

Military-Civil Administration and Islam in the North Caucasus, 1858–83

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As the Caucasus War of the 19th century drew to a close, a large population of Muslim mountaineers in the North Caucasus came under the authority of the Russian Empire. Many of these peoples had been resisting Russian rule for decades, and they had now somehow to be brought into the framework of the empire and made into peaceful subjects. Since Islam and the Islamic legal tradition played central roles in sustaining resistance to the empire during the war, tsarist officials had also to decide on an approach to dealing with the religion and its jurisprudence and with Muslim spiritual elites in the region. The tsarist government itself was not of a single mind about how best to approach Islam in the North Caucasus. Some elements of the government favored a continuation of the policy begun in the Volga basin and in the Urals in the 18th century of creating an official Muslim hierarchy for all Muslim territories of the empire. But other officials feared that an institutionalized Islamic system in the North Caucasus would be dangerous for Russian control, especially in the wake of Shamil's success in constructing state structures based on Islamic law and using them as a basis for resistance to Russian rule over such a long period. Therefore in the North Caucasus, after extensive deliberation and internal debate, the Russian government ultimately did not allow the extension of an official Islamic hierarchical organization. Instead, it started to give preference to a policy of supporting so-called "customary" law, or *adat*, over "Muhammadan law,"¹ or *Sharia*, and of co-opting and strengthening secular leaders over the previously existing Islamic spiritual elite.

¹ I have put this term in quotation marks to indicate that it is the term that Russian administrators themselves used. Although it is common in Russian studies to refer to Sharia as "Muslim law," and tsarist officials themselves conceived of Sharia as a "code," this is considered a highly anomalous view of Sharia within Muslim communities and among scholars of Islam. I thank James Meyers for bringing this point to my attention.

The resulting approach of indirect, local, secular control and self-government, with oversight by Russian military officers, came to be referred to as the system of military-civil administration (*voenno-narodnoe upravlenie*), under the authority of the Caucasus Mountain Administration, which was later renamed the Caucasus Military-Civil Administration (*Kavkazskoe voenno-narodnoe upravlenie*). This military-civil administration was distinct from the system of civil administration (*grazhdanskoe upravlenie*) that was implemented in more settled parts of the region, such as the bigger towns and cities of the North Caucasus and most of the Transcaucasus, and it had the ultimate aim of eventually bringing the areas currently under military administration into a unified civil administration. One main goal of this military-civil administration was to create a unified and centralized administrative organization in the conquered territories. Another goal was to weaken the authority of the Muslim spiritual leaders of the village communities and to create a secular administration that had authority among Muslims while fulfilling the decisions of the central authorities. The long-term intention was to “civilize” the mountaineers and reduce their “fanaticism” and aggressiveness, thus making them passive and peaceful citizens of the empire. In so doing, tsarist officials hoped to restrict the spread of hostile forms of Islam and to supplant Sharia, which they saw as a serious threat to Russian control in the Caucasus.

Thus local tsarist officials in the Caucasus Mountain Administration in the North Caucasus approached the problem of Islam with a clear conception that the best way to bring the Muslim mountaineers into line with Russian governance and law was to rule indirectly and to restrict the role of the clergy by supporting secular elites and traditional, non-Islamic law. This approach contradicted the earlier imperial policy of creating officially supported hierarchies for the Muslim clergy. Local officials were able to prevent the extension of such hierarchies to their areas of responsibility in the North Caucasus; paradoxically, however, and due in part to their paranoia about Islam, in the end they adopted in practice a very different mode of intervention in, and interaction with, the Muslim community.

This article examines how the Caucasus Mountain Administration approached Islam and the role of religion and religious elites in consolidating imperial control, from the start of the institutionalization of military-civil administration in 1858 until the Chancellery of the Viceroy was dissolved in 1883. It examines the interaction of the Russian military administrators and Islam in the North Caucasus, the role of the military-civil administration in the “Muslim question” in the region and in the debates about creating official Islamic hierarchies in the Caucasus, and the relationship between state

attempts at control and Muslim religious leaders' opportunities to use state institutions for their own political and ideological ends. A primary source for this examination will be the little-studied archive of the Caucasus Mountain Administration of the General Headquarters of the Caucasus Army (*fond* 545, "Kavkazskoe voenno-narodnoe upravlenie"). This archive, comprising some 7,000 files, is the only part of the archive of the Caucasus Army to remain in the National Historical Archive in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The Organization of Military-Civil Administration in the North Caucasus

The basic approach of indirect rule through the co-opting of local elites began during the course of the Caucasus War in the first half of the 19th century. Up until the end of the 1850s, the Russian imperial administration maintained a distant approach to mountaineers who pledged allegiance to the empire. Having promised not to attack Russian or Georgian territory or to give support to Russia's enemies, the mountaineers were given the right to farm and herd animals on Russian landholdings and to trade in Russian cities and outposts. They paid yearly tribute to Russian military authorities (there were three offices of the General Quartermaster of the Caucasus Army with responsibility for the mountaineers), but otherwise they were left to deal with their own internal affairs through either their local traditional laws (*adat*) or Sharia. The organization of local administration that emerged over the course of the Caucasus War was complex and often contradictory. Some territories, especially the towns and cities, were under direct Russian administration and under the jurisdiction of standard imperial law. In the northeastern and central Caucasus, there were Muslim territories and confederations of mountaineer communities that were under Russian protection and indirect rule: actual power, courts, and tax collection were in the hands of local rulers or village elders who acted under the supervision of a small number of Russian military officers.

After the end of the fighting in the northeastern Caucasus and the final conquest of Shamil, new administrative institutions were created to oversee the mountain Muslim population and bring unity to local administration in mountainous regions. According to the Statute on the Caucasus Army, issued on 1 April 1858, a special Division for the Administration of Mountain Peoples, independent from the civilian administration, was to be created under the General Quartermaster of the Caucasus Army.² On 19 June 1860, a Chancellery for Administration of the Caucasian Mountaineers was created

² Semen Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska ob upravlenii Kavkazom*, 2 vols. (Tiflis: Guttenberg, 1907), 1: 168.

within the jurisdiction of the General Staff of the Caucasus Army. In August 1865, with the formation of the Caucasus Military District, this chancellery was renamed the Caucasus Mountain Administration (*Kavkazskoe gorskoe upravlenie*), and in 1880, by order of the Caucasus Army, it was renamed the Caucasus Military-Civil Administration.³ Although some reforms were introduced after uprisings in Dagestan and Chechnya in 1877, the system of military-civil administration remained largely unchanged up until the revolutions of 1917.⁴

With the formalization of Russian administration in the Caucasus, the territory of the region was divided into two types. The parts of the Caucasus that had been administered according to standard Russian imperial civil law, including most of the Transcaucasus and the bigger towns in the North Caucasus, retained that status. The recently conquered territories and those settled predominantly by Muslims were assigned to the Caucasian Mountain Administration, under which local mountaineers formed village communities (*sel'skie obshchestva*) with councils of elders (*starosty*), Sharia judges, and local courts that were to be governed through adat-based laws. The village communities were responsible for paying taxes to the Russian state, keeping local order, catching and handing over bandits, repairing roads, and providing transportation equipment to military units crossing their territories. Especially serious crimes—such as murder, rape, theft of state property, rioting, and issues involving non-mountaineers—came under the jurisdiction of the administration, and the Russian state served as guarantor of decisions made by local courts.⁵ Sharia courts were given the right only to consider strictly religious questions and family issues such as inheritance and marriage.⁶ All other legal issues were decided according to codified versions of customary law, which, as Austin Jersild explains, was seen by the Russians as “pure, historically authentic, and pre-extant to the arrival of Islam in the North Caucasus, which ... was brought by emissaries who were not native

³ R. Alabian, “Kavkazskoe voenno-narodnoe upravlenie,” introductory note to Georgian National Historical Archive (sakartvelos sakhelstsi po saistorio arkivi—SSSA) *fond* 545.

⁴ V. O. Bobrovnikov, *Musul'mane Severnogo Kavkaza: Obychai, pravo, nasilie. Ocherki po istorii i etnografii prava Nagornogo Dagestana* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2002), 56.

⁵ V. O. Bobrovnikov, “Voенно-narodnoe upravlenie v Dagestane i Chechne: Istoriia i sovremennost',” in *Rossii i Kavkaz skvoz' dva stoletii*, ed. G. G. Lisitsyna and Ia. A. Gordin (St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2001), 98–99.

⁶ A. S. Kondrasheva, “Sistema voenno-narodnogo upravleniia kak forma politicheskogo kompromissa rossiiskoi administratsii i severokavkazskikh gortsev (2-ia polovina XIX veka),” *Vestnik SevKavGTU Seriiia “Pravo”* 6, 1 (2004): 23; Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain People and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 38.

to the region.”⁷ Thus customary law was viewed as a tool to restrict the influence of Islam and Islamic law, deemed to be an intrusion and a sort of “magnifier” of cultural defects among the Caucasian mountaineers.⁸ What was more, since *adat*, unlike *Sharia*, could be modified and in effect “modernized,” it could serve as preparation for a gradual transition to Russian civil law.⁹ Efforts were undertaken throughout the region in the 1860s to collect and codify these customary laws.¹⁰

Mountaineers were not subjected to military conscription, although they could serve in the Russian army on a voluntary basis.¹¹ In some places, districts were divided up according to previously existing *naibstva*, and in some cases local headmen (*naib*) from Shamil’s administration remained in place. The mountain administration also undertook fundamental changes in the organization of territorial units in order to break up and control previously existing clan and kinship structures, and it restricted local forms of self-government by supporting new local elites and placing them under the oversight of the Russian military.¹² Tsarist officials appointed local elites with the fewest possible ties to Muslim religious leaders to serve as village elders.¹³

The impetus for consolidating the military-civil administrative system in the institution of the mountain administration, as well as the focus on replacing *Sharia* with *adat*, came with the Viceroy Prince A. I. Bariatinskii, although indirect rule in practice had been used in the Caucasus much earlier. As Bariatinskii himself explained, the direct precedent for the military-civil approach was the system implemented in Chechnya in 1852:

As the model for the administration of the mountain tribes—changing this model, of course, according to local conditions, and always keeping in mind the genuine agreement with the demands of the Russian authorities and the local population—I took the administration of the Chechen

⁷ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 97.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹ A. L. Zisserman, *Fel’dmarshal kniaz’ Aleksandr Ivanovich Bariatinskii, 1815–79*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1888–91), 2: 91.

