WHY DID RUSSIA NEED THE CAUCASUS?

By Yakov Gordin

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Why Did Russia Need the Caucasus?

In the early 20th century, Professor P.I. Kovalevsky, whose main profession was that of a psychiatrist but who was keenly interested in history, published the book *The Conquest of the Caucasus by Russia*. The author's non-professional background makes his perception of the subject particularly revealing, as it represents the viewpoint of a typical member of the intelligentsia with patriotic—even chauvinistic—and state-centric inclinations.

Kovalevsky wrote in the introduction to his "historical essays": "The history of the conquest of the Caucasus by Russia must be written in blood—so many people, so many resources, so much money Russia gave to it. Meanwhile, this page of Russian history is either completely unknown to us Russians, or known too vaguely. Something is vaguely recalled about Yermolov, Paskevich, Vorontsov (not Vorontsov-Dashkov), but what they did there, Allah knows. The immortal historical works of General V.A. Potto are known to very few people".

Formally, Kovalevsky was mistaken. His book was written between 1900 and 1910. By then, a great many works dedicated to the conquest of the Caucasus had accumulated. Historical journals had already published hundreds of memoirs from participants in that conquest. Why, then, did a person reasonably familiar with historical literature have this feeling of an "unknown war"?

One of the surface reasons lay in the speeches given in the Third State Duma by representatives from the Caucasus and Transcaucasia, presenting the Empire with a bill for the recent past. "How can Russians know their Caucasus? From the speeches of the Duma

representatives of the Caucasus?.. Yet the Caucasus is a part of our body, it is a land steeped in the blood of our ancestors. For a Russian not to know the history of the annexation of the Caucasus is a great sin".

The conquest of the Caucasus as an "unknown war" began to be written about immediately after the capture of Shamil and the "pacification" of Chechnya and Dagestan. General R. Fadeyev, a practitioner and theoretician of the conquest who published the book *Sixty Years of the Caucasian War* in 1860—the first and important attempt to conceptualise the Russian-Caucasian drama—wrote, characterising the Russian public's perception of events in the Caucasus: "... From a distance, everything merged into one indistinct image; the most fundamental changes in the state of affairs were smoothed over, and a thinking Russian person, unfamiliar personally with the Caucasus, naturally could not connect the contradictory events and was inevitably led to the most improbable conclusions in seeking a solution to this problem. Our society, on the whole, did not even realise the goal for which the state so persistently, and with such sacrifices, sought the subjugation of the mountains". In the same 1860, Fadeyev was echoed by another "Caucasian," General Staff Colonel Romanovsky, who published a course of public lectures on the Caucasian War as a separate book.

However, the issue was not solely one of limited and inaccurate information. The crux of the problem lay much deeper. The last sentence in Fadeyev's quoted text offers insight into this core issue. Not only the poorly informed public, but also the thinking "Caucasians" persistently posed the question—why? Was the inclusion of the Caucasus in the empire worth the colossal sacrifices Russia truly made for it?

For all who attempted to answer these questions, the clearest and simplest argument was the fate of Georgia, the fate of Transcaucasian Christianity. Kovalevsky, driven primarily by imperial passions and resentment towards the ungrateful "aliens" (inorodtsy - non-Russian peoples), placed the "Georgian factor" at the forefront. In doing so, he described the situation of Georgia in the last quarter of the 18th century close to reality.

"The position of Georgia throughout this entire period was extremely and profoundly difficult. It was devastated by internal strife. It was also devastated by its neighbours. It was a victim both in itself and in relation to its surroundings. It was surrounded by a ring of minor predator states, living by raids and robberies, mainly against Georgia itself, and behind them stood two large Muhammadan states, each of which claimed supreme dominion over Georgia".

The Tsar of the united Kartli and Kakheti during this period was the talented commander and statesman Heraclius II (Irakli II), who was occasionally successful in neutralising the Persian threat and suppressing the activity of the mountaineers. But the forces were too unequal, and the internal stability of the state was precarious. In 1783, Heraclius concluded a treaty with Russia, the Treaty of Georgievsk, named after the fortress where it was signed, under which the Russian Empire accepted Georgia under its protectorate and promised it protection. However, Russia provided no substantial military aid to Georgia, and the very fact of this alliance was perceived by Persia as a challenge. In 1795, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, Shah of Persia,

having crushed the desperate resistance of Heraclius's small forces, took Tbilisi, destroyed it, annihilated and led into captivity almost half the city's population...

