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The Meaning of Death for Adygs During the Years of the Caucasian War*

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Abstract

The article deals with issues of everyday life of Adygs (Circassians) under conditions of a protracted military conflict during the Caucasian war in the first half of 19th century. Based on the recollections of eyewitnesses and direct participants in the events (Russian military officers and foreign observers), literary works of local authors and folklore sources, authors of the study explore a human factor in the history of the Caucasian War, in terms of emotions, dramatic experiences, fears, and transformation of ethnic consciousness. In this regard, histories of everyday life, gender history, and history of mentality appear to be the most productive research methods and approaches. Using related research tools allowed analyzing an inner perception of death of Adygs in the violent conflict. Adygs appear in the study not as a faceless side of the conflict, but as an active and personalized historical subject.

The Caucasian war was not only a chain of political and war events, but was full of personal stories, tragedies of loss and sorrow, female experiences. The routine of death strengthened a respect for the dead, rebooting related symbolic content and ritual practices. At the same time, an erosion of the mental foundations of traditional culture occurs due to the fundamental changes in the conditions of prolonged war.

Keywords: the Caucasian war, Circassians, Heroics of death, Transformation of mentality, Female experiences, Caring for the death, Rhetoric of grief.

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Introduction

The Caucasian War is a painful boundary, which has divided the history of the Adygs into two great epochs, Before and After: the traditional "patriarchal old days" and a new existence within the framework of the imperial state. The Caucasian war, which began gradually in Kabarda and which was spreading over a hundred years throughout the Caucasus, was not only the time of historical changes, but also the transformation of such states as ethnic mentality and national consciousness. In order to determine the nature and the extent of these changes, their impact on the future destinies of the peoples of Caucasus, this article will consider one of the aspects of changes in mental behavioral practices and the everyday life of the Adygs, expressed in their attitude to the most tragic consequences of war - the death during war and the caring for bodies and souls of the departed. We chose this aspect of the problem due to its dramatic acuity and the conservatism of the ritual-ritual aspect, which gives greater exposure to mental attitudes and their transformations under the influence of external factors.

Under the death during war we understand not only the death on a battlefield, but also other military tragedies: violence against women, hunger, child victims, etc. Therefore, our analysis will not be socio-political, but historical and cultural, with an emphasis on everyday details, ethnographic facts, private experiences and emotions.

One of the main trends of modern historical science is the shifting of attention focus from the external sides of the studied reality to the inner ones, an attempt to reconstruct the inner world of a person of the past and his perception of the world in which he lived. Such a research perspective will make it possible to understand the complex system of relations and meanings of "a man in war" better, to see the specific experience of Circassians in the conditions of resistance and to understand both the motivation of their behavior and their perception of war as a whole from within.

Methods

The research tools of the history of everyday life made it possible to study the sphere of human everyday life in the context of military confrontation, to present the Circassians not so much as an abstract aspect of a conflict, but as creators of meanings actively creating the realities of the past. In this article, in accordance with this approach, authors applied the interpretation of the historical source by the penetration into its inner layers, the task was to fill the lacunae of the narrative: inconsistency, understatement, which allowed to elucidate the motivation of the actions of individuals and to come closer to their understanding.

War puts a person in a border situation, which actualizes the experience of death as one of the root categories of human existence. The application of approaches developed by the history of mentality made it possible to trace the implementation of the concept of death in war, the relations to enemies and a human body in the behavioral practices and the consciousness of the Circassians. This was possible with the understanding of existence forms in the Circassian society concerning the values of life, duty performance, the image of a male warrior and his faithful wife. The isolation of these categories of consciousness made it possible to study the constant socio-psychological features typical of behavior in a situation of military confrontation.

The source base of our research is based on three types of sources: folklore material, literary (narrative) testimonies of the participants in the Caucasian War and the works of local readers. The first kind includes songs and legends about the Caucasian war: historical-heroic and lamentable, many of which are published in several collections.¹ The evidence of eyewitnesses, memoirs and notes of Russian officers and foreign authors are combined in collections² or are published in separate editions.³ The literary and

ethnographic works of Adygea educators of the 19th century constitute the third category of sources, the most reliable from the point of view of the material authenticity.⁴

Literature Review

In the vast historiographic material of the Caucasian War, we see it is expedient to single out the historiography of a particular problem of interest to us, namely, the tragic everyday events and personal experiences of the war participants and victims, which fell out of the sight of the Caucasus scholars as less significant and insufficiently "scientific". The turn to everyday history, to historical and anthropological study of the classical subject of historical research - the wars - occurred only in post-Soviet historiography.

