other realms. Unlike other religions, the Tradition had no texts or scriptures—for indeed it was not a religion: it was a way of life, akin to Japanese Bushido, or perhaps to the Native American "Good Red Road."

Animism: In ancient times, Caucasus peoples worshipped natural powers, the sun, and certain holy trees, gardens, and mountains, which were to be approached only with the greatest respect. Some climbed high trees in order to pray. Many gods and legends originating in the Caucasus are known today in their more familiar Greek mythology guise. Holy places—glades,

groves, rocks, trees, mountains—remain and are respected as such to this day.

Carpets: Carpets have been called the world’s oldest “furniture.” Certainly carpets—especially Caucasian carpets—are beautiful and addicting, and visitors would do well to refrain from buying too many (at least at one time). Carpets are, of course, far more than just carpets: they are cultural maps, works of art, and, as such, may be endowed with spiritual as well as aesthetic attributes.

Painting: Niko Pirosmani (Georgian) and Hakob Hakobian (Armenian) are but two painters who deserve to be better known in Europe and America. The main art museum in Yerevan houses a surprise for Americans: dozens of paintings by Rockwell Kent. The artist donated many works to Armenia. Partly this stemmed from Kent’s Marxist and Socialist sympathies, and also, almost certainly, it had something to do with his affinity for Armenia’s stark landscape: Kent, who was also a farmer, adventurer, and romantic, loved remote regions: Maine, Nova Scotia, Greenland—and Armenia.

Film and Dance: Suffice it to say the George Balanchine, one of the 20th century’s greatest choreographers, was born Balanchivadze in Georgia. Another Georgian, Paata Tsikurishvili, a world famous mime, currently resides in Washington, D.C. Dance plays a special role in the Caucasus: it bound the community together, with all generations dancing together; certain aspects of traditional dance refer to astronomical events. Partners do not touch, though there is strong eye contact. Typically the hands move, but the upper body is motionless; the feet perform intricate and rapid steps, difficult to learn. Each nation has its own spectacular traditions of drama, children’s theater, and puppetry. Filmmaking in Georgia and Azerbaijan dates back a century, and all three South Caucasus countries at one time had thriving studios. Now many of the great directors have died and younger counterparts work abroad. **During the Soviet period Georgians made more than 700 works (including, in 1957, Mikheil Kalatozov's *The Cranes are Flying*). Today the Georgian film industry is dormant and many of its best directors live abroad. Tengiz Abuladze's classic *Repentance* (1987)—a composite portrait of Stalin, Beria, Hitler, and Mussolini) signaled the beginning of Glasnost in Georgia; it could never have been made without the help of Eduard Shevardnadze. The living master of Georgian (and French) film, and one of the great directors of our time, is Otar Ioseliani, whose works (e.g. *Falling Leaves*, *There was a Singing Blackbird*, *Brigands-Chapter VII*, *Adieu, plancher les vaches!*) are lyrical and nostalgic, filled with whimsy and gentle humor—with surprising moments of violence—somewhat in the spirit of Jean Renoir. Ioseliani loves to use music, song, silence, and surrealistic juxtapositions in time and place. Recent feature films about Georgia and its culture include *Son of Gascogne* (1995, dir. Pascal Aubier), about the misadventures of a Georgian song troupe in France, and *After Otar Left* (2003, dir. Julie Bertucelli). the story of a family in Tbilisi whose son works abroad, and dies. Concerning Armenia, beautiful depictions of the land and its history come from Canadian director Atom Egoyan, and in particular his films *Ararat* (2003) and *Calendar*. Egoyan's work is about people in crisis; they explore a range of themes: acceptance, genocide, tradition and modernity; the meaning of home and connection; and particularly the importance of stories, and the question: Whose stories does one believe—and why? An evocative recent film about Armenia, with beautiful scenes of the land in winter, is *Vodka Lemon*. The late, great Sergei Parajhanov (painter, puppeteer, director of, among other films, *Sayat Nova*, *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969), *The Legend of Suram Fortress* (1984), and *Ashik Kerib*) has been**

compared to Fellini for the range and vividness of his artistic creations, which weave together legends, artifacts, architecture, and traditions from throughout the Caucasus. Azerbaijan film--which dates back to 1898--has yet to be promoted in this country; prominent scenarist Rustam Ibragimbekov wrote the screenplay for the award-winning Russian film *Burnt by the Sun* (1994, dir. Nikita Mikhalkov). From Russia, *Prisoner of the Mountains* (1997, dir. Sergei Bodrov) is a powerful contemporary rendering of Pushkin's poem and Tolstoy's story: the classic trope about the clash between Russian and Caucasus cultures. *Time of the Dancer* (1998 dir. Vadim Abdrashatov), is about a group Soviet veterans who try to establish a normal life for themselves in an unidentified Caucasus country (Chechnya?). *House of Fools*, (2002, dir. Andrei Kochalovsky) is about patients in a mental home in Chechnya and how they cope with the war at their doorstep. Alexei Balabanov's film *War (Voina)*, (2002), filmed in Dagestan and Chechnya, contains beautiful scenery, but is otherwise in all ways dreadful: the Chechens are uniformly barbaric, their English hostages foolish and effete, and the Russian soldiers valiant. In 2005, fire in the Georgian film archives in Tbilisi destroyed many reels and soundtracks; surviving copies in Moscow remain under the control of the Russian government. In some cases, Moscow has negotiated with Western promoters the rights to Soviet/Georgian films, with no proceeds going to Georgia. The Caucasus is waiting to be rediscovered as a venue for filmmaking.