After the death of Heraclius in 1798, his son and heir George XII (Georgiy XII), who did not possess his father's talents, realised the catastrophic situation of Georgia and entered into negotiations with Paul I regarding the full incorporation of his kingdom into the Russian Empire. Paul agreed. The matter was finally resolved by Alexander I's manifesto of 12 September 1801.

Almost everyone who tried to understand the origins of the Russian-Caucasian drama first paid attention to the "Georgian factor". The author of the famous book *Russia and Europe*, N. Ya. Danilevsky, a thinker and scholar of Russian history, wrote three decades after the end of the Caucasian War: "Small Christian kingdoms had been begging for Russian help and offering to accept Russian suzerainty since the time of Ivan the Terrible and Boris Godunov. But only Emperor Alexander I, at the beginning of his reign, after long hesitation, finally agreed to fulfil this wish, having first satisfied himself that the Georgian kingdoms, utterly exhausted by a century-long struggle with the Turks, Persians, and the Caucasian mountaineers, could no longer sustain an independent existence and had either to perish or join their co-religionist Russia".

Danilevsky then formulated a fundamental proposition: "In taking this step, Russia knew that it was taking on a heavy burden, although it may not have fully anticipated how heavy it would be—that it would cost her a continuous sixty-year struggle. **Be that as it may, neither in essence nor in form was this a conquest, but rather the rendering of aid to those who were failing and perishing".

In the already quoted book, R. Fadeyev, aiming to concentrate the entire system of motivations that drew Russia to the Caucasus, wrote, in particular: "To Russia came the cries of Orthodox Georgia, trampled by barbarian invasions, exhausted by endless struggle, which at that time was no longer for the right to be an independent nation, but for the right not to renounce Christ. Muslim fanaticism, inflamed by this new doctrine of Shiism, was in full swing. Having despaired of overcoming the steadfastness of the Christian people, the Persians systematically massacred the population of entire regions. Starting from the 16th century, almost every Georgian family could pray for the martyrs of its own blood... Russia could not refuse to defend Orthodox Georgia without ceasing to be Russia".

Fadeyev went on to discuss the confrontation with Turkey, whose strategic allies were considered to be the mountain tribes. The military-strategic consideration invariably accompanied the "Georgian factor" in the system of motivations.

Alexander I's hesitation was understandable. Georgia's entry into the Empire presupposed the establishment of secure communications between the main imperial territory and the new land, as well as the protection of Georgia from raids and invasions. This complicated relations with Persia and Turkey and made conflict with the mountain peoples inevitable. It is no wonder that Fadeyev dated the start of the Caucasian War precisely from the moment Georgia was annexed.

In the early 20th century, M.N. Pokrovsky summarised yet another layer of the conquerors' perceptions of the Caucasus: "The war with the mountaineers—the Caucasian War in the narrow sense—resulted directly from... the Persian campaigns: its significance was purely strategic, and least of all colonial. The free mountain tribes always threatened to cut off the Russian army, operating on the banks of the Aras (Arakas), from its base. It would perhaps not have been impossible to come to terms with them. Catherine II was firm on this idea, and Alexander I inherited it from his grandmother. However, proposing such a solution meant not understanding the psychology of the military men operating in Transcaucasia. To them, it seemed much easier, of course, to subjugate these "rogues" (a term often found in official papers of the time - Ya. G.) than to conduct some kind of negotiations with them and respect their rights or customs. "Surely the 'Russian bayonet', before which the 'regular troops' of the sovereign of a fairly large power, the Persian Shah, fled in panic, could quickly humble these ragamuffins, only fit," it seemed, for stealing horses from the Cossacks? Practice soon showed that driving the 'rogues' and horse thieves out of their mountain strongholds was an immeasurably more difficult task than taking the 'clay pot' called Erivan Fortress, or even reaching Tabriz. But once the campaign had begun, the honour of the uniform demanded its completion. The Persian—and only partly Turkish—wars thus determined the Caucasian War not only objectively, but also subjectively: they explain its psychology to us".