¹⁰ See Michael Kemper, “Adat against *Shari’a*: Russian Approaches towards Daghestani ‘Customary Law’ in the 19th Century,” in *Religion et politique dans le Caucase post-soviétique*, ed. Bayram Balci and Raoul Motika (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2007), 97–119; see also Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Richmond, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2001), chap. 1, for similar processes taking place on the Kazakh steppe.

¹¹ “Kopiiia prikaza nachal’ nika shtaba Kavkazskogo okruga ob otmene polozheniia dlia postupleniia kavkazskikh gortsev v armiiu na sluzhbu” (SSSA f. 545 [Kavkazskoe voenno-narodnoe upravlenie], op. 1, d. 1755).

¹² Kondrasheva, “Sistema voenno-narodnogo upravleniia,” 32.

¹³ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 107.

people that was formed in 1852 and was later expanded and borne out by seven years of experience. In the Chechen district, only the care for the main administration lies with the Russian leadership. The judicial and local [*zemskae*] administration are native. The *mekeme* (the court and punishment together) have earned such trust from the population that despite the closed nature of Muslim life, women come from faraway places to complain about domestic issues. Without any coercion, *adat* has already taken full precedence over Sharia in this court. Chechens are settled in large auls of several hundred to a thousand households, under the administration of an elder [*starshina*], and over every subdivision of the district a *naib* has been placed.... The local administration achieves its goals as much as can be demanded. While until recently, in certain parts of the region that have been pacified for a half-century already, it was still impossible to travel without military protection, and the local leadership could not detain a single guilty person among a population that was given to all possible lawlessness, in Chechnya ... under this administration, relative safety has reigned. Bandits [*abreki*] are pursued by residents, and the people, who have just barely calmed down after a 19-year war, have turned to peaceful labor and now are quickly rebuilding their prosperity.¹⁴

In a more general sense, the Caucasus became the testing ground for military reforms that were undertaken after 1856 (in the wake of Russia's crushing defeat in the Crimean War) by Bariatsinskii and his chief of staff, D. A. Miliutin, who would later become minister of war. Bariatsinskii introduced fundamental reforms into the structure of the Caucasus Army: delegating authority to individual field officers in separate commands; improving roads, bridges, and lines of communication; and updating equipment and weaponry—innovations that contributed significantly to the defeat and capture of Shamil in 1859 and the final pacification of the northeastern Caucasus by 1864.¹⁵ These reforms in the Caucasus Army then became a model for changes in the military at the imperial level and in turn strongly influenced the restructuring that constituted the "Great Reforms" of the 1860s.¹⁶ The concept of military-civil administration and the Caucasus Mountain

¹⁴ A. I. Bariatsinskii, "Otchet Gen. Fel'dmarshala Kniazia A. I. Bariatsinskogo za 1857–1859 gg.," in *Akty, sobrannnye Kavkazskoi arkhieograficheskoi komissiei* (hereafter *AKAK*), 13 vols. (Tiflis: Tipografiia Kantseliarii Glavnonachal'stviuiushchego grazhdanskoi chast'iu na Kavkaze, 1866–1904), 12: ch. 3 (appendix), 45–46.

¹⁵ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91.

¹⁶ See W. Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), 143–58.

Administration emerged in the context of these reforms, with which they shared important concepts and principles. For example, the military-civil system of indirect rule through village communities and councils of elders was analogous to the village councils that would become the focus of the Great Reforms in central Russia; and as in central Russia, the system rested on the support of native customs and folk institutions among the local population. In its original conception, military-civil administration would create equality in rights across the population, remove privileges existing in adat and Sharia, and eliminate the existing religious and secular social hierarchies.¹⁷

As Bobrovnikov has pointed out over several publications, the tenets of military-civil administration had parallels in the colonial administrations of other imperial powers of the period, particularly in French Algeria and in the British colonies in India and the Middle East; policies in all three places may themselves have been inspired by Ottoman policies of indirect rule in the 16th–18th centuries.¹⁸ Russian officials carefully studied the French and British experience during their preparations for the reforms of the 1860s. In Algeria in particular, as in Dagestan, the coastal areas were declared “civil territory” and governed under the laws of the metropole, while the mountainous areas populated by Muslims were governed by the military officers of the *Bureaux arabes*. There too, French military administrators attempted to undermine Sharia law by supporting customary law, which as in the Caucasus “was codified by the regime in order to compel the mountaineers to follow their own ‘custom.’”¹⁹ But as Bobrovnikov has also pointed out, the Russian approach was not simply copied from these forms, as in many cases the Russian approaches predated those of the British and French. The latter also closely followed and studied events in the Caucasus, and in some cases they took the methods of compiling and using traditional law from the Russian experience in the Caucasus: “Obviously, it is more correct to speak of a ‘shared experience’ of colonial administration among the three main colonial powers of the 19th century.”²⁰

At its start, the jurisdiction of the Caucasus Mountain Administration and of military-civil administration covered Dagestan and Zakatal in the north-eastern Caucasus, Terskaia oblast in the central Caucasus (which included Chechnya and Ingushetia), and Sukhumskiĭ otdel (Abkhazia) and Kubanskaia oblast in the northwestern Caucasus (which covered the Adygei and Cherkess

¹⁷ V. O. Bobrovnikov and I. L. Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007), 190–94.

¹⁸ Bobrovnikov, “Voenno-narodnoe upravlenie v Dagestane,” 100–1.

¹⁹ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 95.

²⁰ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 209.

regions, stretching all the way north to the Azov Sea). Somewhat later, Kars and Ajara in southwestern Georgia came under military-civil administration, as did the Transcaspiian region, comprising modern-day Turkestan.

Military-civil administration existed in its purest form in Dagestan and Zakatal, where the territory was divided into four military departments (*otdely*) and nine districts (*okruga*). The districts were divided into *naibstva*, whose borders tended to coincide with those of the divisions under Shamil and that were headed by a *naib* or local chief, usually a local native officer in Russian military service. These *naibstva* were divided further into village communities. Each village community had a small village administration and an elected council of elders and a *kazi* (also called *kadi* or *qadi*, an Islamic judge) who formed the local court that ruled according to both adat and Sharia and answered to the *naib* and to the Russian military leadership at the *okrug* level. Only individual elements of the system were successfully implemented in the Terek and Kuban' oblasts. In 1872, both of these latter regions were transferred to the civil administration in the Caucasus and subjected to general Russian imperial law. In their recent work, Bobrovnikov and Babich attribute this changeover to the large-scale out-migrations of Muslim mountaineers from these regions following the Caucasus War and the influx of Russian peasant and Cossack colonists, population shifts that did not take place in as large a scale in the eastern part of the North Caucasus.²¹

It was clear from the start of the military-civil administration system that control over, and eventual incorporation of, the Muslim mountaineers would be a difficult undertaking. Unlike the local populations in more easily absorbed areas, in the North Caucasus the mountaineers were heavily armed and had deeply ingrained martial traditions of feuding, raiding, and conducting guerilla warfare. Thus, in practice, the implementation of military-civil administration in the North Caucasus was hampered by a number of impediments and complications. One was the lack of qualified personnel. In their deliberations on the huge administrative and logistical task ahead of them, Bariatinskii and the other officials involved with the creation of the military-civil administration felt that the key would be to recruit the most competent officers possible, which in itself would be very difficult: "It is obvious that we face an enormous task in terms of the complexity of the material that must be worked through, and the difficulty of finding a sufficient number of people who could head particular administrations and independently develop a complex of national administrations ... even if we increase the number of leadership positions held by local natives, it is extremely difficult to find people for

²¹ Ibid., 198.

such an endeavor.”²² Bariatinskii continued that part of the problem was the lack of any civilian or military educational institution capable of preparing cadres for service in the Caucasus Administration. Increased pay and other bonuses were offered to military officers willing to serve in the military-civil administration, and a number of experienced officers and Orientalist scholars were recruited and served with distinction in the administration. Georgian and Armenian aristocratic elites also served in some of the highest positions, such as the Tiflis-born Armenians M. T. Loris-Melikov and L. I. Melikov and the Georgian princes G. D. Orbeliani, N. Z. Chavchavadze, and A. Japaridze. An anonymous letter in Arabic addressed to the Mountain Administration, delivered to the Officers’ Club in Derbent in Dagestan in May 1868, expressed the local Muslims’ dissatisfaction with such Georgian administrators: “[You] allow the tyranny and injustice of the Georgian bosses, with whom we are eternal enemies and have always fought, over the Muslims, and now God has given them a golden time, as the Great Emperor himself knows. The Georgians and our Muslim bodies cannot be welded together, just as different oils can not be joined; and through their tyranny our Muslims will be forced to abandon the region, because of the actions of these untrustworthy and assiduous Georgians, whose hearts can never be corrected.”²³

Local Muslim military elites who had been in Russian military service during the Caucasus War were appointed as naibs and local administrators, with Russian district heads making regular reports to Tiflis on their character, competence, abilities, and political reliability.²⁴ Ultimately, though, political reliability and connections seem to have been more important than competence. As Jersild points out, while the Russian administrators sought to develop ties with loyal local elites without ties to the Muslim clergy, “[f]requently, however, the Russians were manipulated by such figures, while in other cases mountaineers trustworthy to the Russians turned out to be the ‘most mediocre natives’ without influence and prestige in the village.”²⁵ The available Russian military administrators themselves were often not much more capable. In a secret report in September 1865, Lieutenant-Colonel Dukmasov of the General Staff outlined the deficiencies that he observed in the administration of the Muslim mountaineers in Kuban’ oblast, focusing on the lack of competence among the officer staff. The actions of the military

²² *AKAK*, 12: 46.

²³ “Perevod anonimnogo pis’ma, soderzhashchego nedovol’stvo dagestantsev mestnoi vlast’iu” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 2811).

²⁴ See, for example, “Sekretnye svedeniia o kachestvakh i sposobnostiakh ofitserov gortsev severnogo Kavkaza” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 37).

