

Foreword

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This atlas is extraordinary. To begin with, much of the data used in creating these maps is not accessible in English sources and, indeed, is very difficult to find in sources in Russian or any other language. Further, this atlas is not a collection of satellite images of the region, however detailed such pictures might be. On the contrary, it is a series of hand-crafted maps that, along with the author's pinpoint commentary, lay before the reader snapshot images of the complex nexus of history, geography, and anthropology that shaped the region over a 250-year span. It took an extraordinary effort not simply to produce but to translate such an atlas: How does one spell the names of places and peoples for which no precedent in English exists? how make these names easier for readers to pronounce while preserving reasonable consistency in the transliteration? The Abkhaz language, for example, has more than fifty consonants and is featured in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the most difficult to pronounce on earth. You can thus imagine the dilemmas and labors of the translator. She has succeeded splendidly. The translation is itself a pleasing piece of solid craftsmanship.

The ethnic complexity of the Caucasus is notorious, a true delight for linguistics aficionados and a potential nightmare for the cartographer. How to fit on the map of Daghestan its thirty-plus indigenous groups, some of which occupy a single valley or a few villages? How not to overwhelm the reader with the multitude of flags, including (my personal favorite) the white lotus on the saffron field of Kalmykia, the first state entity in Europe to officially proclaim itself Buddhist?

And the political complexity offers another kind of challenge. The region, with its ever-shifting borders and populations constantly on the move, migrating or being violently displaced for over two hundred years (and more), is a labyrinth of booby-traps for the cartographer. Precisely because of the enormous technical complexity, political nuance, and emotional charge of its subject matter, this atlas could only have been a work of love by a person of extraordinary decency. Arthur Tsutsiev is neither a dispassionate outsider nor a cloistered academic. To

answer the inevitable (at least in the Caucasus) question: he is an ethnic Ossetian and in addition to being an academic works as a senior political analyst for the government of his native republic of North Ossetia. Does this background point to a certain bias? No less than in any of us. But Tsutsiev approaches his task as a scholar who fully realizes the terrible complexity of ethnic histories and chooses to resist the passionately nationalist biases engulfing Caucasus studies. Tsutsiev has always struck me as a quiet, sad man who probably knows more than anyone about his part of the world and what it means to live there.

What exactly is the Caucasus? A look at a good map immediately tells us more than volumes of words. The central enduring reality there is the long wall of formidable mountains tightly flanked on both sides by two large bodies of salt water. Unlike the Mediterranean, the Caspian and Black Seas are almost entirely devoid of natural harbors, promontories, and islands that could protect ancient navigators from the harsh and (especially in the Caspian) often ferocious winds blowing from the expanses of the Eurasian steppes and deserts. Thus the Caucasus is remarkably isolated by its geography, even as it has remained for centuries squeezed between the cradles of early agrarian civilizations to the south and the nomadic Great Steppe to the north, a rock between the grinding wheels of world history.

Anthropologically, the Caucasus is akin to Australia, where local species and human cultures could survive in relative isolation from the march of evolution elsewhere. Like the unique Basque language in western Europe, the majority of languages found in the Caucasus are endemic. Georgian comprises a linguistic family entirely its own, though individual words have made their way west: the Georgian word *ghwino*, according to one hypothesis, has entered English as "wine" perhaps via the ancient Armenian *gini*, Greek *oinos*, Latin *vinum*, and, ultimately, Gothic/Germanic *Wein*. Another endemic family, for simplicity called today Caucasian, is made up of the dozens of complex tongues spoken from Daghestan to Abkhazia. In between we find Ossetian, which linguists consider the sole sur-

viving descendant of the language spoken by the ancient Indo-European horse riders: the Scythians, Sarmatians, and medieval Alans. (The latter probably left their imprint in the English personal name Alan.)

Predictably, in the Caucasus such academic hypotheses are often seen as claims to ethnic fame, if not superiority. What all this says, however, is simply that for a long time the Caucasus mountains have been effectively sheltering the human groups that at some point in their history needed shelter from the waves of various invaders. This observation might also run in another direction: ancient invaders were assimilated by the locals, who adopted their languages while largely preserving their own material cultures and physical stock. The recent invention of DNA testing supplies data, still controversial and incomplete, that seem to suggest a remarkable continuity of local populations, including historical instances in which the languages have changed, as in the cases of the Armenians (whose Indo-European language is traced to the long-extinct ancient Phrygian), the Iranian-speaking "Mountain Jews," and the Turkic Azeris, as well as to the North Caucasus Kumyks, Balkars, and Karachais. In short, in the Caucasus virtually everyone is very, very native, and yet nothing has ever been static in this living region.