Pokrovsky, of course, greatly simplifies the situation. But as for the "psychology of the military men," this factor undoubtedly played a significant role in the choice of a system of relations with the mountaineers, as did the "honour of the uniform" of not only the army but the entire Empire.

In 1840, during the most difficult period of the war, its active participant Rear Admiral L.M. Serebryakov, who was mostly engaged at sea, wrote to General N.N. Raevsky the Younger, commander of the Black Sea Line and a convinced proponent of the non-violent development of the Caucasus: "Complying with Your Excellency's will, I patiently continued to negotiate with the so-called representatives of the Natukhai, the futility of which I understood very well. I reported to you that their proposals were so far removed from the moderate, conciliatory demands of the government that they clearly revealed complete blindness to the state of affairs or an intention to prolong the time with mere empty talk. Otherwise, it would be impossible to understand their requests: to postpone the final conclusion of negotiations until the coming spring, remaining until then in an indeterminate truce on both sides, and their demand that, in the event we do not agree to the delay, we should clear the fortifications and all the points we occupy from Abin to Anapa, in exchange for the oaths and hostages they give, and other impudent and absurd proposals, which a Russian general would scarcely expect to hear from a herd of destitute savages".

This is an extremely expressive and informative text. Firstly, the position of one of the most numerous and powerful Circassian peoples is clear—a readiness for pacification and entry into Russian suzerainty provided their territorial independence is preserved. That is, a readiness for compromise. Secondly, Serebryakov's perception of his "partners" in the negotiations is also clear—a "herd of destitute savages," the very fact that they were presenting conditions which, in Serebryakov's view, were absurd and humiliating for a Russian general, and consequently for Russia. The path of compromise, for which Raevsky advocated—specifically, the practice of

active economic contacts capable of bringing the mountaineers and Russians closer—was fundamentally unacceptable to Serebryakov, who represented the bulk of the Russian general staff and officer corps, not least for psychological reasons, as described by Pokrovsky.

The characterisation—"a herd of destitute savages"—was by no means true. The world of the Circassian—Adyghe—tribes represented a vast and distinctive civilisation which, had it been gradually integrated into the pan-imperial cultural system, could have significantly enriched it.

Meanwhile, one of the ideas intended to explain and justify both the cruelty of the conquest and the sacrifices Russia made in the process, lay precisely in the realm of culture. Characteristic was the desire to include the Caucasus in the context of European—especially Classical—history, which was so important for the young Russian—post-Petrine—culture.

General P.Kh. Grabbe, one of the most determined and cruel conquerors of the Caucasus, while already in retirement, was rereading classical authors. On 3 April 1847, he enthusiastically noted in his "Notebook": "I found acquaintances in Tacitus, seemingly noticed by no one else yet. In the description of the war between King Pharasmanes (Farasman) of Iberia (Georgia – Ya. G.) and Artabanus, King of Parthia, Tacitus names the Shepsukhs (Shepsukhs) among the auxiliary troops of the former. On the northern slope of the Caucasus and at its foothills down to the Kuban, a strong and warlike tribe, the Shapsughs (Shapsugs), still exists among the Abadzekhs, Natukhaitsy, and Ubykhs".

It is quite plausible that due to the necessity of the Caucasian range in this area, where there are hardly any routes other than narrow paths, they could have suffered from invasions at various times by different peoples from Asia to Europe and from Europe to Asia, who were obliged to choose the only existing passes through the Caucasian mountains: the Caucasian Gate (Darial Gorge – Ya. G.) and the Caspian Gate (Derbent – Ya. G.).

Moreover, the Caucasus still conceals rich treasures for future researchers in various fascinating respects, especially concerning the origin of its peoples. Many tribes bear in an uncorrupted form names that have been transmitted by History since ancient times. The Andi, Avars, Oseti, and Ossetians. The latter are particularly noteworthy. They occupy the main gorge through the Caucasian Gate from Europe to Asia, running almost through the middle of the Caucasian range. Their appearance is different from all other Caucasian tribes, and their language, by its sound and even by the resemblance of some words, recalls the German language".

