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ARTICLE

Ottomans in the Caucasian Highlands: Recruitment of the Circassians and the Ottoman Mission in Anapa, 1812–1828

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Abstract

The present article is a study of Ottoman military recruitment attempts of Circassians in the northwestern Caucasus. It examines the process of realizing a Circassian highlander army and the administration of the Anapa fortress during the time of two different fortress commanders. Focusing on the deeds of these two pashas regarding Circassian recruitment and their social background, this study highlights the Ottoman-Circassian relations and the dynamics of loyalty and pragmatism. Specifically, the role of provincial networks in ruling the border fortresses and regional politics in the Eastern Black Sea have been underlined within the context of the Russian-Ottoman rivalry over the Caucasus. Rebutting the importance of the origins of Ottoman officers for Ottoman borderland politics, this study argues that the contribution of provincial notables to the Ottoman civilizing mission and the Circassian army project in the early nineteenth century has been indispensable to the realization of Ottoman establishment in the Caucasus.

Keywords: Ottoman; Caucasus; Circassian; provincial notables

Following the Russian victory in the Russian–Ottoman War of 1806–12, the Ottoman government decided to establish a Circassian army in the vicinity of the Anapa fortress on the Black Sea coast in the northwestern Caucasus. During the interwar era between the two Russian–Ottoman Wars (1806–12 and 1828–29), the government sent two pashas to command Anapa, with the aim of using it as a base to recruit Circassian tribesmen into a new military force on the frontier. The first pasha, Seyyid Ahmed Efendi, an officer who had long been stationed at the fortress and who had combat experience leading the local highlanders, had initially proposed recruiting the tribes and, with robust support from the Ottoman government, served as the commander of the Anapa fortress from 1815 until 1825.[1] Frustrated by years of futile attempts to persuade the Circassians to serve the imperial army, the government eventually replaced Seyyid Ahmed Pasha with Çeçenzade Hasan Pasha, who was a provincial notable (*`ayan*) from the province of Trabzon, indicating a quite different social status than his

[1] State Archives of the Republic of Turkey, Department of Ottoman Archives, Istanbul, Turkey (hereafter BOA), Cevdet Askeri (hereafter C. AS) 51/2354, 26 Şevval 1237 (16 July 1822); BOA, Hatt-i Humayun (hereafter HAT) 724/34479, 25 Ramazan 1230 (31 August 1815).

predecessor.[2] What made this otherwise conventional recruitment drive unique was that the tribal army was designed for permanent deployment rather than for any imminent imperial campaign. The solid integration of Circassians through military means was a principal element in reinforcing the Ottoman presence within the region.

The present study uses the Circassian army project to evaluate the Ottoman mission in the Caucasus and explore its intersection with the social and political identities of Ottoman officers. The 1820s were a period of military reform throughout the empire, including, from 1826 on, erasing the remnants of the old military order, especially the janissaries, and attempting to form a more uniform, standardized army. As part of this task, the Ottoman government sought to impose a new order on the irregular frontier forces that had traditionally made up a key part of its forces, starting with Islamization.[3] Whereas much of the existing literature focuses on the early modern period, this paper acknowledges that Islamization was a continuing process from the 15th to the 19th centuries, with distinct characteristics in each region and era, shaped by varying social, economic, and political factors. In the 19th century, as in many other instances on Ottoman frontiers, inviting Circassian tribes to Islam was the first step for admission into the imperial service.[4] Supported by the ongoing process of Islamization in the region, it is my contention that the Ottoman policies toward Circassian tribes resembled the later initiatives of the late 19th century, which Ottoman historians have dubbed the "Ottoman *mission civilizatrice*."[5] Nevertheless, compared to the Arab and Kurdish provinces of the empire later in the century, the Ottoman mission in the Caucasus was a condensed course of the civilizing mission related to the urgent need to cultivate allies in the Caucasus.[6] Akin to Selim Deringil's account, the Ottoman government found itself obliged to counter the increasing Russian threat in the Caucasus with a civilizing mission mentality through efforts to study, train, and discipline tribal populations characterized by military traits.[7]

Equally important to understanding the Ottoman civilizing mission is the role of provincial Ottoman notables. Works dealing with this topic, however, exclusively focus on the Arab

[2] BOA, HAT 724/34479, 25 Ramazan 1230 (31 August 1815); BOA, HAT 706/33888, 15 Rebiyülevvel 1239 (19 November 1823); BOA, HAT 706/33888, 12 Cemaziyelevvel 1239 (14 January 1824).