²⁵ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 107.

administration staff had only annoyed the mountaineers without benefit, Dukmasov reported. The officers there were used to the administration of peaceful districts: "These individuals, not understanding or not wishing to understand their situation, have brought pre-prepared convictions to the new administration over the conquered mountaineers, considering the mountaineers to be some kind of special, unusual people, with whom one must interact cautiously, as with quicksilver or gunpowder." Perhaps because these officers did not fully understand their duties and responsibilities, "the officials of the new military-civil administrations have decided that it is much better for them, based on the experience of previous years, to keep themselves separated from the mass of the people."²⁶

Dukmasov saw that this reluctance to interact with the local population reached absurd levels, so that even when serious crimes were committed in their districts of responsibility, "they usually search for a way to extract themselves from the necessity of getting into dangerous (or perhaps tedious) interaction with the people, and through such means a capable translator usually appears or, even worse, a village chief, named to this position by the previous rulers or by very influential mountaineer families." The result of this negligence was that the local chieftains became very powerful and abused their positions to extract rents from the population, which in turn increased the distrust of the Muslim mountaineers for the government. Dukmasov drew particular attention to this point in his conclusion: "The mountaineers' aggravation at the government is strengthened even more because every appearance of the government's representatives among the people is accompanied either by extreme measures or by orders that are very unpleasant for the mountaineers. The majority of the police officers [*pristavy*] of the old school care only about maintaining the appearance of order, and they consider their job accomplished so long as the mountaineers do not riot or go on rampages."²⁷

Thus the ideology of leveling existing social hierarchies often backfired in practice. In *Zakatal*, for example, administrators reported that the local population had a great deal of trouble grasping the dual nature of the military-civil administration. They did not understand how they should be subject to the local civil authorities and at the same time to the Russian military command (i.e., the head of the Upper Dagestan Military Administration). What was more, locals complained that a number of Armenians and other locals

²⁶ "Sekretnyi otchet podpolkovnika gen. shtaba Dukmasova o rezul'tatakh poezdki po Kubanskoï oblasti s tsel'iu vyivleniia nedostatkov v dele upravleniia gortsami" (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 104, l. 3).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 4.

were making a niche for themselves as translators and intermediaries between the population and the Russian administration and using their positions to take bribes and large percentages for their services. As a result of this confusion and annoyance about corruption, the Russian officials reported, the local clans made their own arrangements for self-protection and self-provision (*krugovaia poruka*). Responsibility for maintaining order became divided between the clans and the administrative institutions that governed by adat.²⁸ As a result of many years of constant military action in neighboring regions, a whole class of native military officers and cadets (*iunkera*) had emerged from upper-class families that were respected in the community. After the 1860s, these officers could not take part in the governing institutions, because in spite of the law and general policy, local Russian administrators began replacing adat courts with civil courts, thereby removing authority from the local native elite and giving it to the administration. The local elite in turn felt alienated and disaffected because of this, and as a result they ceased to perform the policing and reporting function that the Russian military-civil administration assumed for them.

Sometimes the incompetence of Russian administrators led to outright conflict. As General Melikov wrote in his 1868 *Report*, a rebellion that broke out in Zakatal in 1863, ostensibly the result of attempts by local Russian administrators to Christianize Muslims, “was an explosion of resentment aroused by causes that have more to do with the material interests of the discontented than with religious interests, although the people who were fanning them to rebellion tried to give the whole affair the character of an armed rising in defense of religion, as is constantly done in similar cases among the Muslim population of the Caucasus.”²⁹

Muslims themselves often complained that political reliability and personal connections mattered more for official appointments and confirmations than did competence. In May 1876, the students and their parents of the district school in Dzgars in Zakatal complained to the mountain administration about their new Islamic law teacher, Magomed Kiza-olgu. The previous teacher of Muslim law had died two years earlier, and the students had long been waiting for a new teacher to be appointed. Finally, the local administration appointed Magomed, who had previously worked in the local post office. The students complained that he knew nothing about Islamic law, “could not even write his name in Arabic,” and was made a mullah and given the position through

²⁸ Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 1: 206–7.

²⁹ A. Magomeddadaev, *Emigratsiia dagestantsev v Osmanskuiu imperiiu (sbornik dokumentov i materialov)*, vols. 1– (Makhachkala: Institut istorii, arkhologii i etnografii DNTs RAN, 2001–), 1: 52.

connections and without having to take the required examination. The case was reviewed by a local court (under supervision of the Russian administration), and Magomed was found to be “of the highest moral quality.” The students and their parents appealed the case to the regional military-civil administration for the Zakatal region, but the Russian deputy head testified for Magomed: “I know him personally, and I am fully convinced of his morality.” No evaluation of Magomed’s actual qualifications seem to have occurred in this case, and he remained in his position.³⁰

In practice, the system of military-civil administration often failed to live up to its ambitious social ideology, in part because of a lack of qualified personnel, which meant that in most areas under its jurisdiction, Russian administrators were very sparse on the ground. Local Caucasians gained positions as intermediaries and held positions of authority. In many cases, these were the same local elites who had been in power during the resistance under Shamil. Thus, although one of the goals of the reform was to level classes and remove both the religious and secular hierarchies, in reality Russian administrators more often proved reluctant to undermine the authority of the local aristocrats.³¹ This lack of qualified personnel, combined with a deep-seated fear of Islam and Sharia among Russian military administrators, led to poor decision making that in some cases unnecessarily provoked conflicts, as in the case of Zakatal in 1863.

The Transcaucasus Islamic Authorities and Military-Civil Administration in the North Caucasus

The question of whether and how to create an organized system to regulate and control the Muslim clergy in the Caucasus, such as existed for Muslims in other parts of the empire, had occupied Russian officers and administrators in Tiflis and in St. Petersburg throughout the period of the Caucasus War. The government administered Muslim regions of the empire through the Orenburg Muhammadan Ecclesiastical Assembly (*Orenburgskoe magometanskoe dukhovnoe pravlenie*) and the Taurida Muftiate in Crimea, both of which answered to the Ministry of the Interior in St. Petersburg. These institutions, by imposing a hierarchy on the Muslim clergy that was based on the familiar hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, gave the government a means of centralized control over Islamic affairs and gave participating Muslim clergy

³⁰ “Po prosheniuiu uchenikov Zakatal’skogo uezdnogo uchilishcha, s zhaloboivu na zakonouchitelia musul’ manskogo zakona Molla Magomeda Kizy-olgy i o naznacheniui na mesto ego drugogo uchitelia” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1432, ll. 2–7).

³¹ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 34.

a means of unification, appeal, and control over resources and religious interpretation.³²

Four of the early Russian military governors in the Caucasus—A. P. Ermolov, I. F. Paskevich, G. V. Rozen, and E. A. Golovin—had taken an interest in the concept of state administration of the Muslim clergy; and no fewer than four statutes (*polozheniia*) were issued on this topic in the first half of the 19th century. The first viceroy, Count M. S. Vorontsov, however, considered these statutes to be vague, incomplete, and insufficient to the requirements of the government. Nevertheless, Vorontsov clearly supported the principle of tolerance for Islam. “I always try to show the Muslims,” Vorontsov wrote to Count D. N. Bludov, “that the government has no intention to touch in any way their legal system, and I very often allow them to resolve their most important disagreements and cases in their own *Sharo* [i.e., Sharia] court. To change this legal direction suddenly and without a significant reason in their eyes would be very incautious on our part and could have, I repeat, unpleasant consequences.”³³

In 1848, Vorontsov sent Collegiate Councillor and esteemed Orientalist N. V. Khanykov on a research expedition to the Muslim regions of the Caucasus, and to Turkey and Persia, to gather information about the Muslim clergy and to begin drawing up a proposal for a new statute. Khanykov found that the “clergy”³⁴ in the Caucasus were deeply dissatisfied because they felt that as an estate, they had lost their significance and had insufficient resources on which to live, and because there was a great deal of confusion and contradiction in the various existing Sharia resolutions. Khanykov recommended creating a Muslim spiritual administration in Tiflis that would limit the authority of members of the clerical hierarchy by regulating admission to the clergy, sources of income, and spheres of activity. He drew up a proposal in 1849, which after consideration by the Council of the Main Administration was sent by Vorontsov to the Caucasus Committee in St. Petersburg. The main points of this proposal were approved, but the project was put on hold because of the Crimean War.

³² For a detailed discussion of the issue of creating a social estate out of the Muslim clergy, as well as of the Orenburg Assembly and its relationship to the government and the Muslim clergy in Russia, see Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), chaps. 1 and 2.

³³ “Otnoshenie kn. Vorontsova k grafu Bludovu ot 19 marta 1848 g., no. 148,” cited in Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 111.

³⁴ The conception of Muslim spiritual personnel as a “Muslim clergy” was also a term common among Russian state officials, but one that would not be used or considered appropriate by Muslim communities, for whom there is no clear division between clerics and lay persons. Thanks again to James Meyers for making this point.

When Prince Aleksandr Bariatinskii took over as viceroy in 1856, however, he did not agree with the basic tenets of the project. Bariatinskii saw conciliation with Islam and the encouragement of Sharia as wrongheaded and counterproductive in pacifying and incorporating the Muslim population. He was convinced that the Muslim clergy inherently encouraged distrust and hostility toward the Russian government on the part of Muslims, whereas a policy of supporting adat would diminish the clergy's significance in the eyes of the people; moreover, because of its malleability, supporting adat would allow for an eventual extension of Russian civil law to the local population.³⁵ The creation of the administrative structure in the Caucasus required a fresh start, he argued in his report for 1857–59, because the previous structure, with the exception of that created in 1852 for the Chechens, “was based on the destruction of the authorities created by national life, and on the dominance of Sharia, which is inherently joined with the primacy of the Muslim clergy.” By a strange sequence of events, according to Bariatinskii, Russian policy ended up coinciding with that of Shamil and his Murids, who had “spared nothing to erase everywhere social distinctions [and] to destroy customary legislation [*narodnoe zakonodatel'stvo*] and replace it with pure Sharia; for the Murids this was essential, as only by such means could they subordinate the people to their spiritual tutelage.”³⁶ Bariatinskii wanted to reverse the measures of Shamil's administration, not continue them, as he felt his predecessors in the Russian administration had done. In Bariatinskii's view, the Russian officials were mistaken when they tried to win over the majority of the population quickly by ignoring the interests of the local aristocracy and favoring instead the Muslim clergy; the officials had reasoned that because the local people preferred Sharia over the less egalitarian adat, the clergy could serve as an instrument for a rapprochement (*sbliuzhenie*) between the population and the government.

