

ARMENIAN MIGRATION TO THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

The Russo-Qajar and Russo-Ottoman wars of the early nineteenth century profoundly changed the political and administrative configuration of the South Caucasus. The territories north of the Araz River came under Russian control, while those to the south remained under Qajar rule. After incorporating the northern Azerbaijani khanates, the Russian Empire abolished the khanate system and established administrative structures reflecting its political and strategic priorities. The resettlement of Armenians in the South Caucasus was a multi-stage historical process that predated the nineteenth century. According to the interpretation presented in the relevant literature, an important stage occurred in 1441, when the Armenian Gregorian patriarchal seat was transferred to Echmiadzin, then within the Garagoyunlu state. Large-scale Armenian migration to the South Caucasus intensified after the Russo-Qajar War of 1826-1828 and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-1829. Later Russo-Ottoman conflicts and political upheavals in the Ottoman Empire generated further waves. This article examines the political mechanisms, demographic consequences, and imperial considerations associated with these migrations, particularly in Northern Azerbaijan. It interprets migration as a process linked to Russian imperial policy, military expansion, settlement incentives, and the reorganization of newly incorporated territories.

Keywords: Armenians, South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Russian Empire, Qajars

1. HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF ARMENIAN RESETTLEMENT

Following Russian expansion into the South Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century, population settlement acquired strategic importance. The authorities viewed the demographic composition of newly incorporated territories as a factor in consolidating imperial rule. Within this policy, the settlement of Christian populations, including Armenians, became increasingly significant.

Russian statesmen had considered resettling Eastern Christians in the Caucasus even before the complete conquest of Northern Azerbaijan. Christian settlement was therefore not merely a consequence of the treaties of 1828 and 1829; it formed part of an earlier imperial approach to the region. One early initiative came from General P. D. Sisianov, commander-in-chief of the Caucasus. In October 1803, he referred to Armenian support for “the rapid and successful establishment of Russian rule in these lands” (Əmrahov, 2022, p. 34). Sisianov also encouraged Armenian Bishop John to facilitate the movement of Armenians from Iravan to Russian-controlled territories.

The Russian government also appealed to other Eastern Christian communities. In 1804, Sisianov invited 16,000 Armenians from the Qajar state to Northern Azerbaijan. This interest reflected Russia's geopolitical rivalry with the Qajar and Ottoman states. Armenians lived in both empires, knew local political and economic conditions, and were regarded by Russian officials as a potentially important Christian constituency in newly incorporated territories.

Demographic settlement and imperial consolidation were therefore closely connected. In addition to military and administrative control, Russian authorities pursued policies that could alter the social composition of strategically important areas. Under Alexander I and Nicholas I, Armenian migration from the Ottoman and Qajar states became increasingly linked to Russia's broader regional objectives.

This gradual process was evident before the major migrations of the late 1820s. After Alexander I

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ascended the throne in 1801, Armenians requested permission to settle near Derbent. The emperor approved the request by decree on December 21, 1802 (Məmmədli, 2008, p. 12).

The demographic situation in the Azerbaijani khanates before the large-scale migrations of the late 1820s is important for assessing the subsequent changes. Russian authorities paid particular attention to Karabakh, which had both strategic and economic importance. Citing the Acts of the Caucasian Archaeological Commission, Kh. D. Khalilov reports that approximately 10,000 families lived in Karabakh in 1805. By 1808, warfare and displacement had reduced this number to 7,474 (Əliyev, 2019, p. 12).

In 1810, approximately 12,000 families lived in the Karabakh Khanate, including 2,500 Christian families. Muslims therefore constituted more than 79% of the families and Christians approximately 21% (Шопен, 1852, p. 23). The 1823 tax register of Karabakh, compiled by Russian officials Yermolov and Mogilevsky, recorded 20,095 families: 15,729 Azerbaijani and 4,366 Armenian. Azerbaijanis constituted more than 78% of the population, while Armenian families accounted for approximately 22% (Шахмурадов, 2015, p. 45).