However, some elements of the emotional experience of the Caucasian War consequences, associated with the massive eviction of the indigenous population of the Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire, were covered in the scientific research of the Soviet explorer Dzidzaria.⁵ He touched on the previously hushed up aspects of the national liberation movement of the mountaineers. The time of reorganization legitimized the appeal to forgotten archives and sources and to acute topics: it became possible to ask questions about the nature of the war and the subsequent expulsion of Caucasians to a foreign land, about the real number of victims and the colonial policy of the tsarist government.⁶ These works allow us to expand the empirical and the theoretical basis of our research.

Yakov Gordin's monograph is devoted to historical and cultural problems of the Russian-Caucasian drama, the history of confrontation and the attraction of two worlds: Russian civilization and the "powerful ancient world of the Caucasus"⁷. The tragic theme became the main one in his analysis of the mental Caucasian crisis.

The Caucasus studies of the last two decades included new topics in the range of issues under study: the development of a male character and behavior, the corresponding social institutions⁸, the world of female and male experiences⁹, the education of a warrior, the development of the code of honor¹⁰, the study of the everyday space of death, the mental notions of a worthy retirement from life, a high note of tragedy in the event of death.¹¹

Results and Discussion

This article summarizes the collective developments of a set of issues faced by the researchers of military everyday life. Death during the Caucasian War, the heroic tragedy and ordinary fear of loss, experience and resistance, accompanying the history of the war, will complement our understanding of the past. What is the "heroics of death"? How did the customary ritual and traditional consciousness help the experience the death of loved ones? What place did women occupy in the military events? How did the women's expectations motivate men to heroic death? How did the military command use the mental attitude of the mountaineers to the bodies of the dead to destroy the spirit of resistance?

Thus, the research is aimed at the study of the Caucasian people patriarchal ideology transformation in the course of their colonization, as well as the degree of mental attitude preservation/destruction.

The heroics of the Caucasian War became a common place in national historiography. The Circassian troops boldly entering a battle, a special strategy of fighting, personal courage and an absolute readiness for death in the war - all these stories lie on the surface of historical chronicles, folk songs and literary novels.

However, a valiant death has other faces. Women emotional actions and reactions, sometimes demonstrative, sometimes impulsive, are no less significant to understand the features of the ethnic

image and the culture of the people experiencing a military tragedy and using a set of methods worked out by collective consciousness and fixed by the tradition of methods to experience their grief and facilitate the deceased share.

The Caucasian war is known to us only by the way the men showed themselves in it and the way the men wrote their history then. Women represent a kind of silent mass in this historical drama, and one can only guess how much was experienced in the walls of the domestic women space: expectations, patience, fear, pride, pain and loss. These intangible and undocumented aspects of history are an inestimable emotional component of private women history. A woman's voice is almost not heard in historical documents, women names are lost in the tragedy of the Caucasian war.

The more precious those rare evidence of women participation in the events of the war years, which can be found in folklore sources. And then it turns out, that almost every song contains information about real women. Almost always these are *gybze* - songs-lamentations for the lost husbands, brothers and sons. These folk poetry compositions have independent significance for "women history" writing, as they contain important information about the value system of Adyg women culture: the moral foundations of life, the nuances of family relationships, the feelings of love exacerbated by war, the qualities of a worthy man, a happiness image, etc. At the same time, women, not being the main heroes of *gybze*, occupy a modest place "behind the scenes", outside the chronicle of events.