“The main task of the mountain administration,” Bariatinskii wrote, “should be to weaken the bases from which Muridism itself arose—that is, to restore the upper classes where they still exist and create them anew where they do not.” He thought that Sharia should be limited to spiritual issues. Instead, laws based on traditions (adat), together with the reinstatement of the nobility, would weaken Sharia and lay a foundation for civil law and consolidation with the Russian legal system, for adat by its nature was open to change, whereas Sharia, being based on essential Muslim religious belief, was not. As adat evolved, Muslim mountaineers' conceptions of legality and

³⁵ Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 135.

³⁶ Bariatinskii, “Otchet,” in *AKAK*, 12: 39.

citizenship would come into line with those of the empire. “Simultaneously with these measures,” Bariatinskii concluded, “it is essential to encourage the development of trade, industry, and education, particularly with regard to the upbringing of women in the Muslim higher classes, the prejudice about which creates a central obstacle to a mutual rapprochement.”³⁷

Despite Bariatinskii’s aversion to Sharia, it was under his viceregency that the first codified editions of Sharia law were published. Bariatinskii said that he recognized the practical importance of publishing Muslim law, and he expressed the desire to see translations of sections relating to family rights and responsibilities in inheritance. In considering further translation and codification of Islamic law, the government was particularly concerned to restrict any influence of foreign clergy on Muslim legal issues in the Russian Caucasus. The absence of codification in Russia meant that Muslims had to appeal to religious authorities in Persia and Turkey for the final resolution of spiritual and even civil disputes. Therefore the leadership in the Caucasus came to the conclusion that an official legal system for Muslims was needed. Since, in their understanding, Sharia historically allowed for governmental oversight, such a structure would allow the government a degree of control over the direction of Muslim legislation and over the clergy. Although Bariatinskii held to his principle of weakening Sharia, ultimately the idea of endorsing and co-opting Sharia gained the upper hand. The tsarist military officer and historian Semen Esadze summed up the growing consensus among military administrators: “[e]ven if the principle of absolute subjection of Muslims to general law could be carried out by force, with support from the military, the accomplishment of uniformity in the legal code would hardly justify all the difficulties and tremors and disturbances in the people’s lives, even if only temporary, that would be the inevitable consequence of the implementation of such a principle.”³⁸

Official individual muftis had been appointed for the Transcaucasus since the 1840s,³⁹ and in 1862 Bariatinskii’s temporary successor, acting Viceroy Prince Orbeliani, issued formal instructions confirming a Shiite *Sheikh-ul-Islam* and a Sunni mufti and requiring them to oversee the lower clergy and report regularly on their appointments and activities.⁴⁰ These officials

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 115.

³⁹ “Po predlozheniiu g. Namestnika Kavkazskogo o izbranii Mustafu Efendi muftiem Omarovoi sekty v zakavkazskom krae” (SSSA f. 4 [“Kantseliariia Namestnika Kavkazskogo”], op. 3, d. 127).

⁴⁰ The instructions also especially emphasized the duty of the Sheikh-ul-Islam and the mufti to restrict foreign mullahs or other clergymen. See Kavkazskoe glavnoe upravlenie Namestnika, “Proekt instruksii kavkazskomu muftiiu po upravleniiu magometanskim dukhovenstvom”

themselves began agitating for an official religious authority, often by means of communicating complaints from their Muslim communities. In a report to the viceroy in May 1863, the Transcaucasian mufti included such an appeal from a Sunni community in Yerevan:

The state of the Sunnis is getting worse day by day, and we have fallen behind our rivals (the Shiites) and are disgraced before them, losing the name of Sunnis. Why do you not pass on to the viceroy our request and inform him that Islam without a kazi and without an executor of Sharia cannot exist, and that not fulfilling Sharia causes disgust in Muslims? Such forgetfulness about us proves that we remain Muslim in name alone, and it would be against your conscience to continue to forget about us, as the mufti of all the Muslims. This is not what a mufti should do. We have decided to write to you in order to stand up for our sect.

In his conclusion, the mufti argues that these accusations were not fair to him, as he was trying to intercede on Muslims' behalf, and that the situation "is causing my influence among the population to diminish," which could only be rectified by allocating privileges to clergy and creating an official administration for Muslims.⁴¹ That same year, using much the same language, the mufti sent a similar appeal to the Chancellery of the Viceroy, together with a letter from a Muslim teacher in Kuban' oblast requesting privileges for the Muslim clergy there.⁴²

With the arrival of Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich as viceroy later the same year, consideration of a state Muslim administration in the Caucasus resumed. The viceroy's commission solicited the opinion of the well-known scholars of Islam Baron F. F. Tornau and Professor A. A. Kazem-Bek. According to their recommendations, a higher administration for Muslim affairs in the Caucasus would have three functions: to decide spiritual issues and questions of religious rituals, resolve civil disputes among Muslims, and oversee the lower clergy. If Muslim spiritual courts in the Caucasus were properly constituted, Tornau and Kazem-Bek reasoned, the government would be able to subject all Muslim clergy to its influence. This could be accomplished only

[manuscript], Georgian National Parliamentary Library, Department of Rarities (sakartvelos parlamentis erovnuli biblioteka, riaritetebis ganqopileba). See also "Raport zakavkazskogo muftiia Omarova ucheniia i perepiska o snabzhenii ego instruksiei dlia upravleniia im dukhovenstvom" (SSSA f. 8, op. 1, d. 3620); and "Perepiska s zakavkazskim sheikh-ul'-islamom ob utverzhenii instruksii kaziiam Alieva ucheniia" (d. 3621).

⁴¹ "Raport M. Sak. Kr. M. Ef. M. Z." (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Azerbaïdzhanskoi respubliki [TsGIAAR (ADTA in Azeri)] f. 288 ["Kantseliariia Zakavkazskogo Sheikh-ul'-Islama Alieva ucheniia"], op. 1, d. 24, l. 14).

⁴² SSSA f. 8, op. 1, d. 3632, ll. 2–6.

by “allowing the clergy to keep the rights and functions that are singularly stipulated in Sharia.”⁴³ The goal should be to encourage Muslim legal institutions’ “civil character” without thereby degrading their “spiritual character” in the eyes of Muslims. In doing this, the government should by no means relinquish its right under Sharia to appoint and oversee members of the court and pay their salaries. In addition to the Sharia courts, Tornau and Kazem-Bek also proposed creating an official “Council of Clergy,” referred to in the documents as “*Idzblas ulemov.*” It would be made up of the highest local clerics of both the Shiite and Sunni sects: one Shiite *mushteid* and two Sunni muftis—one a *shafii* and the other an *azemit*. They would oversee all issues of belief and ritual, examine decisions by lower judges, and hear complaints of local government heads with regard to judges. This council would be located in Tiflis under the “close and direct observation of the viceroy.”⁴⁴ Tornau and Kazem-Bek considered it essential that the geographic boundaries and jurisdictions where spiritual and civil laws applied be clearly defined. They proposed removing only criminal and real-estate cases, but not other civil disputes, from the jurisdiction of Muslim law.

Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich found this last proposition unacceptable. Such an exception in civil law for Muslims, based only on their religious convictions, would be impossible; and removing criminal cases and real-estate issues from their jurisdiction would in any case undermine the authority of Muslim courts.⁴⁵ In a letter of July 1864 to Count V. N. Panin, the head of the Tsar’s Chancellery, the viceroy argued that Muslim law was in a chaotic state in the Caucasus, for reasons that included the inability to understand the Arabic in which the laws were written, the contradictory nature of the commentaries themselves, the arbitrary administration of various khans and naibs, and the prevalence of customary law. Therefore, “[f]or all these reasons, I propose that there is no basis for revoking the application of general laws in relation to the Muslims of the Transcaucasus region; the force of Muslim laws should be preserved only for issues concerning family rights and responsibilities and orders of inheritance.”⁴⁶

In 1864, a new commission was formed under the chairmanship of Count A. M. Bulatov, the vice-director of the Main Administration, to consider the “reform of the Muslim clergy.” Representatives of both the Shiite

⁴³ “Zapiska barona Tornau i professora Kazem-Beka ‘Ob ustroistve sudebnogo byta musul’man,’” cited in Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 122.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 127.

⁴⁶ “Otnoshenie Velikogo kniazia k grafu Paninu ot 18 iuliia 1864 g., no. 103,” cited in Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 129.

Sheikh-ul-Islam and the Sunni mufti were also included. At the behest of this commission, Sheikh-ul-Islam Akhmed Gussein-Zade traveled around the Muslim Caucasus to inspect the clerical institutions. He found that in almost every district, the appointed kazis responsible for Sharia issues had not been supplied with rules to guide them, the lower-level mullahs acted virtually without supervision and intrigued among themselves, and the kazis and mullahs were in almost constant conflict. He concluded that so long as the rights and responsibilities of the clergy were not delineated, the clergy could bring no benefit to the government or to the population.⁴⁷

In addition to Gussein-Zade's observations, the commission based its considerations on the Khanykov proposal, the commentaries on that proposal by the members of the Caucasus Committee in St. Petersburg, the instructions of 1862 to the Muftiate and the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and existing legislation on the administration of Muslim clergy elsewhere in the empire. The proposal drafted by the commission began with a statement of official recognition of freedom of worship for Muslims. It defined a hierarchical structure for the Muslim clergy, both Shiite and Sunni, and outlined the rights and responsibilities of the various levels as well as rules for appointments and promotions. It also specified the jurisdiction of Sharia courts at each level and procedures for appeals. It proposed the creation of four regional "collegial assemblies" (*medzhlis*) of mullahs and local kazis at the lower level, and the mufti and Sheikh-ul-Islam at the top, to review decisions by local courts and kazis and to consider religious crimes and issues involving mosque property and the governance of religious schools. The mufti and Sheikh-ul-Islam at the top of the hierarchy would decide issues of dogma and appeals from the level of the *medzhlis*. They would also have the right to issue *fatwas*.