Grabbe, the harsh opponent of the humane N.N. Raevsky the Younger, who was notorious for sparing neither the mountaineers nor his own soldiers, did not ponder the historical connections between the Caucasus and Europe by chance. The Caucasus became a link connecting the present of Russia and Europe with the distant past, and its incorporation into the Empire held not only military-political but also historico-psychological significance. The cultural-psychological component of the overall motivation that guided the thinking part of the conquerors and Russian society in general, played, as we shall see, a very significant role in their perception of events, ennobling the brutal daily practice and giving special importance to the process of conquest.

In this regard, the publications in the most influential Russian newspaper, *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* (*Moscow News*), written by its owner and publisher M.N. Katkov, are of undeniable interest. In an editorial on 27 May 1864, Katkov affirmed: "'The Caucasian War is over,' writes the Grand Duke Viceroy: 'Henceforth, not a single disobedient tribe remains in the Caucasus'. Joyful news! A new glorious page in the annals of the present reign, a new brilliant success with which God blesses it!"

"Let us recall that the most ancient legends of Greece, which began the history of Europe and laid the first foundations of European education and civilisation, are connected with the Caucasus. Let us also recall that the Caucasus is connected with certain memories from the most ancient period of Russian history—from the period of Kievan Rus', when the Russian people and the Russian land first came into being. The Caucasus—the classical Colchis, the land of the Golden Fleece, where the heroes of the first semi-mythical venture, which was then entering the historical life of Europe, travelled—was just as familiar to our *bogatyrs* (богатыри, epic heroes of Old Russian tradition), who reached it in the very dawn of our historical life. The dashing princes of Kievan Rus', who marked out the borders of the Russian land with their spears, did not forget the Caucasus".

A passage then follows that is very important for understanding the mindset of the moderately conservative part of Russian society, whose sentiments Katkov expressed: "What was marked out by Kievan Rus' in that early period has almost all been acquired and reclaimed by the Russian people after many adversities and trials, in which its territory was fractured, and it itself was torn apart and subjected to a foreign yoke. The Caucasus has been affirmed as the inalienable property, the blood inheritance, of the Russian land".

Katkov's article leads to two conclusions. Firstly, the Caucasus as a cultural phenomenon organically enters—through the classical layer—into the pan-European!—and thus Russian—cultural context. At the same time, the culture of the mountain peoples is completely ignored—it is as if it does not exist at all. Thus, the right of the mountaineers to the Caucasus as a living space is questionable. Secondly, the Caucasus turns out to be Russia's 'blood inheritance' due to its ancient historical connection with Kievan Rus', and the conquest is transformed into the legitimate reclamation of 'inalienable property'.

Both Katkov and Fadeyev, who was closely associated with *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, had yet another motive explaining and justifying the conquest of the Caucasus:

Fadeyev wrote: "The Caucasus did not demand great sacrifices; but whatever the cost, no Russian has the right to complain about it, because the occupation of the Transcaucasian regions was neither a random nor an arbitrary event in Russian history. It was prepared for centuries, was caused by great state necessities, and accomplished itself". The last words here are fundamental: "accomplished itself".

Katkov, four years after Fadeyev, declared: "The conquest of the Caucasus is one of those historical predeterminations that occur beyond human calculation, sometimes even in spite of them". That is, the absorption of the Caucasus by the Empire is unquestionably determined and, ultimately, does not require explanation or justification.

Both Fadeyev and Katkov feature the motive of the revival of Christianity in the Caucasus, which is naturally linked to the ideas presented above. Fadeyev: "Through the ruins of the Tatar Khanates, founded on Russian soil, a vast horizon opened up for the Muscovite state to the south and east; in the distance, free seas, rich trade, co-religionist peoples—Georgians and Caucasian mountaineers, who were still half-Christian at the time, stretching out a hand to Russia". Then, in the 16th–17th centuries, Muscovite Rus' could not reach out to the Christian mountaineers in response. Now, in the second half of the 19th century, there was a legitimate opportunity to correct this historical failure.

Katkov: "Long before Olga and Vladimir, Christianity was brought to the Caucasian coast and Transcaucasia from Greece. Christian churches founded in the 6th century still exist on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. With the decline of the spiritual metropolis, Christianity weakened in the Caucasus, faded away among the surrounding paganism, and finally disappeared altogether. It survived only in Armenia and Georgia, and it became the first bond that united these countries with Russia".

