

Map 4

1774–1783: Ethnolinguistic Map of the Greater Caucasus

Map 4 depicts the ethnolinguistic composition of the Greater Caucasus around the time the Caucasus first began to be incorporated into Russia. This is the point at which Russian researchers, scouts, and military administrators first came onto the scene. The task of determining the cultural and ethnopolitical structure of this area located directly across Russia's inner border still lay ahead, but it was important for them to investigate the territory not only for its natural features and resources but for the human landscape as well, which presented its own quagmires and impassable terrain, easily traveled lowlands, and strategic mountain crossings. And even as this landscape was being investigated, it was also, with the passage of time, increasingly being shaped by these energetic observers as they became active organizers of the regions they described. The security of the Russian border against the Caucasus looming over it and the empire's acquisition of Transcaucasian provinces would gradually demand that more comprehensive military and administrative control be exercised over the region.

By the mid-eighteenth century the Kuban Nogai Horde as well as Kabarda, coreligionist Georgia, and the Tarki Shamkhate (a khanate ruled by a shamkhal, the title of Daghestani Tarki khans) had all become objects of Russian interest and attention. Peter the Great's campaign to Persia and the western Caspian coast (1722–1723) had begun to influence Russian thinking about the political and tribal composition of Caspian Daghestan, Shirvan, and Talysh. There was only a vague sense of Christian Armenia, somewhere deep in Turkish and Persian territory, but the Armenians who came to Kizlyar from Transcaucasia would become a familiar sight along the Russian border with the Caucasus. Moving the border forward from Kizlyar to Mozdok would bring Russian observers into closer contact with new groups of Caucasian mountain dwellers, people who seemed to be emerging from behind the former rulers of the lowlands—Kumyks and Kabardins. Different highlander communities, known to Russians since the sixteenth century as Okokis, Michiks, Shubuts, and Kachkalyks, gradually began to be per-

ceived and categorized as one people, the Chechens, who would become the main neighbors on the other side of the Cossack defensive line along the Terek. The Iassy were rediscovered (now under the name of Ossetians) presiding over strategic mountain crossings into Georgia.

Between 1740 and 1770 the Russian administration in Astrakhan, Kizlyar, and, later, Mozdok received appeals from various mountain populations and lowland feudal rulers for Russian protection or even to become Russian subjects. These appeals were prompted by heightened internal antagonisms in the region. Rivalries among local princes in Kabarda and Daghestan were accompanied by growing tensions between lowland feudal and highland communities. Feudal overlords needed imperial support to assert their claimed suzerainty over highlanders settling the plains (where this suzerainty appeared to be in decline). As for highlander commoners, they either tried to resist these claims and their imperial backers or sought imperial support in overcoming the obstacles these overlords posed to their efforts to settle the plains.

Internal contradictions were taking shape in the region, associated in particular with social and demographic shifts in highland communities and Kabarda's post-1739 status as "independent" (in fact, it acted as a neutral buffer territory between Russia and the Porte). The Treaty of Belgrade had left Kabarda less vulnerable, for the time being, to the exigencies of the Russo-Ottoman struggle and safer from incursions by Crimeans, Kuban Tatars (Nogai) and Kalmyk nomads. This new geopolitical status freed Kabardin princes to continue their attempts to establish rule over highland communities. However, neither episodic efforts by Kabardin principalities to work together to take advantage of foreign policy opportunities nor their claims to the vassalage of the mountain communities of the Central Caucasus could qualify Kabarda as a "feudal empire" or even a confederation with allied mountain communities. By the 1750s some highland communities had already established enough offshoots in the plains to resist the princes' forces and those of

their Russian patron. This was the case in the successful move onto the plains by Chechens formerly controlled by Kumyk and Kabardin princes. But where the balance of power somewhat differed, some highland communities south of Kabarda, including Ossetian and Ingush, actively sought imperial overlordship in their struggle for lowland territory.

The variety of scenarios that played out as Russia was gradually drawn into the region shows that it was not only Russia's own geopolitical rivalry with the Porte that shaped its early integration into the region but also the antagonisms and struggles between local polities situated along the Russian Terek boundary. In addition to the forces drawing Russia into the North Caucasus, local hotbeds of groups eager to push Russia out were developing that would endanger the imperial border with the Caucasus and act as a counterforce to Russian expansion. Just how complex the region was in terms of political landscape, tribal composition, and internal tensions was becoming increasingly evident. The region could be roughly broken down into three large areas:

The North Caucasian Steppe: Identified as Ciscaucasia (Fore-Caucasus) within the Russian Empire because it divided the region into the near and far side of the Caucasus mountains, it extended from the Sea of Azov to the Caspian Sea. To the north—above a line that followed the Kuban and Tomuzlov Rivers or, according to some interpretations, passed through Pyatigorye (Beshtau, in northwest Kabarda) and then extended along the Terek River—was an area controlled by various arrays of Turkic-speaking Nogai nomads and, in parts, Kalmyks. To the south of this line various Adyghe and Kumyk feudal entities dominated. Kabardin Adyghe princes laid claim to grazing lands that extended to the Tomuzlov River and Naur (as the middle reaches of the Terek were called). Along the eastern edge of Ciscaucasia the Terek flows through coastal lowlands that were populated or used by Kumyks and adjoined Daghestan's narrow lowland coast, then extending to the Derbent area, which had been settled by other Turkic groups.