In 1868, the commission's proposal was sent out to the administrative heads of all regions in the Caucasus with substantial Muslim populations and to some specialists in Muslim law. Baron Tornau again weighed in, urging the authorities to recall his and Kazem-Bek's earlier argument that to make Muslims equal with other Russian subjects, the clergy should be reorganized to render it politically harmless, which could be accomplished only by organizing the clergy independently and linking its members' activities and sustenance with material interests that would make them dependent on the government.⁴⁸

The head of the military-civil administration of Dagestan oblast, General Levan Melikov, sent a 33-page typeset "Opinion" in which he outlined his

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2: 138.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2: 152.

objections to the project. He argued that the government alone should be responsible for supervising members of the lower clergy (the mullahs) to ensure that their sermons did not include ideas hostile to the government. Many mullahs, he wrote, disagreed with the government or were frankly hostile to it because of their interpretation of the Koran. The confirmation of mullahs who were elected to their positions by the village communities should also depend only on the government, with no interference from the clergy.⁴⁹ The views and demands of the government and the clergy were diametrically opposed, Melikov continued. What the clergy held by conviction and conscience to be the proper teaching had the effect of promoting religious intolerance in the population and hostility toward the Christian government. Therefore, no higher Muslim cleric could deny to the government that certain mullahs were preaching or interpreting the Koran in a way hostile to all that is Christian. No amount of state support could make the clergy change its calling. Some might put on a show for the government in hopes of keeping their privileges, while in fact propagating something different. Even if a cleric did support the views of the government, the lower clergy and in turn the population would denounce him as an apostate (*otstupnik*). As a result, in the best case, the government would end up providing material support for a higher clergy that had no significance among the population. "In view of the fact that the Muslim clergy presents to the government a strong political grouping with the Koran as its charter and with the goal of maintaining constant and unrelenting hostility among the people toward everything that does not come from the Koran, it is extremely dangerous to trust or even allow any sort of participation by the higher ranks of this grouping, which has more than once proved that it is incapable of any compromise in observing and protecting the views of the government," Melikov argued.⁵⁰

Not only would making the higher clergy responsible for confirming or supervising the lower be ineffective, but it would strengthen the hostile clergy in their ongoing struggle with the government over influence with the people, Melikov continued. What is more, because the project gave the clergy the task of enforcing religious orthodoxy, it would be impossible to introduce innovations and thereby the spirit of Russian legality and eventually civilization. Further, giving the clergy responsibility for resolving civil issues through Sharia would strengthen their influence over Muslims' personal and property relations and their daily life. In Melikov's view, the proposal was mistaken in thinking that the clergy could safely be allowed to resolve such issues so long

⁴⁹ Levan Melikov, "Mnenie" (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 43).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

as litigants could appeal to a higher Muslim court or to a government civil court, because the clergy would convince the people that appealing to non-Muslim institutions was against the Koran and that no Christian court could be considered lawful or correct. Finally, Melikov concluded that the mid-level clergy and the councils (*medzhlis*) must not be given oversight over members of the local clergy (*prikhodskie dukhovnye*), because the latter were under the control of their communities, which could remove them for any shortcomings in their religious obligations, and because the local clergy were closely observed and directly answerable to the military administrative authorities.⁵¹

The Council of the Main Administration took up consideration of the proposals and the commentaries of the governors in January 1869. In response to Melikov's criticisms, the council concluded that any arguments that organizing the clergy would strengthen its corporative coherence and its ability to influence the population in a direction inherently hostile to the government must give way to the understanding that a concealed enemy is always more dangerous than an overt one. Further, the council pointed out that the government had been involved with organizing the Muslim clergy already for 40 years. Both the clergy and the population were aware of these efforts, and leaving them incomplete could only demonstrate fear or incapacity on the part of the government. It concluded that the clergy's right to interpret the Koran could not be denied. Hence the government was obliged either to organize this clergy or destroy it; in the latter case, the government would be forced to take upon itself the duty of interpreting the Koran and meeting the spiritual needs of the Muslim population.⁵²

Crucially, though, the Council of the Main Administration acquiesced to Melikov's concerns with regard to the specific conditions in Dagestan, and ruled that upon publication the statute should take effect only in those parts of the Caucasus under civil administration. It was decided that a separate statute would have to be published some time in the future for the regions under military-civil administration: Dagestan, the North Caucasus, and Abkhazia.⁵³

In its final review, the project faced serious opposition from Minister of Internal Affairs A. E. Timashev, who like Melikov challenged many of its basic assumptions. The viceroy argued strongly in favor of the project, in part by attempting to allay Timashev's concerns by emphasizing the decision not to implement it in the North Caucasus: "Here [unlike in the interior *gubernii*

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kantseliariia Glavnonachal'stvuiushchego grazhdanskoiu chast'iu na Kavkaze, *Zapiska o peresmotre Polozheniia 5-go apreliia 1872 g. ob upravlenii zakavkazskogo musul'manskogo dukhovenstva* (Tiflis: n.p., 1896), 9.

⁵³ Ibid., 14–15.

of the empire], this is one of the most important state issues, demanding such attention in its measures that I decided at once to present the proposal for the Statute on the Organization of the Muslim Clergy for all parts of the region entrusted to me by His Majesty, but I considered it more cautious to introduce it first in those territories that submitted long ago, leaving for the future the decision to expand the statute as a whole or with certain alterations to the Dagestan, Terek, and Kuban' oblasts."⁵⁴

The proposal was confirmed by the Governing Senate as the "Statute on the Administration of the Transcaucasian Muslim Clergy of the Shiite and Sunni Teachings, no. 38" on 5 April 1872. It became law in the parts of the Caucasus under civil administration and remained in effect without alteration until the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917.⁵⁵ The 1872 Statute created a more uniform system of hierarchy and control than in the older Orenburg Assembly or the Taurida Muftiate. There was a unified hierarchy extending from local mullahs to the muftiates at the top. The Muslim elites who received the state license were under dual control and answered both to the local Russian governors and to the office of the viceroy. In addition to their other duties, the mullahs were responsible for keeping and reporting local statistical data, thus (in the words of Bobrovnikov and Babich) "turning them into low-level employees of the state statistical service," while the mid-level kazis not only dealt with marital, family, and inheritance issues but were to supervise the local clergy, thereby "filling the role of state bureaucrats of the middle rank."⁵⁶ The statute also gave clerics privileges that the clergy under the Orenburg and Taurida hierarchies did not have: clerics and their children were not subject to taxation; children of the higher clergy who served for at least 25 years automatically received the rights of children of the nobility; and clerics were given funding for official travel.⁵⁷

No action was forthcoming, however, to expand the statute to the areas under military-civil administration, although in early 1876 the office of the viceroy introduced licensing and testing for appointment for lower Muslim

⁵⁴ "Otnoshenie namestnika Kavkazskogo ot 15 ianvaria 1869 g. predsedateliu Kavkazskogo komiteta s proektami polozheniia ob upravlenii zakavkazskim dukhovenstvom shiitskogo i sunnitskogo tolkov" (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv [RGIA] f. 821 [Departament dukhovnykh del inostrannykh ispovedanii MVD], op. 8, d. 610, l. 5).

⁵⁵ By that time, Terek and Kuban' oblasts had been transferred to civil administration and officially remained under the authority of the Orenburg Assembly; see E. I. Vorob'eva, "Vlast' i musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo v Rossiiskoi imperii (vtoraia polovina XIX v.—1917 g.)," *Istoricheskii ezhegodnik* (1997), 45.

⁵⁶ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 256.

⁵⁷ "Polozhenie ot 5-go apreliia 1872 g. ob upravlenii Zakavkazskogo musul'manskogo dukhovenstva sunnitskogo i shiitskogo uchenii" (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1433).

clergy in the North Caucasus, albeit without the privileges or organization offered to the Muslim clergy in the areas under civil administration.⁵⁸ In June 1876, the head of the Zakatal region passed along to the head of the Caucasus Mountain Administration in Tiflis an appeal from local Muslim clergy that was delivered five months previously, written in Arabic, and signed by 32 mullahs. In their appeal, the mullahs explicitly echoed the Russian conception of the Muslim clergy as a social estate: they complained that although a commission had been set up to consider the rights of local beks, no such consideration was given to the status of the clergy. To the contrary, they remained an impoverished and dependent class. They asked for the same rights and privileges that the emperor had granted to the Transcaucasian Muslim clergy.⁵⁹ In response, in January 1877 the Caucasus Mountain Administration sent a report to the heads of all regions then under military-civil administration, asking for their thoughts on the desirability of extending in full force the 1872 statute's stipulations on the Muslim clergy.⁶⁰ The head of the Zakatal region replied in April that this extension "meets no objections whatsoever,"⁶¹ although according to a policy review in 1896, no action was taken to implement it.⁶²

General Melikov, however, still in place as head of Dagestan oblast, maintained his harsh objections to extending the statute's provisions. Including with his report a copy of his typeset "Opinion" from 1868, Melikov emphasized that the clergy in Dagestan, the kazis and mullahs, were elected by the population and then confirmed by the military-civil administration, so they were under the direct supervision of the populations who elected them on one side and the administration on the other and entirely dependent for material support on their flocks. "Not having any interests outside of their congregations, the mullahs do not enter into any interactions with the mullahs of other congregations, they do not depend on one another, and each acts independently in his district, subordinated and

⁵⁸ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnnyi Kavkaz*, 259–60.

⁵⁹ "Proshenie musul'manskogo dukhovenstva Zakatal'skogo okruga nachal'niku Gorskogo upravleniia" (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 3).

⁶⁰ "Raport ot nachal'nika Kavkazskogo gorskogo upravleniia ot 27 ianvaria 1877 g." (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 34).

⁶¹ "Otzyv nachal'nika Zakatal'kogo okruga ot 14 apreliia 1877 g." (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 38). The file also contains a report from the head of the Transcaspian okrug—modern-day Turkmenistan, then under the jurisdiction of the Caucasus Mountain Administration. He reports that the Turkmen and Kirgiz nomads of his region are "poor Muslims," that there is no Muslim clergy to speak of, and that extension of any of the rights of the statute would be "premature" (*ibid.*, l. 37).