However, in a number of folklore works, real women names are mentioned to enhance the effect of the events described: "among the dead is the corpse of the beauty, the Babukovs' daughter"¹², or in the storyline, to indicate the reason for the battle: "Azhagoyevs Fardaus beauty was taken by Don Cossacks"¹³, or for the illustration of the tragic ending: "This world is small because of grief to Kumpylkhan the Beauty."¹⁴

In the search of information on the participation of women in the events of the Caucasian war, we turn to the collection of oral folk art "Kabardinsky folklore", published in 1936, and find the dramatic work "Ruin of the village"¹⁵, which is dramatically astounding. The thing in the song is about the attack of the imperial troops on the village of Prince Ali Karamurzin allegedly in 1765. It is performed on behalf of women, has many characters, and almost all of them are women: Princess Elmeskhan and Khani Karamurzin, who are humiliated by captivity; this is Goshekhurey Shogenova, who rushed to enemy bayonets in a desperate impulse to preserve the virginity of the betrothed bride; This is the dark blond, thin-skinned Hanio, "whose silk braids are the reins for the damned *giaours*"; this is the mother of two little girls, the beautiful Gura who lost consciousness in the struggle for her honor and who curses her husband who fled to the mountains; this elderly princess Shyrykhona, who entered into the battle with the enemy fearlessly.

The text of eleven couplets gives an idea of "female writing" peculiarities - the emphasis distribution in the significance of events, their sequence, and their reliability in details (as opposed to the abstractness of "male" texts that make it difficult to reconstruct a real story). So, initially the outcome of the attack is obvious - the capture of women by the enemy, and this is the main trouble of the war, semantically integrating such concepts as the loss of independence, the insult of honor, people's grief. Poetic techniques do not detract from the rigid documentalism of unhappiness: "If you look at one end of the village - the bright sun is shining. If you look at the other end of the village - the corpses of children lie like snags."

Women's voices clearly tell about the heroism of the men who stood up for their defense ("brave Zhabagi Taov", "our gold Hadjy Nartyzhev", "senior Shumaho Shogenov", "Tutuka Barakov the junior"). The valor of Ismail Atluskirov, who "without dropping the gunshot, spinning with his sharp sword, freed his wife from captivity is especially noteworthy." In contrast to the "male" songs here, against the background of a

large-scale tragedy, the private elements of women experiences are seen. The anthropological details complement an objective idea of the war period, brightly highlighting real objects, situations, feelings, giving a complete picture of the event itself and the prehistory of "peaceful happiness". Women voices testify to the cruel nature of the attack on a peaceful village, accompanied by the violence against women: "The morocco corsets (leather girl's corsets, taken off by a groom on the wedding night for the first time - Auth.) are torn with bayonets. They should be taken at a wedding night"; "The silk of my beshmet was torn in pieces with bayonets"; "Our golden-capped hats are pushed up behind us, and silk trousers are torn off with the toe of a boot."

Similar female lamentations are repeated in many similar songs, as in the crying of Chuzhkuapa: "My breasts are white / With a rifle butt they are turned black, / Our black leather corset is removed from our skin. / We dream to our beloved ones take them off from us, / But until they will not let us live until evening."¹⁶

And this refrain is the proof of the typical nature of the situation and the associated experiences. The stories described do not always tell us about physical death. The loss of maiden's innocence or female honor was perceived by them and by the songwriters as the symbolization of death.

A valuable ethnographic material is contained in each phrase of this song: in the description of clothing and appearance details, in brief reservations about family ties and everyday customs. A special place is occupied by love revelations: "As I look in the glass windows, everything seems to me young psy (Prince - Auth.), and when I go to the white bed, I see a shaggy beast"; "We used to dance on the beds with gold moustached handshakes. And now the soldier's boss is enjoying himself with us at the stove." A woman's love for husbands, for children, for life is something it is worth fighting for. But it is obvious only in female folklore texts, men are traditionally reserved, and therefore less informative.

The content of the song is extremely truthful in the historical aspect. Defining the main enemy - the aggressor's soldiers, women point to traitors, their fellow tribesmen, writing their names into history. And not only them. The revenge of a woman to a coward husband is terrible: calling her full name and surname Ali Konshaov, she despises him for betraying 250 years later: "He was like a fortress, / but hid in the mountains of Andruga: / This is the younger Ali Konshaov. / Two young girls. / They tore off my chest. / It would be better my husband was gone. / On the day when I was stripped, / <...> when we were taken by the giaours, / He was not visible in a battle. / Come back, redhead coward, / You will not return the beautiful Guru! <...> / If I had not fallen senseless, / You would not have seen me alive."¹⁷

Obviously, women owned the instruments of psychological influence on men - the direct participants in hostilities. The effectiveness of this impact was extremely high, as lyrical images increased the perception and the understanding of the tragic sense of the death of wives, sisters, mothers and children.