The conclusion Katkov draws is momentous. The task of Russia is not simply to include the originally Christian Caucasus in the Orthodox Empire, but to change the imperial model itself. "The final pacification of the Caucasus serves as a new portent that the centre of gravity of Russia, which, due to a historical necessity that has now passed, was shifted to the North, must now, by the power of new destinies opening up before it, move willingly or unwillingly to the South—to where it was initially, when the Russian land began and when European Russia had almost the same borders as now—to where the most ancient memories of our people are concentrated, where it was first called to historical life, where it finds the sacred symbols of its internal unity".

According to Katkov, the conquest of the Caucasus 'straightens out' Russia's historical destiny rather than simply solving certain military-strategic and religious charitable tasks. It gives Russia the opportunity to return to its roots, to restore the organic existence of the country and people, which was distorted by Peter I.

The solution to such a task justified any sacrifice. Moreover, it did not require justification at all, for it was accomplished—in the favoured expression of A.S. Pushkin—by the "force of things," "it accomplished itself," it occurred "beyond human calculation. Perhaps even in spite of it".

The various problems of the Caucasus continually appeared on the pages of *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, even after the pacification of the mountain peoples had seemingly lost its topicality. Just five years after the article quoted above, Katkov realised that the fervent enthusiasm over the military victory in the Caucasus was somewhat premature.

In an editorial on 3 January 1869, Katkov wrote: "The Caucasus can serve as an indication of what should be avoided in the Turkestan region. We would scarcely be far from the truth if we were to say that the possession of the Caucasus costs the state treasury 20 million roubles a year in net loss. In various ways, we would scarcely be far from the truth in assuming that the Caucasus, fully pacified, requires five times more troops than were counted in the time of Yermolov and Paskevich, for keeping the local residents in submission and for waging wars with Persia and Turkey. **There is no doubt that the most correct means of eliminating the state deficit should be the reduction of the troops maintained in the Caucasus, and the costs of administering the Caucasus and Transcaucasia". The idea itself is indisputable, but it is unclear how to implement it without risking the loss of the Caucasus...

And the fact that the Caucasus must not be lost under any circumstances was the firm belief of the majority of Russian society. At this point, decisively pushing aside the cultural aspect, geopolitics came to the forefront in a far more dangerous form than during the confrontation with Persia and Turkey.

On 16 August 1877, on the eve of the most difficult Russo-Turkish War for Russia, Katkov quoted in his editorial a pamphlet published in Austria by a certain Major von Bischoff, entitled *The Caucasus and its significance for Russia in relation to its European and Asian affairs*. The Major urged the European public on the necessity of curbing Russian aggressiveness: "The conquering policy of Russia and its aspiration to expand the sphere of its power from the China Sea to Central Europe can only be halted when it is possible to tear the Caucasus and the Polish belt of fortresses away from Russia. The execution of both depends on the strength of European armies, supported by the British fleet, and finally, on the mood of the populations of the Caucasus and Poland. As long as Russia possesses the Caucasus and the group of Polish fortresses, it will not abandon its conquering policy and its aspiration to take over all world trade, and it will remain a threatening danger to the existence of independent states".

Katkov and his sympathisers had every reason to take the Austrian officer's arguments seriously. Europe was indeed anxiously observing the steady expansion of Russian territory. And while the western border was stable—despite the Polish bridgehead looming over neighbouring countries, Russia had no aggressive intentions in that direction—the situation in the south looked entirely different.

Fadeyev asserted: "It was evident that the dispute over the Black Sea, over all the waters and lands to which Turkey laid claim, would sooner or later, at the first opportune political alignment, become a European dispute and be turned against us, because questions of Western influence or domination in Asia do not tolerate partition; a rival there is fatal to European power". And further—a fundamental proposition: "A Caucasus independent of us would create an endless series of losses and dangers for Russia".

From the point of view of imperial ideologues and statists, the possession of the Caucasus was an imperative, because the fate of the state depended on success or failure in this direction. The threat of the Caucasus being torn away, with all its severe consequences, appeared quite real, especially during the Crimean War.