⁶² Kantseliariia Glavnachal'stviuushchego grazhdanskoiu chast'iu na Kavkaze, *Zapiska o priesmotre Polozheniia 5-go apreliia 1872*, 6.

responsible before their societies and the administration,” Melikov wrote. “If even with such decentralization, and in the absence of a hierarchical structure, the Muslim clergy does not cease to have influence over the people, continues to incite the population to fanaticism, and struggles against the measures that the government takes to weaken religious hostility toward us, then [the Muslim clergy’s] influence will strengthen even further should it become a well-organized class united under the direction of a spiritual leadership with very weak dependence on the administrative authorities,” he continued. Although acknowledging that some positive changes were made to the original project when it became a statute in 1872, Melikov concluded by emphasizing that he still believed that it would not improve the administration’s ability to control the clergy but instead would increase the clergy’s malicious influence over the population.⁶³

Melikov’s objections appear to have been the final word on expanding the provisions of the 1872 Statute to the North Caucasus, and aside from an abortive attempt by then Governor (*Glavnonachal’stvuiushchii*) of the Caucasus A. M. Dondukov-Korsakov to introduce a *Polozhenie* creating a spiritual administration for Muslims in the Kuban’ and Terek oblasts in 1889,⁶⁴ no further action was taken on the issue.⁶⁵ The only exception was that by 1912, Senator Nikolai Reinke reported that heads of districts under military-civil administration were to appeal to the Transcaucasian mufti for resolution of Sharia issues; in case of disagreements between the administration and the kazi in local Sharia courts, a review would be required by the Command of the Caucasus Army, which would require a conclusion from the Transcaucasian Sunni Administration.⁶⁶ In reality, links between the clergy in the military-civil administration regions and the muftiates in Tiflis were so rare that according to S. G. Rybakov, the region in reality fell completely from the muftiates’ sphere of influence.⁶⁷

⁶³ “Otzyv Nachal’nika Dagestanskoi oblasti ot 13 marta 1877” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 1433, l. 40).

⁶⁴ See D. Iu. Arapov, “Imperskaia politika v oblasti gosudarstvennogo regulirovaniia Islama na Severnom Kavkaze v XIX–nachale XX vv.,” in *Islam i pravo v Rossii: Materialy nauchno-prakticheskogo seminara*, no. 1, ed. I. V. Babich and L. T. Solov’eva (Moscow: RUDN, 2004), 26.

⁶⁵ The 1896 review by the head of civil administration emphasizes the importance of Melikov’s opinion in preventing the expansion of the provisions to the areas under military-civil administration; see Kantseliariia Glavnonachal’stvuiushchego grazhdanskoiu chast’iu na Kavkaze, *Zapiska o peresmotre Polozheniia 5-go apreliia 1872*, 13.

⁶⁶ N. M. Reinke, *Gorskie i narodnye sudy Kavkazskogo kraia* (St. Petersburg: Senatskaia tipografiia, 1912), 66–67.

⁶⁷ S. G. Rybakov, “Ustroistvo i nuzhdy upravleniia dukhovnymi delami musul’man v Rossii,” in *Islam v Rossiiskoi imperii: Zakonodatel’nye akty, opisaniia, statistika*, ed. D. Iu. Arapov (Moscow: Akademkniga, 2001), 270.

Sufism and the Struggle against Islamic Non-Orthodoxy

Russian military administrators' approach toward Islam seems to have been indelibly shaped by fear of what they saw as the non-orthodox religion of Shamil's "Muridism." From the creation of the military-civil administration system, coinciding as it did with the final conquest of the rebellious mountaineers in the eastern Caucasus, military administrators started to become aware of the mystical types of Islam that they referred to as *tarikāt* or *zīkr*, what is more generally known as Sufism.⁶⁸ According to Esadze, "Still in 1860, that is, soon after the suppression of Muridism, there appeared a particular sect among the Sunnis of the Kuba, Nukhi, and Shemakhi regions under the name of 'zīkr,' meaning 'remembrance' in Arabic."⁶⁹ The Russians initially associated the influence of this new teaching with the efforts to emigrate to Turkey, Esadze wrote, and its spread seemed not to involve anything criminal or harmful. It was rather an aesthetic movement emphasizing devoutness. Sufism was seen as unorthodox, however, and quickly came to be perceived by Russian military administrators as inherently dangerous: "This teaching in Chechnya took on a religious-political character and its propagators had the goal of arousing the people to overthrow Russian power."⁷⁰

In reality, Sufi brotherhoods had existed in the North Caucasus since the Middle Ages and had played a central role in the spread of Islam in the region. In the beginning of the 19th century, the conception of religiously based resistance against Russia that had emerged in the previous century among Muslim spiritual elites in the Caucasus was taken up by one of the main Sufi brotherhoods, the *Naqshbandiyya*. This movement was called Muridism by the Russians (from *murid*, a student or follower of the teaching). Sufi orders were informal organizations based on the pupil–teacher relationship; and as Jersild points out, "[l]ong before the onset of European colonial rule, throughout the Muslim world such versions of mystical Sufism, sometimes called 'popular' Islam, were radical in their challenges to the orthodoxy of the urban *ulema* (Muslim religious leaders)."⁷¹ In the Caucasus as elsewhere, Sufi brotherhoods were often more likely than the orthodox clergy to take up holy war against a colonizing infidel, and "Shamil and Sufi orders in the North Caucasus were part of broader histories of Islamic renewal and of conflict between new empires and old."⁷² In addition to its anti-Russian sentiments, this

⁶⁸ *Zīkr* means the repetition (or "remembrance") of the name of God and often refers to the circular dances that accompany this repetition and prayer. In Russian documents of the period it is usually referred to as *Zikra*.

⁶⁹ Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 1: 215.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷¹ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 20.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Muridism was linked with the idea of replacing adat and other non-Muslim traditions in the North Caucasus with Sharia.⁷³ Some aspects of Sufism, such as the *zikr*, were practiced by the warriors of Shamil's army, but primarily in a secular fashion and with less consideration of the spiritual aspects. (In Bobrovnikov and Babich's characterization, the *zikr* became a sort of "soldiers' song" that Shamil's army would perform before the start of battles).⁷⁴

Russian officials clearly saw Sufism as not only a non-orthodox interpretation of Islam, which was bad enough, but also as integral to Muslim resistance. This phobia of Islam, and the equation of Sufism with hostility to the Russian government, was based in part on administrators' ignorance of the local and more general realities of Islam and on what they heard from their Muslim interlocutors. Russian officials appear to have been unaware, for example, that another of the major Sufi brotherhoods, the *Qadiriyyah*, disapproved of the use by Shamil's Murids of the *zikr* and other Sufist practices, since they held that these could bring enlightenment only to the most devout. More important, they opposed war with Russia in general and held that Muslims should instead concentrate on their own self-development.⁷⁵

One example of the Russian officials' misunderstanding of Sufism is the case of the Muslim cleric Sheikh Kunta-Haji. In 1861, Kunta-Haji appeared in Avturin in Chechnya and was observed actively propagating Sufism. Kunta-Haji, a leader of the *Qadiriyyah* brotherhood, had called for an end to the war and for peace with Russia. He was persecuted by Shamil for his pacifist views and left the region in 1858 to go on the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca. He returned to Chechnya in 1861, after Shamil's capture, and resumed his preaching. His activities soon attracted the attention of Russian officials, because he quickly seemed to attract up to 5,000 disciples and his approach to Sufism involved visible, large-scale public performances of the *zikr* with loud singing. Despite his history of pacifistic teachings, administrators reported that Kunta was inciting the local population against the secular elite loyal to the Russian authorities and was organizing an alternate administrative system, declaring

⁷³ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 95; see also V. O. Bobrovnikov and M. Kemper, "Miuridizm," in *Islam na territorii byvshei Rossiiskoi imperii: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, ed. S. M. Prozorov, 4 vols. (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1998–); vol. 5 forthcoming.

⁷⁴ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 99.

⁷⁵ Robert Crews emphasized that the views of the Naqshbandi Sufi order had earlier become part of the "orthodox" set of opinions under the Orenburg Assembly. A similar thing seems to have occurred in the Transcaucasian Muslim hierarchies as well; see Robert Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *American Historical Review* 108, 1 (2003): 68.

himself “acting imam.”⁷⁶ With encouragement from local elites, Russian officials seemed to interpret Kunta’s teachings and following as the expression of a dangerously politicized Sufism. In his report to the viceroy, Terek oblast commander General M. T. Loris-Melikov wrote: “The teaching of the zikr, which in its tendency resembles Holy War [*gazavat*], now serves as the greatest means of unifying the population, and it awaits only an auspicious time to awaken the slumbering forces.”⁷⁷ Loris-Melikov argued that using military force in this case might provoke a dangerous reaction; instead, he proposed fighting the Sufists by collaborating with Chechen Islamic scholars and mullahs who opposed Sufism and were prepared to support what the Russians saw as Islamic orthodoxy.

The leadership of the Terek oblast administration outlawed the public practice of the zikr, and Kunta-Haji and his family were placed under observation. He and his brother were arrested in January 1864, when the authorities feared a new uprising in Chechnya, and deported to inner Russia. Several thousand of Kunta’s followers, armed only with ceremonial daggers, tried to demand his release and were repulsed by force, resulting in several hundred casualties.⁷⁸ Local elites throughout Chechnya were ordered to arrest anybody who propagated Sufism or practiced the zikr, and kazis and mullahs were ordered to codify and make public an “exposition of the rituals of their belief” in order to expunge Sufist practices.⁷⁹

Many members of the middle and higher Muslim clergy apparently saw the mystical sects and the Sufi brotherhoods as a threat to their own positions or interpretations of religion; and they perceived opportunities in the willingness of the authorities to support a supposed Islamic orthodoxy. They appealed to the authorities using terms of reference that the Russian administrators would understand and to which they could not fail to react. In his appeal to the head of the Administration of the Viceroy in December 1863, the Transcaucasus Sheikh ul-Islam described the appearance of Sufism in the northern regions of Baku province and in Dagestan, equating it directly with the Muridism against which the Russians had fought so hard. He described the fanatical characteristics of Sufist practices, drawing more on the Russians’ preconceptions about Muridist fanaticism than on the actual relationships

⁷⁶ P. I. Kovalevskii, *Vosstanie Chechni i Dagestana v 1877–1876 gg.* (St. Petersburg: M. I. Akinfiiev, 1912), 90.