The mountains protect, but they also limit. One obvious limitation is in the small size of human populations. Mountains cannot feed many mouths. Another serious limitation imposed by the landscape is in the size and depth of local state structures. The majority of highlanders before modern times rarely had to submit to the taxing powers of state officials, imperial churches, or grand lords. The inhabitants of the mountains were usually too few in number, too scattered, too poor, and too well-armed for anyone to bother taxing them. Instead, they developed flexible and strong clan cultures famed for both their generous hospitality and their vindictive ferocity: in a stateless society the only precarious guarantee of safety was a reputation for being a good friend and host and an implacable foe. This is

not too different from what we find in the old Viking societies, in the Balkans and Sicily, or among the Kurdish and Afghan peoples. In the Caucasus, warrior culture and clan segmentation achieved extraordinary levels. Much evidence suggests, however, that the persistence of clan societies is not the result of special traditionalism or geographic isolation. Just the opposite: the proliferation of nonhierarchical yet complex pastoralist-agrarian societies (to use the technical anthropological terms) seems to have been boosted by the introduction of firearms about three centuries ago. Guns allowed even the relatively poor farmers and shepherds to resist the exactions of aristocrats in splendid armor.

Into this picture enters the Russian Empire, first in the 1550s and then, in a more sustained manner, during the 1780s to 1820s. Initially the conquests seemed easy. The modern European army, tested in the wars against Napoleon himself, in a succession of battlefield triumphs rolled to the southern borders of what later became Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The Russians' success was due to the presence of feudal social structures in these relatively more fertile lands. Once the strength of Russian arms was proven in direct confrontations, even the Muslim Turkic elites, to say nothing of the Christian Georgian and Armenian princes and priests, usually chose to submit themselves and their peasants to the new masters in the hope of being incorporated on better terms. It was only in the stateless mountains of the North Caucasus that Russia ran into the sustained guerrilla resistance coordinated by the ideological network of combative Islamic Sufis.

Arthur Tsutsiev meticulously documents in his maps the twists and turns of these protracted struggles and how their multiple legacies have been transported into our day. Let me emphasize here that his approach is far more subtle and theoretically robust than those romantic retrospective depictions that dwell on historical memories and national predestinations. This atlas is not merely an authoritative reference source. Map after map, it tells a coherent and comprehensive story of the making of the modern Caucasus.

What might be perhaps less evident to the reader is that this atlas meshes several theoretical breakthroughs in understanding the human past. Almost literally at the ground level lies the historical geography of Fernand Braudel, who first elaborated in his classical study of the Mediterranean the complex

interdependencies of physical landscapes and the variety of human societies emerging from them. Braudel's work was followed by the "organizational materialism" of contemporary historical sociologists like Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, and Immanuel Wallerstein. Their approach is to examine what has been flowing over the networks of geopolitics, governance, world economies, human migrations, and cultural exchanges; what has shaped the conflicts, the dilemmas, and the solutions found or never quite found by the collective actors and organizations involved with this landscape. Ultimately, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* became the signal work around which a broad consensus among contemporary scholars of nations and nationalism crystalized. Make no mistake, the key word *imagined* in Anderson's famous title does not mean "fake" or "frivolously concocted." Rather it directs our attention to the actual processes, personalities, resources, and ideological battles that have been involved in the construction of quintessentially modern projects aimed at political rights through nationhood.

The nationalists themselves tell a very different and much simpler story. It can be summarized in a few standard tropes: our group is ancient, we were always here, our culture is unique and great, therefore we must do whatever it takes to assert ourselves as a sovereign state. Some thinkers recently suggested that the heyday of nationalism is now past. The last great outbreak came with the ethnic rebellions following in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The future belongs to market cosmopolitanism or, in a considerably less sanguine prediction, conflict among religiously formulated civilizations. That remains to be seen. So far one must hope that this extraordinarily sobering atlas might eventually be found in every school and bookshop, and, for that matter, in the teahouses and bars where nationalist fervors still flare up easily. Such popular use of Tsutsiev's work would be a service to humanity. This does not contradict the value of his intellectual achievement. Theoretically sophisticated and remarkably clear, this atlas can also be read by students, experts, and scholars as a first-rate graphic monograph on nations and nationalism.