This is especially important to understand the changing nature of war. At its initial stage, when the clashes between the belligerents were still chivalrous and there was hope for negotiations, compromises and former allied ties, an element of sporting competition, respect for a dignified and equal adversary was present in relation to the enemy. Hatred towards the enemy is formed not so much on the battlefield as in the rear where the gardens and crops are destroyed, the native auls are burning, women and children are suffering. The concept of "heroics of war" will expand at the expense of "quiet" heroes. Not only the brave participation in a bloody battle is worthy of a song, but also the ability to stand up for their honor, for the lives of children and the elderly, for those who did not previously take up arms, as it was the gender-marked subject.

The emotional emphasis on the death of loved ones, constantly repeated in folklore sources, should be read as one of the evidences of a special - traditionally patriarchal relationship to the relatives. The

contemporaries of the Caucasian war saw the consequence of this feeling of collective, family solidarity in the responsibility for the deceased: taking him out of the battlefield, worthy funeral, ritualizing his departure: "In the Circassian character there is, perhaps, a trait more admirable than their concern for the fallen - about the poor remains of the dead, who can no longer feel this concern. If one of the compatriots fell in battle, many Circassians rush to that place to take out his body ...".¹⁸ The quantitative abundance of descriptions of such behavior, with often monotonous content of evidence, fixes the routine and normality of this program of action. V. Potto in the "Caucasian War" repeatedly described similar situations: "Thirty highlanders rushed to the body, and a desperate struggle ensued over the prostrate corpse... the body passed from hand to hand ...".¹⁹ The Adygean author Khan-Girey writes that even in the case of the chase, "the bodies of killed comrades are carried out with surprising determination ... protecting the body of the murdered comrade, entire parties die".²⁰ Theophilus Lapinsky, who supported the liberation movement of the mountaineers, noted that "not one corpse, not one wounded, not one gun was left in the hands of the Russians...".²¹ The considerations of their own safety were not taken into account. The general of the tsarist army, Rayevsky, who knew the psychology of rivals, wrote the following: "Going to battle, the mountaineer gives his brother in arms an oath to die together or take out the body of the fallen comrade; the failure to fulfill the vow bears disgrace, and a perjurer must keep the entire family of the dead."²²

Circassians took "all their dead, risking even firing shots"²³ in order to pay their last debt to their compatriot. The struggle for the bodies of the dead and wounded, accompanied by new victims, surprised the participants of the Caucasian campaign with "irrationality" and illogical manner. The abundance of such examples, which are rife in different independent sources, indicates that this is not a passing story, but a deep, root psychic attitude. Its ethnocultural specificity attracted the attention of foreign authors.

J.A. Longword brings the words of the Circassian insurgent against the murdered brother-soldier: "It's over for him ... Pass his corpse to the girls from his village, let them bury the poor young man, as befits. There will be someone to cry over his grave."²⁴ Tears are a vivid testament of grief, this is an emotional experience of the tragedy, which, despite military everyday life, has not become a familiar, worn out, muffled routine. Tears, even ritual ones, touched the eyewitnesses: "The screams of a poor woman who they tried to console about such a sad loss unsuccessfully (the death of three brothers during the defense of their village - Auth.) were very touching indeed."²⁵ Women tears were a powerful stimulus for national resistance: "Kundetov, see," - urges the people talking to their prince, - "your gloomy house will collapse under the wailing of the old women!"²⁶

The picture, familiar to the history textbook, illustrating the tragedy that accompanies any battle: the battlefield with the abandoned bodies of the dead, over which crows are circling, is uncharacteristic for Caucasian ideas about the worthy end of the warrior. The end comes when the person killed in the battle is returned to his home, where he is sincerely mourned, duly prepared for burial and buried "properly".