⁷⁷ Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv respubliki Dagestana (TsGA RD) f. 126, op. 2, d. 14, l. 30; Z. Kh. Ibragimova, *Chechnia posle Kavkazskoi voiny (1863–1875 gg.): Po arkhivnym istochnikam* (Moscow: Dialog-MGU, MAKS Press, 2000), 87; and Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Ssevnyi Kavkaz*, 141.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁹ Esadze, *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 1: 216; Kovalevskii, *Vosstanie Chechni i Dagestana*, 91.

found in Sufism (“If a Teacher orders his Murid to throw himself into the fire, then he is obliged to fulfill this order of the *Murshid* [i.e., teacher] forthwith and with surety that the flame will turn into a heavenly bed of flowers”). The Sheikh ul-Islam thus explained to the Russian authorities why Sufism was dangerous.⁸⁰

There are, the Sheikh ul-Islam wrote, Muslim clerics who seek the noble path and devote their talents to gathering the teachings of the Prophet to help people judge between light and dark. Others distinguish themselves by composing books of philosophy, poetry, and prose for the good of society. There is, however, a third group

whom any right-thinking person should regard as clever charlatans, who have decided to dispense distracting and abstruse ideas about divinity and future reward: this last class is known to the people as “*tarikats murids*.” They cleverly and subtly conceal their schemes from the ignorant population, and with grandiloquent and predictable words in their many compositions they try to prove that the *Murshid* is able, through fasting, lack of sleep, and other pious rituals (that is, sanctimoniousness [*khanzhestvo*]) to reach a state of divine truth and become endowed with imaginary supernatural secrets, and that in so doing he can be considered close to divine and make miracles happen with the help of the divine light that constantly issues from his soul.⁸¹

Avoiding such charlatans and their absurd teachings requires education and developed mental capacity, the Sheikh-ul-Islam argued, but these qualities were entirely lacking among the Caucasian Muslims, leaving them easily deceived. The murids refrain from criminal behavior so long as they are unsure of their strength:

If they always behaved this way, then one could want nothing more than to help them spread muridism and be absolutely secure in the inviolability of the property and the personal security of any person. But unfortunately they do not keep to this kind of behavior, since it often happens that the real success of these charlatan-murshids and their acquisition of strength and resources gives them a tremendous power over the mass of the people. Then they find it no longer necessary to hide behind the mask of sanctimoniousness, and in removing their disguise they transform themselves into fearsome Asiatic despots, and their murids are made into monsters and a scourge.⁸²

⁸⁰ “Donesenie Zakavkazskogo *Sheikh-ul-Islama* Glavnomy nachal’niku upravleniia na Kavkaze o miuridizme i merakh bor’by s nim” (TsGIAAR f. 288, op. 1 d. 55, l. 2).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, l. 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, l. 9.

Russian commanders in the field appear to have been willing to utilize the support of Muslim clergy who were amenable to cooperation. In his report on the state of Dagestan oblast from its formation to 1 November 1869, General Melikov gave a somewhat more nuanced interpretation of Sufism in the North Caucasus. He observed that before the Russian conquest, there were more followers of the *tarikats* in the obedient regions than in the regions ruled by Shamil, and that Shamil and his murids did not support *tarikats*, considering it a schism. Russian officers kept a close watch on the religious mood of the people and persecuted Sufists only if it was noticed that they crossed the boundary between moral teachings and attempting to incite the people against Russian authority, in which case they were subject to arrest and deportation.⁸³ In April 1862, the Dagestan governor received reports from the southern district of the appearance of a new Sufist teaching. So far, its propagators called only for a moral cleansing of sinful thoughts, together with prayer and bodily movements to the point of exhaustion and unconsciousness. "But since with time, this could cross beyond the border of the purely religious, and to obstruct the further spread of this teaching, seen also by the Muslim clergy as against their religion," two of the propagators were arrested.⁸⁴ Melikov emphasized cooperation with the local Muslim clergy in suppressing Sufism: "After this report, I met with the head of southern Dagestan (now the commander of Terek oblast) and ordered him to try to arrest the spread of the teaching of *zikr* ... with the help of Muslim scholars who denounce it."

A short while later, it became known to the mountain administration that a resident of the village of Magaramkent in the Kyur *khanstvo* had begun openly to propagate among his fellow villagers convictions that were "harmful to the Russian government." He began to gather followers and circulate an appeal from village to village in the form of a testament of the Prophet, supposedly given to a pilgrim at the Prophet's grave. Aside from condemning various sins to which Muslims had succumbed, this appeal threatened God's wrath for adhering to *adat* and forgetting Sharia and for recognizing the rule of unbelievers and making deals with them rather than declaring war against them. Again, Melikov emphasized cooperation with local clergy in dealing with this threat: "According to the information I collected, this appeal has spread to the majority of the settlements of Dagestan. Some of

⁸³ "Kratkii otchet nachal'nika Dagestanskoi oblasti so vremeni ee obrazovaniia po 1 noiabria 1869 goda" (Institut istorii, antropologii i etnografii Dagestanskogo nauchnogo tsentra Rossiiskoi akademii nauk [RF IIAE DNTs RAN] f. 1. op. 1, d. 150, ll. 1–18); repr. in full in Magomedadaev, *Emigratsiia dagestantsev*, 1: 49–73.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 62.

the village kazis, understanding the absurdity of the appeal, threw out the propagators, but others accepted it and read it out in the mosques.” Several months later, Melikov summoned the kazis and elders of the villages of Taitag and Tabasaran, where the teaching of the zikr was known to be carried out: “They came to me in September, and although I had reports that because of measures taken to bring the people to their senses, the performance of the zikr had ceased in most of the villages and was weakened in the others, but I personally warned the representatives of those villages that if they allow this teaching, then I, in agreement with the request of their own clergy, will denounce it as illegal and will hold them strictly responsible.” The military-civil leadership and the Muslim clergy working together, Melikov stressed, “were able to act on the people and their common sense so that the propagators of this teaching lost that fascination that they had previously enjoyed among those who listened to them.” This had been so effective, Melikov reported, that by 1868 there was no zikr movement in Dagestan but only isolated individuals who practiced the rituals of that teaching and who had no significance among the population. They even “arouse the resentment of believers as people who do not understand the Muslim religion, or who are pretending to be particularly pious.”⁸⁵

Further evidence of this cooperation, and of the willingness of the local clergy to appeal to the Russian military-civil administration, is a complaint received by the head of the Zakatal region in July 1866. In this letter, written in Turkish in Arabic script, the local clergy complained that a certain Makhmud Efendi was practicing the “tarakat,” and distributing the “Testament of Omar.” According to this testament, written in Arabic and sent together with the complaint (included in the file with a translation by an administration translator), Omar was on the pilgrimage in Medina when the voice of God told him that the end of the world was near and that Muslims would suffer the consequences of their sins and of their disregard for morality and the teachings of the Koran. The Russian officials, in their written deliberations in the file, considered that this apocalyptic teaching contained nothing inherently criminal or subversive. But in part because the local clergy had warned that this teaching was heretical, unorthodox, and “directed against the Russian government and the local authorities,” they decided that it must be restricted, and Makhmud Efendi was arrested and deported to an inner Russian province.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 67.

⁸⁶ “Perepiska o propovedi Makhmudom Efendi tarigata, napravlennogo protiv russkogo pravitel'stva i mestnykh vlastei” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 245, ll. 55–56).

The military-civil administration continued to monitor and prosecute individuals whom they accused of practicing the zikr or propagating tarikat through the end of the 1880s. This charge was particularly common as a pretext for deportating people who were involved in the uprisings in 1877–78 in Chechnya and Dagestan.⁸⁷ In the 1872 statute on the creation of the Transcaucasian Muslim administrations, Sufists were explicitly prohibited from receiving licenses and thus excluded from the official Muslim clerical hierarchy in the Transcaucasus.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Fundamental administrative changes took place in the Caucasus after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March 1881 and the beginning of the so-called “counterreforms” of Alexander III. In 1881, Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich was appointed chairman of the State Council and relocated to St. Petersburg. With his departure, opponents in the government of the concentration of power in the office of the viceroy finally won out, the viceregency was dissolved, and the region was subordinated instead to the Civil Authority (*Glavnonachal'stvuiushchii*) in the Caucasus. The Caucasus Committee in St. Petersburg was also dissolved, and its tasks were turned over to the Committee of Ministers.

In 1883, a number of changes were implemented to the institutions associated with the viceregency in the Caucasus. The Chancellery of the Viceroy was replaced by the Council of the Civil Administration. The staff of the military-civil administration was severely cut, and many of its sections (including the archival department) were handed over to the civil administration. The territories under its jurisdiction were subordinated directly to the War Ministry. Attempts were made by bureaucrats in St. Petersburg to abolish entirely the military-civil system of administration in the North Caucasus and transfer its remaining institutions to the Ministry of the Interior. These plans became derailed in a series of interbureau deliberations and were never implemented, so in reality the military-civil administration system continued to function up to the revolutions of 1917.

The officials responsible for administering and consolidating the Muslim populations in the North Caucasus faced difficulties and challenges similar to other eastern borderlands of the empire, as well as some specific to the region. Russian administrators were few and far between, and they faced what

⁸⁷ “Perepiska o vyselennii iz Dagestanskoi oblasti v Sibir' zhitelei toi zhe oblasti, v vosstanii vo vremia voiny s Turtsiei” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 2283); also see dd. 2911, 2912, and 2913 for deportation files on particular individuals suspected of inciting the uprising.

⁸⁸ Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 257.

they often referred to as a “steep wall” of separation from the Muslim communities they governed because of language, culture, and a sense of mutual distrust. There was always a shortage of competent personnel proficient in local languages, which in many cases necessitated reliance on local intermediaries. The Caucasus also bordered on the powerful Muslim empires of Turkey and Persia, which could and did try to use the Muslim populations against Russian authority by spreading rumors and encouraging dissension and emigration. The massive outflow of Muslim mountaineers after the end of the Caucasus War was useful for reducing and controlling the threat of Muslim resistance and facilitating Russian colonization, but it also complicated efforts to co-opt viable elites into a functional system of direct rule. The mountaineers had deep-seated, militant warrior traditions, and many remained well armed after the Caucasus War and even after the uprisings in 1877.⁸⁹

Russian officials in the North Caucasus felt deep fear and aversion toward militant Islam (especially Sufism or anything that smacked of “fanaticism”) and the Muslim clergy, and they actively opposed the creation of state religious institutions for Muslims. Yet in dealing with those problems, administrators on the ground always emphasized the importance of supporting and cooperating with loyal Muslim leaders and clergy. In one of his reports, General Melikov emphasized the officials’ precarious situation: they felt that they had to rein in the influence of the clergy to keep them from arousing any “religious fanaticism” among the population, but in so doing they had to be careful not to arouse suspicions of religious persecution among that same population.

