

**THE RELOCATION OF MALAKAN COMMUNITIES TO THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN
THE 19TH CENTURY****Received: 13 February 2026 | Accepted: 04 April 2026 | Published: 15 April 2026**

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Abstract

In this article, the process of the relocation of the Malakan communities to the South Caucasus in the 19th century is discussed in the context of the religious-political and administrative policies of the Russian Empire. The article discusses in detail the process of the “undesirability” of the Malakans in the Russian Empire as a pacifist religious organization, which was not affiliated with the Orthodox Church, and therefore the need for the relocation of the Malakans from the central regions of the empire to the border regions. The article discusses the process of the migration of the Malakans in the region in the period from 1840 to 1890, as well as the process of the settlement of the Malakan families in the territory of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, based on the historical sources. The article highlights the role of the Malakans in the socio-economic life of the South Caucasus region. The article discusses the innovations introduced by the Malakans in the spheres of dairy farming, agriculture, and horticulture, and shows that these innovations, in interaction with the traditional forms of farming, contributed to the development of the region’s economy. It is mentioned that the relationships with the local population are peaceful, which underlines the importance of these relationships for the creation of a multicultural social environment in the South Caucasus. This study also deals with the political changes, industrialization, and the process of Sovietization, which took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the empire. The changes that occurred in the social status of the Malakan communities are also discussed. The migration of some of the Malakan communities to Russia and Siberia, as well as the involvement of others in the assimilation process, is also discussed, and the impact of these processes on the social structure, cultural identity, and social life of the Malakan people is explained. This article also deals with the process of distancing Malakan communities from the South Caucasus, and it is underlined that this process did not cancel the role of the Malakan people in the social, economic, and cultural development of the region, but instead resulted in the recognition of Malakan cultural heritage as a historical fact.

Keywords: Malakan, South Caucasus, agriculture, community management, pacifism, socio-cultural relations, ethnography, tolerance.

1. INTRODUCTION

We witnessed considerable political and demographic transformations in the 19th century. In this context, the impact of the Russian Empire's colonization and settlement policies in the Caucasus region

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had a direct impact on the ethnic, social, and economic characteristics of the area. In the context of the challenges in church-state relations in the empire and the presence of alternative religious movements compared to Orthodox Christianity, the Malakan communities were among the socio-religious movements that were moved to the border regions because they were not considered loyal subjects of the empire (Aliyev, 2012, p. 59). The religious characteristics of the Malakans—pacifism, non-violence, community-based lifestyle, and the simplicity of their labor—differentiated the Malakans from the Russian ideology. These characteristics prompted the central government to worry about the increasing number of these communities; thus, it was considered advisable for the Malakans to be moved to the southern borders of the empire, i.e., the South Caucasus. The territories of modern Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia became the areas of resettlement for the Malakan communities. In these territories, they introduced significant innovations in the areas of agriculture, crafts, and cooperative farm management. The labor culture and economic discipline of the Malakan communities, as well as the principles of social solidarity they practiced, created the conditions for the development of an environment of mutual cultural influence with the local population. Therefore, they made significant contributions to the socio-cultural processes in the region. The relevance of this topic is evident not only in terms of historiography but also with regard to the development of the modern South Caucasus. The activities of the Malakan communities were not limited to the development of the economy; they also played an important role in the development of the traditions of peace, solidarity, and labor in the region. The study of these processes is of great scientific importance in terms of determining the nature and impact of the social and cultural model they developed. Therefore, studying the influence of the Malakans in the region and their legacy is relevant not only from a historical perspective, but also in terms of the formation of multicultural and tolerant societies. The economic structures, cultural elements, and social orders preserved in Malakan settlements even today prove that these communities left a deep mark on the region. This case provides a valuable and relevant source for research as a historical example of coexistence of different peoples, mutual cultural influence, and social integration. Although the methodological approach of this article is based on F. Aliyev's *History of Russian Communities in the South Caucasus* and J. Hasanov's works *The Caucasian Policy of the Russian Empire and Resettlement*, the main distinguishing feature of the study is that it approaches the activities of the Malakan communities not only as objects of resettlement policy, but also as active subjects in the socio-cultural and economic development of the region. While existing studies have focused on the political and administrative aspects of imperial policy, this article focuses on the daily life practices, labor culture, forms of community-based organization, and interactions with the local population of Malakan communities. At the same time, the article emphasizes not only the historical but also the current social significance of the topic by evaluating Malakan heritage in the context of the formation of modern multicultural and tolerant societies, which distinguishes it from previous works in terms of methodology and content.