Music: Hohvahness and Katchachurian are two of Armenia's greatest composers. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia have a long opera tradition, and there are many masters of folk instrument and bardic traditions throughout the South Caucasus.

Georgian choirs: Polyphonic singing in Georgian folk music and church chants, documented as far back as the 10th century AD, and is undoubtedly far more ancient, has many styles, ranging from one or two solo voices above a droning choir to homophonic singing with tempo increases. In a style called "Krimanchuli," a male voice yodels in high register. Singers tend to focus more upon the smooth blending of voices rather than on the lyrics. Church singing is more subdued, western regions being harsher and more dissonant than the chants of Eastern Georgia.

Jazz in Baku: Special mention should be made of contemporary "classical" art forms, such as the jazz. Baku supported a large European community during the 19th century when it produced more than 51 percent of the world's supply of oil. Jazz hit the scene early on, and despite Soviet prohibitions and subjugation of the arts to Communist ideology--so that even the saxophone solo in Ravel's "Bolero" had to be played on the bassoon--a new movement began in the 1950s that combined jazz with a traditional Azeri music form, the *mugam*. Its greatest proponent was jazzman, pianist, and composer, Vagif Mustafazade (1940-79), who secretly listened to jazz on the BBC and VOA. Mustafazade excelled at playing by ear improvisation of classical jazz, dance music, B-Bop, and *mugam*-fusion, with improvised rhythm and scales. Mustafazade gained worldwide recognition and organized music groups in Georgia. His daughters also became talented classical and jazz musicians. When American jazz pianist B.B. King heard Vagif Mustafazade perform at the famous Iveria Hotel in Tbilisi, he remarked, "Mr. Mustafazade, they call me the 'King of the Blues,' but I sure wish I could play the blues as well as you do."

Old Things: The Caucasus is full of archeological mysteries and treasures. No one really knows who erected the dolmens found in Georgia and Abkhazia, the prehistoric arrays of standing stones in Armenia, or the grooved stone “roads” on the Apsheron peninsula. Especially intriguing are the 6,000 petroglyphs discovered under boulders and in possibly manmade caves at Gobustan, on the Caspian Sea, 30 miles south of Baku. They date from the 12th-8th century BC and portray bulls, deer, predators, reptiles, insects—and curious engraved images of long (reed?) boats with many passengers and oars. The latter are virtually identical to boat engravings found in northernmost Norway. The late adventurer and history theorist Thor Heyerdahl expressed a “growing suspicion” that the ancestral Scandinavians came from the Caspian, which was once connected to the Black Sea in warmer climactic times (8,000-10,000 years ago). The region had many reed-filled waterways, and Heyerdahl speculated that Aser-Odin (a figure in old Norse sagas and legends) may have traveled up the Volga to the source of the Dvina River, and from there sailed to the Baltic and Nordic realms. Aser, said Heyerdahl, might have been related to the word Asov (Ashov), on the Black Sea—or to Azer.

Issues and questions for further exploration

- 1 What is the community benefit of the “veneration of elders”?
- 2 What is the disadvantage of the above?
- 3 When is the proper time to toast during a Georgian feast?
- 4 What is the correct technique of slicing a suspended apple in half using a Circassian sword while riding a horse at a gallop?
- 5 Is horse theft ever commendable? How about bride-kidnapping? (Argue it both ways, as if you lived in an isolated mountain community.)
- 6 What is the role of women in traditional Caucasus societies?
- 7 Is the reputation of Caucasus peoples for living long lives true or a myth?
- 8 Does yogurt prolong life?
- 9 What is *purpulgica* and how is it prepared?

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A Final Word About Borders and Nationalities

T. H. White, in *The Once and Future King*, wrote about how inconsequential borders are to birds (who consequently ignore them). Humans, however, must contend with the boundaries they create, and in the Caucasus borders aggravate as many problems as they resolve. Armenia is landlocked; its closed border with Azerbaijan splits the latter in two. Contested borders drawn on water divide the Caspian and its petroleum treasures, while pipelines attempt to circumvent other borders by snaking over mountains and under seas. Georgia's internal borders create tensions in the face of government bankruptcy and corruption. Borders in the North Caucasus add to no one's security while the Chechen war rages on.

Yet despite borders, the news (or more often the distressing lack of news) about the region, and despite the Caucasus' complexities, certain patterns endure. People there are resilient and the landscapes remain as awesome as ever. Life goes on, nature prevails over human affairs, and, as always, the events of today in the Caucasus offer tantalizing glimpses of—its past.