Russian officials saw one part of the solution to this problem in a long-term process of education, economic development, and eventual assimilation. Although they always seemed optimistic about the ultimate correctness of the policy of indirect rule and the goal of “civilizing” the Muslims of the Caucasus, they were realistic about the shortage of resources to accomplish this goal and realized that it would take many decades to bring to fruition. Another part of the solution was the project, begun under Bariatsinskii, to replace Sharia as the basis of legality with the more malleable laws of *adat*. Together with the involvement of Russian officials in legal proceedings, appeals, and rulings, *adat* was to help eliminate the role of Sharia and bring the mountaineers into the general system of civil law and governance. Although this goal remained the official policy throughout the existence of the military-

⁸⁹ Prince Sviatopolk-Mirskii devoted a considerable portion of his report on the 1877 uprisings to a discussion of all the difficulties and possible concerns and consequences that would be involved in disarming the Muslim mountaineers if such a decision were ever taken (see SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 2926, ll. 7–12).

civil system of administration, in reality adat never replaced Sharia at the local level, in part because the policies of the same Russian administrators encouraged cooperation and co-optation of the Muslim clergy. In the words of Bobrovnikov and Babich, “Bariatinskii’s idea of replacing Sharia with adat remained but an unfulfilled dream.” Another reason why adat did not displace Sharia may have been that unlike other Muslim societies, where local traditions (called *urf* in Arabic) serve as an addition to Sharia, in the North Caucasus adat traditions were both deeply entrenched and often entirely contradictory to the postulates of Sharia.⁹⁰ These contradictions served as a rallying point for the appeals of Islamic hardliners against Russian rule, but at the same time the continued existence of these contradictions created a space for those Muslim elites, intermediaries, and clerics who saw advantages in remaining loyal to the Russian authorities and were willing to navigate the middle ground between adat and Sharia.

Officials of the Caucasus Military-Civil Administration took part in the deliberations over the establishment of the Transcaucasian Muslim religious hierarchies, and in the end their viewpoints played a crucial role in preventing the extension of those institutions’ authority to the areas under military-civil control. Nevertheless, the interaction between military administrators and local Muslim elites continued. The earlier imperial pattern of using religious authority as a means of consolidating the state was carried on through patronage extended to local elites and the use of local village councils and Muslim courts. The Muslim elites, in turn, made use of this state patronage in their own interests, particularly to restrict the influence of religious rivals (such as rival Sufist interpretations). As Charles King has pointed out, in the Caucasus “[a]s in other borderlands, the obverse of resistance was not acquiescence but rather the active pursuit of personal and communal interests within frameworks provided by the empire itself.”⁹¹ Ironically, when religious elites in areas under the authority of official Muslim hierarchies demonized Sufism and “fanatical” interpretations of Islam to support their appeals for government support of religious orthodoxy, they reinforced Russian administrators’ suspicions about Islam and thereby helped to ensure that the Muslim hierarchies’ jurisdiction would not be extended to the areas under military-civil authority. The mindset and experience of the Russian officers in the Caucasus also most likely played a direct role in the decision later not to extend the authority of

⁹⁰ Esadze makes this point: *Istoricheskaia zapiska*, 2: 105–6.

⁹¹ King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 156.

Muslim religious hierarchies to the Kazakh steppe and Turkestan during the Russian conquest and colonization of Central Asia.⁹²

Thus a final part of the solution to the problem of dealing with the Muslim population and the influence of the clergy was the willingness of the military-civil administration to co-opt those Muslim clerics and elites who saw advantages in the arrangement and ultimately to encourage a kind of Islam that was inherently less threatening. Melikov summed up this approach in his report on the state of Dagestan:

From this review of the mindset in Dagestan, it might seem that our situation here is still shaky, and that the order that we have introduced is insufficient to keep Dagestan peaceful. It is true that before us lies a very considerable time of ceaseless struggle with a variety of hostile elements that are embedded in the local Muslim population. But on our side stand a huge member of important local natives who are vitally interested in maintaining the current order. Each of these has his faction, and this part of the population, together with the masses who have always respected peace and give in to disorder only after protracted and unobstructed efforts at arousing them by ill-intentioned people, constitute a foundation of support ready to stand on the side of peace. In case of an unforeseen disruption of the peace, they will help us restrain that faction of aggressive people and the population that they have stirred up.... Therefore, we should conduct our ceaseless struggle through a considered opposition to the fanatical infatuations of the locals—an opposition without petulance and vengefulness, an opposition that is aimed at maintaining the rationally thinking part of the clergy and the

⁹² A number of senior officers who had served in the system of military-civil administration in the North Caucasus later played key roles in the implementation of Russian control in the Transcaspien okrug and in Turkestan. They included General A. V. Komarov, who had headed the military-civil administration in Tiflis; General S. M. Dukhovskii; and General A. N. Kuropatkin. Approaches to indirect rule and to customary and Islamic law similar to those in the Caucasus Military-Civil Administration were implemented under the various statutes that governed Turkestan following its conquest in 1867 and were included in the *Polozhenie* on the administration of the Turkestan region of 1886. See Bobrovnikov and Babich, *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 204–5; and Edward Allworth, ed., *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 153–57. In the words of Alex Marshal, “It is difficult to interpret this new policy [of creating self-government and reformed courts] instituted from 1868 [in Turkestan] as anything other than a direct legacy of Russia’s Caucasus experience” (*The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800–1917* [London: Routledge, 2006], 41). The Caucasus Military-Civil Administration archive contains documents, such as “O magometanstve v kirgizskoi stepi i ob upravlenii dukhovnymi delami kirgizov” (marked “sekretno”) from June 1870, that directly describe how approaches from the Caucasus were to be taken into consideration in the Kirgiz steppe and elsewhere in Central Asia (“Perepiski po voprosu o magometanstve v kirgizskoi stepi” [SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 611]).

people [and] at paralyzing, through them, the effort of fanatics and the intrigues of restive people.⁹³

Despite the failure to extend an official Muslim hierarchy to the North Caucasus, Russian administrators repeatedly relied on cooperation with, as well as control over, Muslim clerics and elites, who in turn often appealed to Russian officials, using their own terms, to gain support for their positions. Despite occasional uprisings and a continuing atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, ultimately the system of indirect rule through cooperation and co-optation proved to be surprisingly enduring.

This long-term effectiveness might best be demonstrated, paradoxically, by the outcome of the largest and most violent of the uprisings in the Caucasus, the rebellion in Abkhazia, Chechnya, and Dagestan in the spring and fall of 1877. Restoring control came at a significant cost to the Russian military and required relocating valuable troops and artillery away from the ongoing Turkish–Russian War, yet the insurrections were put down with much less effort than had been required in conquering Shamil’s forces in the same region two decades earlier. Some local-level native officials of the military-civil administration went over to the side of the rebellion, but the vast majority of the native military elite stayed loyal to the empire, including the naibs who had served under Shamil and retained their positions under the Russian administration, as well as the militias of native volunteers. The uprising was a clear indication, however, that the local populations had still not fully accepted Russian authority.

In the spring of 1878, Prince D. I. Sviatopolk-Mirskii submitted a secret report to the Caucasus Mountain Administration on the state of the mountain population in the wake of the rebellion. Sviatopolk-Mirskii began his report by recalling that several uprisings had taken place since the end of the Caucasus War but had usually been put down quickly, primarily by the local native militias. These cases showed that full pacification of the Caucasus had not yet taken place, but also that the majority of the population was “adapting to peaceful occupations and becoming unused to carrying weapons and using them.” The government had underestimated the danger of discontent among the North Caucasian Muslims in the event of war with Turkey; in fact, Sviatopolk-Mirskii wrote, the Turks had prepared Caucasian Muslim pilgrims passing through on their way to Mecca to spread rumors, and the war was hardly declared when the uprisings began in Ichkeria and Chechnya in the spring of 1877. But the uprisings were put down quickly “because here

⁹³ Quoted in R. M. Magomedov, *Vosstanie gortsev Dagestana v 1877 godu* (Makhachkala: Daggosizdat, 1940), 30.

the population had become less fanatical and militant, and less dangerous.”⁹⁴ The majority reacted to the uprisings slowly and without enthusiasm, “as if seeing it only as fulfilling an obligation out of religious duty,” and “in general, in their actions they did not demonstrate the same energy and stubbornness of will that they were so well known for during the Caucasus War.” He also observed that the native militias fought bravely in many cases against the rebels and demonstrated themselves to be entirely loyal to the Russian administration.⁹⁵ These observations led Sviatopolk-Mirskii to the conclusion that the “Caucasian mountaineers have become less fanatical, less militant, and less dangerous for us, and although the interval of a mere 15 years cannot have great significance in the lives of peoples, the time since the Caucasus War has not passed unnoticed and without success in fortifying our authority and security in this region.”⁹⁶ The largest of the Caucasian rebellions during the period of military-civil administration was overcome, not through the force of Russian arms but by the changes that the system had brought to the mentality of the local population.

Thus the 1877 uprisings showed the continuing mistrust and even potential for hostility and violence in the North Caucasus, even as they demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperation and co-optation through indirect rule in gradually reducing the intensity of that hostility. Yet the crucial factor, from the Russians’ point of view, remained control and security: despite the ability of some Muslim elites to take advantage of the system, the relationship remained highly unequal. The tsarist government was able to maintain control, but the goals of incorporating the mountaineers into imperial law and the imperial system more generally remained unfulfilled. The military-civil form of indirect administration outlasted the regime, and the majority of the Muslim inhabitants of the region remained relatively unaffected by imperial rule.

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⁹⁴ “Kopiiia sekretnoi zapiski kn. Sviatopolk-Mirskogo o sostoianii gorskogo naseleniia posle voiny 1864” (SSSA f. 545, op. 1, d. 2926, l. 2).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 6.