Among the necessary conditions for a "correct" burial is the preservation of the body in its integrity. An example of this is provided by Khan-Girey: "When his body (the Bzhedug nobleman Biyarkhakh - Auth.) was dragged by the Cossacks to the cordon ... then the predatory magpie rushed to the body and tore out one eye with a sharp beak; Circassians - the eyewitnesses of this case - vowed not to spare this bloodthirsty bird, and during the winter several hundreds of magpies were pierced by bullets."²⁷

Not only the face, as the most expressive part of the body, but all his other components as well ("ӀӀпӀпкӀ пӀцыкӀутыр зӀхуӀӀду", i.e. "all twelve parts of the body") should be preserved for burial, all parts connected with the body by joints: hands and the soles of the feet, shins, hips, shoulders and forearms. This provides confidence in a prosperous posthumous future. The founder of Russian military field surgery, N.I. Pirogov noted the peculiarity of the treatment by Caucasian surgeons and bone setters:

"... the Asian doctors in the Caucasus cured such external injury completely (mainly the consequences of gunshot wounds), which, in the opinion of our doctors, required the taking away of members. This is the fact supported by many observations; it is also known that the removal of members, the cutting of fragmented bones is never undertaken by Asian doctors; they perform only the cutting out of bullets of all bloody operations for the treatment of external injuries."²⁸

It happened that the bodies remained in the hands of the enemy, and in such a situation, a possible way out was their ransom or exchange. "The bodies of those who died in the war are redeemed. This is done by the envoys who come to discuss the amount of ransom for the deceased, offering in exchange bulls, horses and other items."²⁹ General Raevsky recalled that "at the end of the onslaught of the enemy, but even during a violent shooting," the "mountain elders came, asking for the ransom of their dead who were left in our hands".³⁰

A respectful attitude to the bodies of those killed in battle, the importance that the Circassians attached to the remains of their tribesmen was used by some tsarist generals to demoralize the enemy. The was the known blasphemous joke by the commander of the troops of the Caucasus line, General Velyaminov about the bodies of the dead Circassians, who "... are hanged in front of the gate of the village every day. This last method is very good: let them ripe like balyks, waiting for a ransom."³¹ Realizing how insulting and provocative such actions were for the highlanders, in 1834, by the order of the Caucasian Line Army, the commander ataman, General Verzhilin, prohibited the outrage over the bodies of the murdered Circassians, whose severed heads the Cossacks brought to the villages as trophies.

The impossibility of burial and mourning, the murdered warriors swaying in the wind, the bargaining with bodies, cut off heads - all these facts of military reality rendered a terrible impression on the local population, struck a blow to religious beliefs, destroyed age-old mental attitudes. Emotionally this was expressed in confusion, despondency and fear of such an outcome. The most acute impression on the eyewitnesses was provided by the repressive methods from General G.Kh. Zass, who used a mental insult to the dead to demoralize the enemy. The Decembrist N.I. Lorer, whose imprisonment in 1837 was reduced by penal servitude at the Caucasian Infantry Regiment, testified in his memoirs: "To support of the idea of fear preached by Zass the Circassian heads always hung up on their peaks and their beards fluttered downwind on a deliberately piled barrow near the Solid trench."³² The Colonel F. Thornau of the General Staff, the author of the memoirs "Memoirs of the Caucasian Officer", recognized one of the heads planted on the pike near the Solid Trench, which belonged to the defiant prince Aslan-Giray Beslanov (Beslenuko Aslan). According to folk legends, when Aslan Beslenuko, known for numerous raids on Russian fortresses, died, G.Kh. Zass ordered to dig his body out of the ground and tear it to pieces"³³, to disfigure his enemy's body out of vengeance for the repeated victories of Aslan Beslenuko on the battlefield.

The protracted nature of the Caucasian war, which for a hundred years, created a new daily routine, allowing the deviation from the eternal traditions. At the initial stage of the liberation movement, the mountaineers could refuse to perform a common combat mission and substitute it with numerous bloody skirmishes for corpses, which became increasingly large. And later, for example, during the battle for the fortification of Gostagayevskoe in 1853, the Adygs failed to take it precisely due to the loss of surprise effect, since after the first shot "everyone hastened to pick up a wounded or a killed neighbor."³⁴

Realizing that the moral attitudes of the previous "knightly" battles reduce the effectiveness of military operations, the leaders of the Circassian resistance often made decisions to attack at the final stage of the war "without taking either the dead or the wounded."