In 1855, Senator N.E. Tornau, a lawyer and researcher of Muslim law who closely monitored the situation on Russia's southern borders, sent a "Note" to the highest authority, the content of which, despite its complete specificity, fully corresponds to the geopolitical concepts of Fadeyev. "The actions of the allies this year are beginning to threaten the Caucasus and our Transcaucasian possessions... But the secession of the region from Russia today, the destruction of our exclusive right to the Caspian Sea, the deprivation of our means of direct communication with the countries of Central Asia—all these circumstances are too important for the British government in relation to its Indian possessions for us to hope that the Western powers will not carry out their plans... The danger to the Caucasus and Transcaucasia is imminent from all sides. Inside the region: the defection of even the completely submissive and subject tribes will occur under the guise of submission to force. And first and foremost, the Georgians will defect, and only after them the Tatars. The Armenians will act both in our favour and in favour of our enemies, depending on their personal interests. There is no point looking for feelings of gratitude among the Asiatics; on the contrary, the Georgian nobility, due to the local circumstances that have taken place, see the country's dependence on Russia as the reason for the deprivation of the most precious blessings for them, the nobility: national independence and satrapic self-will. And when the requested General-Adjutant *aiglets* failed to restrain the Abkhazian ruler from defecting to the enemy even during the occupation of the entire country by enemy troops—will other natives refrain from defection when they see that our strength is inferior to the strength of the allies, when they are convinced that no measures of foresight and resistance have been taken to retain the region for the future, and that all our efforts are aimed only at a temporary repulsion of the enemy forces."

Having laid out a sinister but quite realistic picture of both internal revolt and invasion of the Caucasus and Transcaucasia from outside, Tornau states: "**And then, with a crushed heart, we will see that in a single campaign the fruits of the intellectual labour of our government in the Caucasus over half a century will be lost, the country will be lost that absorbed hundreds of millions of roubles and hundreds of thousands of lives from Russia, will be lost, and finally, the future, which, with the final consolidation of the Transcaucasian region for Russia, presented itself to us for establishing influence over Central Asia".

For imperial ideologues, it was not simply a matter of holding the Caucasus, but of the prospect of advancing deep into Asia, into Afghanistan—towards the northern borders of Britain's Indian possessions. This was conceived as a struggle against Europe in Asia—with the Caucasus as the pivot.

From the very beginning of active operations in the Caucasus—with Peter I's Persian campaign in the early 1720s—the Caucasus and Transcaucasia were viewed precisely as a springboard for advancing into the 'golden lands of the East'. Yermolov, upon receiving his appointment to the Caucasus in 1816, an appointment he persistently sought, reread Napoleon's *Egyptian Campaign*. He understood the underlying motive of General Bonaparte's plan, who himself later admitted: "If Saint Jean d'Acre had been taken by the French army, it would have brought about a great revolution in the East; the army commander would have created his own state there". If Yermolov, like many Russian military careerists, took Napoleon as his model, then the young

Bonaparte was modelled on Alexander the Great, who created "his own state" on the ruins of Asian despotisms.

"In Europe, they won't let us take a single step without a fight, but in Asia, entire kingdoms are at our service," Yermolov wrote before leaving for the Caucasus. The perception of the Caucasus as a gateway to Asia not only did not weaken with the change of eras but also gained profound justification.

If R. Fadeyev in 1860 simply said: "The Caucasian army holds the key to the East in its hands... The real link between Russia and Asia, their knot, is in the Caucasus... From the Caucasian isthmus, Russia can reach anywhere she needs to" , twenty years later, a thinker of a different magnitude, Dostoyevsky, who welcomed the conquest of the Caucasus in 1864, firmly linked the advance into Asia with the hope of Russia's spiritual recovery in the drafts of future articles two weeks before his death, on 12 January 1881: "Our civilising mission in Asia, from the very first steps—and this is unquestionable—will be understood and assimilated by us. It will elevate our spirit, it will give us dignity and self-awareness—and we currently lack this entirely or have very little of it".

Russia's "civilising mission" in the Caucasus had been discussed since Yermolov's time, but the role of the Caucasus in healing the spiritual life of Russian society—or rather, the hope for such a healing—was only vaguely guessed at. Dostoyevsky, applying this to Asia, spoke of it with characteristic categorical and unreserved conviction: "In our future destinies, perhaps Asia is our main outlet!.. It is difficult to turn away from the window to Europe; there is a *fatum* (fate) there. Yet Asia—well, it truly may be our outlet in our future... With a turn to Asia, with a new view of it on our part, something may appear that is not unlike what happened to Europe when America was discovered. For Asia is truly for us the same America, as yet undiscovered by us at that time. With the aspiration towards Asia, an uplift of spirit and strength will be revived in us. And further, Dostoyevsky essentially repeated Yermolov's already quoted formula: "In Europe, we were hangers-on and slaves, but in Asia we shall appear as masters".