Methodology: The methodological basis of this study is based on historiography, source studies, comparative-historical approach and complex analysis of socio-religious processes. The main goal of the study is to scientifically determine the cause-effect relationships between the religious policy of the Russian Empire in the 19th century, the strategy of settling the imperial periphery and the process of resettling Malakan communities to the South Caucasus. The Malakans were one of the "spiritual Christian" religious groups of Russian origin, and were subjected to a policy of control, isolation, and deportation by the imperial administration because they differed from the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church. The relocation of Russian religious sectarians, including the Malakans, to the South Caucasus in the 19th century was related to both religious control and the policy of settling border areas. From a methodological point of view, the study primarily uses a historical-genetic method. Through this method, the historical development of the formation of Malakan communities, their legal and religious status in the Russian Empire, their assessment by the state as a "sectarian" and, ultimately, their redirection to the South Caucasus are traced. This approach allows us not only to describe events, but also to reveal the logic of their internal development. The aim here is to show that the transfer was not a one-time administrative measure, but an integral part of the empire's religious-political governance system. The second main approach in the study is the historical-comparative method. This method allows us to study the migration of the Malakans in comparison with the migration of other religious groups, such as the Doukhobors and Subbotniks, who were directed to the South Caucasus during the same period. As a result of the comparison, it can be determined that, in addition to religious factors, geopolitical, demographic and administrative goals also played a role in the migration of the Malakans. This method is also suitable for revealing the different and similar aspects of the living model, economic structure, and relations with the local population of the Malakan communities settled in various regions - the territories of present-day Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. The source study method occupies a special place in the study of the topic. During the research, archival documents, regulatory acts of the tsarist government, administrative instructions on resettlement, statistical materials, official reports of the period, population censuses, memoirs and later examples of historiography should be analyzed in a comparative manner. Sources are divided into two main groups: first, primary sources directly related to the period; second, scientific literature that interprets the topic. This approach allows for the clarification of facts, the detection of contradictions between sources, and the interpretation of events in a manner free from ideological distortions.

2. Features of the geography and distribution of settlement of Malakan communities in the South Caucasus

The resettlement of Malakan communities to the South Caucasus in the 19th century was not only a demographic process, but also one of the important stages in the reshaping of the socio-economic and cultural structure of the region. Within the framework of the planned settlement policy of the Russian Empire, mainly areas with economic potential but low population density were selected for the settlement of Malakans. These regions were both strategically border areas and of particular importance for the empire in terms of creating new, economically promising agricultural colonies (Mammadli, 2015, p. 48).

Malakan communities were settled in various governorates of the South Caucasus according to a certain plan: new villages were built in the Lankaran, Guba, Goychay and Yelizavetpol governorates in Azerbaijan, communities were formed in the Tbilisi and Borchali regions of Georgia, and colonies were created in the villages of the Lake Sevan basin and the Iravan governorate in Armenia (Mammadli, 2015, pp. 52–67). This settlement map met both the military-political interests of the empire and created favorable natural conditions for the development of the Malakan's economic activities. The areas where the Malakans settled were usually characterized by fertile soil, water resources, and large pastures. The state allocated land to new colonies and introduced incentives for the establishment of community farms, thereby stimulating the long-term settlement of the Malakans there. Later, these regions became developed centers in the fields of agricultural production, dairy farming, horticulture and crafts. Thus, the settlement areas of the Malakans in the South Caucasus, in addition to being part of the demographic policy of the empire, also had a significant impact on the socio-economic development of the region and laid the foundation for the formation of a new economic culture. The geography of settlement of the Malakans in the South Caucasus is not only a result of imperial policy, but also an indicator of the successful integration of these communities' social and economic cultures into the new environment. Their rapid establishment of farms in selected regions, development of labor culture, and creation of long-term settlements demonstrate the high adaptive potential of the Malakan communities. This process also created conditions for the formation of cultural diversity in the region, the emergence of new social practices, and the strengthening of mutual relations with the local population. The settlement experience of the Malakans is a successful example of multiculturalism and social integration in the history of the South Caucasus (Jafarov, 2022, pp. 57–70). Malakans are communities distinguished by both their religious-philosophical views and social lifestyle as one of the non-Orthodox religious movements that emerged in 19th-century Russian society (Gasimov, 2010). Their formation is associated with the intensification of various searches for religious reforms in the peasant environment of Russia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The strict doctrine of the official

Orthodox Church, heavy church taxes, and the influence of the state-church union on peasant life created conditions for many strata to turn to alternative religious searches. In these conditions, the Malakans formed as a community based on a simple, direct interpretation of the Bible, denying church ceremonies, and known for their ascetic and pacifist worldview (Mammadli, 2015, pp. 72). The religious teachings of the Malakans are based on the rejection of rituals and church hierarchy, a direct relationship between man and God, and spiritual purity. They are also known for their anti-violence, refusal to serve in the military, a simple lifestyle, and abstinence from alcohol. These principles determined their social behavior model, strengthening discipline and mutual assistance within the community. Since the religious views and community-based lifestyle of the Malakans were outside the official ideological line of the Russian Empire, they were often perceived as an "unreliable population group", kept under surveillance, and forced to relocate to various regions. Nevertheless, the Malakan communities were distinguished by their strong family ties, hard work, cooperative economic management, and high sense of social responsibility, and formed a unique socio-cultural environment in the regions they settled in (Rzayev, 2018, pp. 89–102).