Nakhchivan and Iravan had comparable demographic complexity. According to the Armenian author V. Parsamyan, the Iravan Khanate had 169,155 inhabitants before Russian annexation: 84,089 Muslims (49.7%), 57,305 Armenians (33.8%), 26,911 Kurds (16%), and 850 members of other groups (0.5%) (Вердиева & Гусейнзаде, 2003, p. 12). These statistics provide a demographic baseline for assessing the effects of imperial-sponsored resettlement on an ethnically and religiously diverse population.

Following the Russo-Qajar War of 1826–1828 and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–1829, the proportion of Armenians in parts of the South Caucasus increased as a result of migration encouraged and organized by the Russian authorities. Plans for Armenian resettlement were discussed during the Russo-Qajar War. S. N. Glinka notes that the Russian officer Bulaksky knew of Nicholas I's intentions regarding the future status of the territories north of the Araz River (Вердиева & Гусейнзаде, 2003, p. 23).

Count Paskevich also involved Colonel Lazarev, a Russian officer of Armenian origin, in contacts with Armenian communities. This involvement shows that the Russian administration considered these relations relevant to consolidating imperial authority in newly conquered territories. During the Russo-Qajar War, Armenian families were relocated to Karabakh and settled in villages including Maraghaly, Janyatagh, Yukhari Chayli, and Ashagi Chayli (Qasimli, 2014, p. 45).

The Treaty of Turkmenchay provided the legal basis for a major phase of population movement. Article XV allowed officials and residents of Qajar territories to move with their families to Russian-controlled regions within a specified period. Migrants could take or sell movable property without customs duties and had five years to dispose of real estate.

Colonel Lazarev was entrusted with organizing the resettlement. Russian writer and diplomat A. S. Griboyedov criticized aspects of Lazarev's activities and noted the involvement of Argutinsky, Gamazov, and other officers (Əmrahov, 2023, p. 10). Not all Armenians in South Azerbaijan wished to move to Russian-controlled territories. The Russian government therefore offered economic incentives, including opportunities to trade, acquire land, and receive temporary exemptions from taxes and *zemstvo* dues. These material incentives supplemented the treaty provisions and made settlement in Russian-controlled territories more attractive. They could also weaken a rival state's economic resources while strengthening newly incorporated territories.

After the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed, Russian troops withdrew from Tabriz on March 9, 1828. Armenians from settlements near Turkmenchay subsequently moved toward Karabakh. S. N. Glinka recorded that some migrants carried weapons because of concerns about possible attacks during the journey. The migration thus occurred in a militarized post-war environment involving armed groups, Russian forces, and imperial officers.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCES IN NAKHCHIVAN, IRAVAN, AND KARABAKH

In 1827-1828, Azerbaijanis comprised 4,170 of approximately 4,600 families in the Nakhchivan Khanate, or about 90%. After 1,400 Azerbaijani families left, the number recorded in 1832 fell to 2,791, approximately 60% of the population (Əmrahov, 2022, p. 122). In 1829, Nakhchivan city had 3,641 Azerbaijani and 1,829 Armenian inhabitants (Шопен, 1852, p. 33). The same records listed 5,553 Azerbaijanis and 7,974 Armenians in Nakhchivan district; 3,224 Azerbaijanis and 179 Armenians in Ordubad city; 3,985 Azerbaijanis and 3,550 Armenians in Ordubad district; and 4,960 Azerbaijanis and 3,508 Armenians in Daralayaz district. In 1828, the Armenian Province, formed from the former Iravan and Nakhchivan khanates, contained 1,111 settlements. Sixty-two villages were recorded as Armenian-populated, while 359 Muslim villages had experienced substantial population loss (Süleymanov, 2008, p. 23).