It cannot be said that this idea was all-encompassing. The invasion of Central Asia, conceived under Peter I—let us recall the tragic campaign of Prince Bekovich-Cherkassky in Khiva and the terrible fate of the garrison of the fortress near Krasnye Vody—and prepared for under Yermolov and his successors in the Caucasus, and finally carried out in the 1870s–1880s, provoked sharp objections from the most insightful publicists.

In 1884, a polemic unfolded on the pages of the Slavophile newspaper *Rus'* between its publisher I.S. Aksakov and the publicist E.L. Markov, the author of the best article on Tolstoy's *The Cossacks*. In the issue of 15 July, Aksakov outlined his concept for the expansion of Russian territory, opposing it to Markov's scepticism: "The boundary created by God between Europe and Asia did not stop our long-robed and long-bearded sages of the 16th century, - so E.L. Markov laments in his article printed in No. 13 of *Rus'*, - the daring Russian force crossed the Stone (the Urals), daringly seized Siberia... This was, in the opinion of the respected author, a harmful step for the future development of the Russian people, which served as a program for a multitude of other later steps in the same spirit, in the same direction...". "First Fort Perovsky,

then Tashkent, Khiva, Bukhara, Fergana, then Akhal-Teke, and finally Merv. Step by step, imperceptibly, in some fatal, as if involuntary, manner, it has drawn us away from ourselves, from our own interests, from Europe and the European, - and drowned us first up to the knees, then up to the throat, and now above the crown of our heads—in Asianism, in savagery of every kind... May our Russian God help us to be forever rid of such acquisitions from this time forth... It is high time for us to finally understand where the walls of our house end and where the foreign land begins!"

As we can see, Markov's views are fundamentally opposed to Dostoyevsky's ideas. The geopolitical model that Aksakov opposes to Markov directly harks back to Fadeyev's calculations of a quarter-century prior. "Where do the walls of our house end?! That is precisely the point, that its walls have not yet been fully raised, and the foundation itself has not been laid everywhere! If we can now anticipate the limits of the Russian state edifice, we must nevertheless approach them first: the time to rest and stop has not yet come... We have not yet restored the border of Vladimir the Great in the West—that not only historical but also our most natural border: Ugric Rus' and Galician Rus' still remain detached from—

—detached from Russia, - but it goes without saying that sooner or later they must join her... 'Did they cross the Urals, did they start climbing over the Caucasus?' laments Mr. Markov. How could they not climb over it? Can the Black Sea become Russian (and without it, Russia will forever remain an underdeveloped state) while we are not its masters, while navigation on it is not safe for Russian ships, while its shores do not belong to hostile forces?.. But it is impossible to assimilate the Caucasian coast without taking possession of the entire Caucasian Isthmus. 'Did they start climbing over the Caucasus!' Are we to stop at the foot of the Caucasian Range under the perpetual threat of the robber tribes inhabiting the mountains? Were we not obliged to secure our Caucasian possessions from all foreign Asian invasions? And we climbed over it, and we took Batum, Kars, and crept along the Asian coast, and we will keep creeping until we sit astride the Straits, thereby finally acquiring a natural border, without violating anyone's natural rights: here is the southern wall of our Russian state House!... To possess the Black Sea and make it Russian, in accordance with the historical testament—which the respected author himself desires—it is necessary, I repeat, to possess the Caucasus, that is, the isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas..."

Aksakov's fervour demonstrates that even at the end of the 19th century, the answer to the question, "Why did we need the Caucasus?" was quite topical and by no means unequivocal. The idea of the saving grace of the Asian direction, pivoted on the Caucasus, passed through the entire 19th century, drawing Russia into the economically fruitless and ruinous conquest of Central Asia. And the very tendency of the limitless expansion of the Empire's territory culminated in the Korean adventure, which provoked the disastrous war with Japan for Russia... But this could not yet be realised in the time of Yermolov, nor Fadeyev, nor Dostoyevsky.

Endnotes

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1. Ibid. P. 5.
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