By the end of the Caucasian War, many eyewitnesses and participants in the events note with regret that "the custom to lie down near the murdered comrade, but not to leave his corpse for the enemy's will, was

completely forgotten."³⁵ In the song about Aiteke Kanokov, composed by his mother, a terrible day is fixed, when "it was customary to leave the dead among the highlanders."³⁶ The tragedy of the hero's death is multiplied by the fact that his body is thrown on the battlefield, and women mourn for him and those who violated the custom and "left the body in moss," and once they are not the men, "Ezugov's daughter-in-law goes across the river [to take the body]".³⁷ The hero of another lamentable song, Uvzhuko, was wounded in the leg during the raid on the line. "Not picked up by anybody," he died, and "his body disintegrated under a bush,"³⁸ making his bride desperate. Women consistently uphold the rules that allow them to create the continuity of values and educate generations with a foothold.

The transformation of the traditional attitude of the Circassians to the dead is also noted by outside observers. V. Potto writes: "The enemy fled from the battlefield with such haste that he did not even capture two bodies from the battlefield",³⁹ "among the killed Kabardians was one of the well-known owners, Prince Kagoka Tatar khanov, and his body remained on the battlefield".³⁹

Such a posthumous fate was perceived as shameful and terrible, so before the fights the characters showed concern for their remains sometimes in advance and independently - "I beg you about one thing: do not leave my corpse in the steppe."³⁹ Obviously, the people's eschatology was expressed in the conviction that only those who were awarded a fitting and not disturbed burial would continue the posthumous life. This problem became especially acute for the Circassians not only during the hostilities of the Caucasian War, but also later, during the forced resettlement of the mountain people. The dramatic character of the well-known song by Muhajirs, mourning the separation from their homeland, is hyperbolized by private tragedies. Circassians refused to throw the bodies of the dead into the sea while sailing on their way to emigration: "Our boards with the dead, tied to their backs, / They threaten and frighten us to take them and throw into the sea."³⁹ To prevent them from being thrown out by force, some tied the body to their backs. And in extreme cases, strengthened it on the board so that the body did not drown, and descended to the water, hoping that one day it would be drawn to the shore and someone would bury him in the ground. Under the circumstances, this was the only possible manifestation of the traditional care of the dead.

Conclusion

A fierce and a purposeful struggle for the bodies of the dead, the responsibility of the living to preserve their integrity, the confidence of every warrior in a decent burial, a sorrowful mourning, a sincere mourning, and a vague memory of him in generations - all these are the features of the Caucasian tradition to treat the fallen are viewed by us as the manifestation of overcoming fear before death, the overcoming death itself, the creation of a space of memory, primarily emotional one.

The independent significance of women in the rhetoric of grief over the dead, their selfless service to patrimonial values, certain expectations about a male act formed a human subjective factor that determines the moral background of everyday military existence. An unconditional readiness of a warrior to risk his life, to demonstrate the wonders of courage and endurance was ensured by the guarantee of "correct" preparation for his departure.

Memory, consisting of a well-known burial place near relatives and poured with abundant tears of women, immortalized in family legends or even in folk songs, became the evidence of the inviolability of the existing order of things "from time immemorial", gave meaning to the sacred for the rightful cause of life, stimulated to some deed.

Therefore, it was this aspect of collective consciousness, ethnic mentality that gradually evolved from a strong characteristic of the mountaineers into their weak spot. The posthumous demonstrative outrage

over their remains became the means of psychological influence on the local population, which caused a strong emotional breakdown and multiplying the tragedy of each individual person and the entire people as a whole repeatedly.

Traditional culture assumes the existence of a temporary spiral, according to which generations of people repeat the ways of their predecessors step by step. The consciousness of the bearers of such a culture balances an extreme nature of military existence of actions worked out over the centuries. At the same time, the emotional level of the tragedy experience is directly proportional to the strength of tribal, social and ethnic ties. The Caucasian war has begun an irreversible process of the traditional mountain order mental foundation destruction.

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