The demographic balance continued to change. According to the cited calculations, the proportion of Azerbaijani Turks in the Armenian Province declined from 73.8% in 1828 to 46.2% in 1834-1835 (Вердиева & Гусейнзаде, 2003, p. 56). Administrative calculations for 1832 recorded 32,400 Azerbaijanis and 17,400 Armenians in Karabakh Province (Вердиева & Гусейнзаде, 2003, p. 99). Together, these figures indicate substantial post-war demographic change associated with warfare, displacement, state-sponsored migration, and Russian administrative reorganization.

According to data cited by X. D. Khalilov and S. P. Zelinsky, 8,249 Armenian families were resettled in Iravan, Karabakh, and Shamakhi under the conditions created by the Treaty of Turkmenchay (Шахмурадов, 2015, p. 34). S. N. Glinka states that more than 5,000 families moved from the Urmia and Salmas khanates alone to territories north of the Araz River. Although the initial plan focused on Nakhchivan and Iravan, food shortages led authorities to direct some families toward Karabakh. The cited figures indicate that approximately 40,000 Armenians moved from the Qajar state. Further migration from the Ottoman Empire followed the Treaty of Edirne (Шопен, 1852, p. 112).

N. I. Shavrov states that more than 40,000 Qajar Armenians and 84,600 Ottoman Armenians were resettled in the South Caucasus between 1828 and 1830. They settled on state-owned lands in the Yelizavetpol, Iravan, and Tiflis governorates, as well as in Borchaly, Akhaltsikhe, and Akhalkalaki (Süleymanov, 2008, p. 66). Approximately 200,000 dessiatines of state land were reportedly allocated, and additional land was purchased from Muslim landowners. Shavrov argued that official statistics omitted some settlers and that the actual number was considerably higher (Əliyev, 2019, p. 3). Resettlement therefore extended across several strategically important areas and involved the allocation of land and other state resources.

3. RESETTLEMENT FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE WIDER SOUTH CAUCASUS

Armenians were settled not only in Northern Azerbaijan but also in territories corresponding to present-day Georgia. The Russian government settled groups arriving from the Ottoman Empire in Akhalkalaki and other districts. According to the cited data, Count Paskevich relocated approximately 30,000 Armenians from the Ottoman Empire to Samtskhe-Javakheti, Erusheti, and Palakatsio in 1828, significantly changing the demographic composition of these territories (Шахмурадов, 2015, p. 45).

On December 3, 1829, a special committee established by Paskevich under Zavilevsky planned the movement of families from Kars, Erzurum, and Bayazet to Russian-administered territories. Further Armenian families were subsequently resettled from Erzurum, Ardahan, Kars, and Bayazet (Süleymanov, 2008, p. 23). These developments show that Armenian resettlement formed part of a broader South Caucasian imperial policy rather than a process confined to Northern Azerbaijan.

Russia's victories in the Russo-Qajar (1826-1828) and Russo-Ottoman (1828-1829) wars created favorable conditions for large-scale Armenian migration. During negotiations with the Qajar state, Nicholas I instructed I. F. Paskevich to combine diplomacy with military pressure until Russia secured strategically

important positions, including Iravan and territories beyond the Araz River (Əmrahov, 2022, p. 122).

The Treaty of Turkmenchay, signed on February 10, 1828, formalized the new political order and made the Araz River a major boundary between Russian-controlled territories and the Qajar state. It strengthened Russian authority in the South Caucasus and established legal conditions favorable to population movement.

Article XV was particularly important because it allowed inhabitants of the relevant Qajar territories to move with their families to Russian-controlled regions within a specified period. A. S. Griboyedov participated in drafting the treaty provisions (Əliyev, 2019, p. 45). The Qajar government agreed not to obstruct migration. It allowed one year for relocation and the duty-free disposal of movable property, and five years for the sale of real estate. Russian officials considered this provision important; one described the resettlement of Armenians from the Qajar state as a significant consequence of the war (Məmmədli, 2008, p. 31).