The formation of Malakan communities and their relationship with the environment shows that religious and social values play a decisive role in determining the lifestyle of the society. The development of the Malakans in a different path from the official ideology has led them to create a unique model not only in terms of religion but also in terms of social behavior. Their peacefulness, hard work, and community solidarity ensured the sustainability of these communities and helped them become accepted as an exemplary social structure in the areas where they settled. Therefore, the lifestyle of the Malakans is a historical example of how alternative religious communities can have a positive impact on society, and this heritage has remained a valuable experience for modern multicultural societies (Argunov, 1996).

2. The essence and goals of the resettlement policy of the Russian Empire in the 19th century

The 19th century was a period in which demographic engineering and planned settlement measures played a special role in the domestic and foreign policy of the Russian Empire. This policy served the goals of consolidating the empire's territories, strengthening political control, filling the border regions with reliable population groups, and increasing economic potential. Russia tried to make administrative management more comfortable by relocating both the population belonging to different sects in its central territories as a result of religious pressures arising from the church-state conflict, and social groups considered "undesirable" from a political perspective, to the remote areas of the empire (Shukurova, 1999, pp. 74–81). The resettlement policy of this period was not only an instrument of social and religious control, but also an important component of the economic development strategy.

Especially in newly annexed regions such as the South Caucasus, the lack of labor resources, the lack of land, and the need to change the local population structure prompted the empire to pursue a policy of planned settlement there. Therefore, religious groups such as German colonists, Russian Orthodox, Doukhobors, and Malakans were settled in various areas of the Caucasus with special privileges. Special resettlement committees were created to implement the resettlement policy, land was distributed for new colonies, and taxes and military service fees were reduced, thus the empire managed to systematically realize its demographic and economic goals. This process played an important role in the formation of the ethnic map of the South Caucasus, the change in agricultural structures, and the emergence of new social relations (Babenko, 2010, pp. 112–128). Thus, the Russian Empire's resettlement policy in the 19th century was a complex state strategy aimed at both preserving the empire's internal political stability and strengthening itself in new territories and left indelible marks on the history of the region. The resettlement policy of the Russian Empire in the 19th century was not limited to the tightening of administration and the strengthening of borders, but also acted as a socio-cultural engineering project of a multinational empire. On the one hand, this policy served to form segments of the population loyal to the empire, and on the other hand, it created a new model of economic behavior, labor culture, and social relations in the region. The experience of the Malakans and other resettled communities shows that resettlement for demographic engineering purposes can sometimes have a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the region, and sometimes cause long-term cultural changes by interfering with the local demographic balance. Therefore, it is important to approach resettlement policy from the perspective of both imperial interests and the historical fate of the peoples of the region (Gasimov, 2010, p. 76). Since the mid-19th century, the resettlement of Malakan communities to the South Caucasus has been an important component of the purposeful demographic and administrative policy of the Russian Empire. Malakans were classified by the imperial authorities as an “invalid religious group” as a community that did not adhere to the official Orthodox Church and rejected religious ceremonies, church hierarchy, and violence. Their removal from the central provinces of Russia and settlement in the border regions served the purposes of strengthening the political control of the empire, ensuring social stability in the border areas, and creating new economic units (Aliyeva, 2020, pp. 115–130). During the waves of resettlement spanning the 1840s–1890s, Malakan families were removed from the Volga region, Voronezh, Tambov, and other governorates and settled mainly in the newly annexed territories of the South Caucasus. In this process, the governorates of Lankaran, Guba, Yelizavetpol (Ganja), Tbilisi, and Iravan were selected as strategic locations for the settlement of Malakans. The resettled Malakans were allocated plots of land, temporary tax breaks were applied, and state support was provided for economic development. The resettlement process was not only the result of administrative decisions; for the Malakan communities themselves, the migration also created new economic opportunities, religious freedom, and the opportunity to live a more freely communal lifestyle. In new settlements, they made significant contributions to the development of agricultural production, strengthening labor discipline,

and renewing social relations. The socio-economic environment of the South Caucasus changed significantly under the influence of Malakan communities, and new agricultural models were formed in a number of regions (Alekperov, 2011, p. 152). The relationship between the Malakan communities that were resettled in the South Caucasus in the 19th century and the local population of the region is one of the topics of particular importance in terms of social, cultural and economic aspects. Since the South Caucasus has a multicultural social structure where different ethnic and religious groups coexist, the entry of the Malakans into this environment led to the emergence of new forms of social interaction in the region. Their pacifist worldview, peaceful lifestyle, high labor culture, and community-based social structure defined the basic contours of relations with the local population. Despite ethno-confessional differences, conflicts between the Malakans and local communities rarely occurred. The main reason for this was the Malakans' aloofness from political processes, their adherence to the principles of non-interference in disputes and non-violence. The culture of both material and spiritual assistance was widespread in their daily lives, which had a significant impact on the harmonious development of relations with the local population (Vereshchagin, 1911, pp. 57–79). The Malakan communities, which were resettled to the South Caucasus in the 19th century, are of special research importance as one of the social groups that played an important role in the historical and cultural development of the region. In the territories of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia where they settled, their economic activity, labor culture, lifestyle, social relations and moral values had a significant impact on the socio-cultural structure of the region as a whole. The multicultural environment formed in the South Caucasus as a result of the resettlement policy of the Russian Empire was further enriched with new ideas and behavioral models of the Malakan communities, creating broad opportunities for the development of cultural interaction between different peoples (Kudryavtsev, 1912, pp. 38–40). The work ethic, collectivist traditions, cooperative farming model, as well as moral principles such as peace and non-violence brought by the Malakans have had a certain impact on the social behavioral norms of local communities. The methods they applied in fields such as pottery, dairy farming, land cultivation, and woodworking gave impetus to the development of the region's craft and agricultural culture, and led to the formation of new production traditions in some regions (Mammadov, 2014, pp. 33–46). Another important aspect of cultural influence is the acceptance by the local population of the simplicity, cleanliness, orderliness and community solidarity that are reflected in the daily life of the Malakan communities. The principles of mutual respect, tolerance in neighborly relations and social responsibility have led to significant changes in the social dynamics of many villages and towns. At the same time, the language, customs and rituals of the Malakans contributed to the further diversification of the multicultural landscape of the region. Thus, the influence of the Malakans on the historical and cultural development of the South Caucasus was not only the result of a demographic process, but also a multifaceted historical event that left a deep mark on the socio-cultural life of the region (Shaginov, 2003, pp. 44–58) The influence of the Malakan communities on the historical and cultural development

of the South Caucasus is most clearly seen in the adoption of their social behavior models and moral values by local communities. The peace-loving, labor culture and collectivist traditions of these communities have formed new quality standards not only in the economic sphere, but also in people's relationships with each other. The process of strengthening the multicultural environment that the Malakans brought to the region is still relevant today, and their historical experience should be valued as an important historical example that proves the possibility of harmonious coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups. This heritage is also invaluable in terms of tolerance and the management of cultural diversity in modern societies.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be noted that the relocation of the Malakan communities to the South Caucasus in the 19th century not only remained a significant aspect of the planned demographic and political strategy of the Russian Empire but also exerted a significant impact on the socio-economic and cultural development of the region from a long-term perspective. It may be noted that labor discipline, a community-based way of living, collectivist ideology and principles, and a model of peaceful behavior exhibited by the Malakan communities have established an exemplary social structure in the regions where they have been living, and this has provided a framework for developing tolerant and respectful relations with the local residents in these regions. The innovations in agricultural practices and cooperative farm management introduced by the Malakan communities have provided a significant fillip to the economic development in this region and have acted as a model for social and cultural development in this region. The industriousness and collectivist ideology and principles exhibited by this community have provided a fillip to social bonding in this region. At the same time, the principle of non-violence, the peace-loving character of the Malakans, and their commitment to the values of the family and community have had a specific impact on the socio-cultural sphere of the region. The language and culture of the Malakans have contributed to the ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of the South Caucasus and have significantly promoted the practice of coexistence and the development of multicultural values. The social behavior of the Malakans and their practice of community management have become an example for the other communities of the region and have played a significant role in the development of a multicultural and tolerant community. Finally, the process of resettling the Malakan communities in the region in the 19th century cannot be regarded only as the migration of a religious sect, but also as a historical process that has had a complex and multifaceted impact on the social, cultural, and economic development of the South Caucasus region. This process has significantly contributed to the development of ethnic and religious diversity, multicultural and tolerant values, and the historical dynamism of the region. Thus, the heritage of the Malakan communities in the South

Caucasus remains relevant and worthy of study not only in a historical context, but also for the study of modern social sciences and community models. The socio-cultural and economic impact created by these communities provides a rich source for future research in terms of preserving the region's ethnic and religious diversity, mutual respect, and the development of multicultural practices. Research on this topic will allow for a more systematic study of socio-cultural integration mechanisms and coexistence practices in future scientific studies. The analysis of historical community relations contributes to the scientific explanation of the processes of preserving ethnic and religious diversity, tolerance, and the formation of multicultural values. At the same time, the study of the economic activity of communities creates conditions for the identification of regional socio-economic development models and forms a solid theoretical basis for the application of interdisciplinary methodological approaches.

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