Documents indicate that Colonel Kh. E. Lazarev and other Russian officers were directly involved in the practical organization of migration. Their responsibilities included providing migrants with food and other necessities during the journey and assisting them after arrival. The scale of migration created logistical difficulties. When more than 5,000 Armenian families approached the Araz River, Russian authorities reported insufficient food supplies in the future Iravan Province. Some poorer families were therefore directed toward Karabakh. Lazarev informed Paskevich that more than 1,000 families from near Maragha and Tabriz had left their homes and that Christians from Urmia, Salmas, and Khoy were preparing to migrate. He proposed sending some of the poorest families to Karabakh, where they could receive food until the next harvest (Əmrahov, 2023, p. 12).

Migration also involved severe hardship. In early 1828, 750 Armenian and Greek families from the Qajar state were settled near Barda. According to the cited account, poor-quality food caused disease, and 1,012 Armenian migrants from Maragha died within three months (Əliyev, 2019, p. 23). Thus, food shortages, disease, administrative difficulties, and limited local capacity complicated the implementation of the imperial resettlement policy.

In 1828-1829, 6,946 families, or approximately 35,560 migrants, were recorded as arriving in Northern Azerbaijan from the Qajar state. Of these, 2,558 families settled in urban and rural areas of Nakhchivan Province (Шопен, 1852, p. 112). Approximately 3,000 families, or 15,000 people, settled in Karabakh Province, while 1,458 Armenian families settled in Iravan Province.

Russian authorities provided settlers with protection during travel, land, financial assistance, trading rights, and temporary exemptions from taxes and *zemstvo* dues. Lazarev emphasized the availability of agricultural land and state support in Iravan, Nakhchivan, and Karabakh (Шопен, 1852, p. 33). Russian policy therefore actively facilitated permanent settlement through legal, economic, and administrative measures.

Many Armenians who migrated from the Qajar state had lived in South Azerbaijani regions such as Salmas, Urmia, Khoy, Maragha, and Tabriz. Many subsequently settled in the former Nakhchivan, Karabakh, and Iravan khanates. Russian authorities sought to increase the Christian population in strategically important areas. N. N. Shavrov also noted that the Armenian population of the Yelizavetpol and Iravan governorates had previously been comparatively limited (Qasımlı, 2014, p. 150).

Russian resettlement policy consolidated imperial authority, increased the Christian population in selected districts, and linked settler communities to the administrative system. Armenian migrants, in turn, received land, economic privileges, tax exemptions, and new settlement opportunities.

Migration resulted from war, imperial expansion, diplomatic agreements, economic incentives, security concerns, and migrants' choices. Because it occurred in inhabited territories, it also produced long-term demographic, political, and social consequences.

4. CONCLUSION

Armenian migration to the nineteenth-century South Caucasus was a complex, multi-stage process shaped by the region's geopolitical transformation. Although Armenian communities existed in parts of the region before the nineteenth century, migration expanded substantially after Russian expansion and the wars of 1826-1828 and 1828-1829.

The resettlements of the late 1820s were not solely spontaneous population movements. Russian military and administrative involvement, the Treaty of Turkmenchay, land allocation, tax exemptions, financial assistance, and the organized distribution of migrants demonstrate the imperial state's active role. Statistics from Karabakh, Nakhchivan, and Iravan show that migration altered territories with established Muslim, Armenian, and other populations. Its significance therefore lies in the interaction of migration with warfare, displacement, imperial administration, land distribution, and regional political reorganization. The policy was regional in scope and affected present-day Georgia and other parts of the South Caucasus. Armenian migration formed part of a broader strategy for governing territories acquired from the Qajar and Ottoman states. Food shortages, disease, and administrative problems nevertheless complicated its implementation.

Nineteenth-century Armenian migration should therefore be examined at the intersection of demographic history and Russian imperial policy. Military conquest created the political conditions, treaties provided the legal framework, and administrative and economic incentives facilitated settlement. The resulting demographic changes influenced the region's subsequent social and political development. The demographic changes were thus products of interconnected military, political, administrative, and socioeconomic processes. A comparative study of imperial archives, population registers, and contemporary accounts could clarify their scale, geographical distribution, and long-term consequences.

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