[3] Although the Islamization literature on the Ottoman Empire falls outside the scope of this paper, it is worth acknowledging studies that explore the connection between the establishment of Ottoman rule and the process of Islamization. See Halil Inalcik, "Islam in the Ottoman Empire," *Cultura Turcica* 5–7 (1968–70): 19–29; Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971); Heath W. Lowry, *Trabzon Şehrinin İslamlaşması ve Türkleşmesi* (Istanbul: Bogazici Universitesi Yayinevi, 1998); and Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[4] Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 788; Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 312–13.

[5] Ottoman historians use different terms to define these late 19th-century initiatives and discuss them within the context of the era's colonialist and imperialist ventures. Although Ottoman officers did not employ such terms for the Caucasus in the 1820s, terms implying civilizing measures started to be widespread in the Ottoman world in the 1830s, such as *usül-i medeniyete teşebbüs* (introducing civilized measures). See Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi, *Vak'anüvîs Ahmed Lûtfî Efendi Tarihi*, vol. 2–3 (Istanbul: YKY, 1999), 651. For the terminology and a critique of locating the Ottoman Empire in postcolonial studies, see also Özgür Türesay, "L'Empire ottoman sous le prisme des études postcoloniales. À propos d'un tournant historiographique récent," *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 60, no. 2 (2013): 127–45.

[6] Ottoman officers were aware that civilizing measures should be introduced slowly and by stages. In the second half of the 19th century, unruly populations of the empire "were to be gradually brought in the fold of civilization" (*pey der pey daire-i medeniyete idhal*). Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 41.

[7] Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 769; Deringil, "They Live," 313.

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provinces of the empire, fixated on the last half-century of the Ottomans.[8] Analyzing the Circassian army project offers the potential to reopen a discussion on the time frame and geographical exclusivity of the Ottoman civilizing mission and allows scholars to reimagine the temporal and spatial approaches of the literature on "reconquering" frontiers in the 19th century.[9] Furthermore, current literature tends to dwell on the role of figures from the Ottoman "center" and overemphasizes the congruity of "locals" with imperial projects. These studies follow the narrative that the government either sent its agents from the center to the frontiers to civilize or transform localities or delegated its duties to reliable locals.[10] I argue instead that provincial notables, despite lacking familiarity with the local context and manifest support from the central government, emerged as indispensable figures to Ottoman projects, debunking existing theories that were trapped between the Ottoman capital and localness. In the case of the Circassians, it was not Seyyid Ahmed Pasha, with his local connections, service in the region, and rapport with the imperial government, who accomplished the Ottoman project in the Caucasus, but Çeçenzade Hasan Pasha, a provincial notable from Trabzon with no connections to the Caucasus and few ties to the Ottoman government.

The Circassian army project in the early 19th century underscores the significance of the intermediate role of provincial notables for the functioning of the empire due to the administrative responsibilities of these men enmeshed with military might. At the borderland locations such as the northwestern Caucasus, these notables gained increased influence, as their value lay in their ability to recruit and feed irregular troops often on their own initiative and through their own ingenuity.[11] In this respect, this study follows the newer trend in literature on the provincial notables of the last two decades, which suggests that, instead of representing Ottoman backwardness, provincial notables, in many instances, contributed to the agenda of the Ottoman government as partners.[12] The existing partnership framework, as it is framed in current literature, however, does not address the personal qualities of provincial notables and treats them as if they were merely seeking any type of employment in a free-flowing imperial "job market" by manipulating imperial policies to their own benefit.[13] Although the government several times attempted to limit the independent mobility of these people, these magnates did not lose their bases within the

[8] In addition to Deringil and Makdisi, see also Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849–1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); and Nora Elizabeth Barakat, *Bedouin Bureaucrats: Mobility and Property in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023).

[9] Alan Mikhail and Christine M. Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2015): 739.

[10] Without mentioning the Caucasus, Rogan and Barakat also date the expansion of the Ottomans into the "uncharted" frontiers right before the Tanzimat period. Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10; Barakat, *Bedouin Bureaucrats*, 7. Although the dynamic between local and central is part of their narrative, the focus of these studies on property and capital is worth mentioning as a source of ingenuity.

[11] Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Robert Zens, "Provincial Powers: The Rise of Ottoman Local Notables (Ayan)," *History Studies: International Journal of History* 3, no. 3 (2011): 441.

[12] Ali Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016). Yaycıoğlu's story about the contribution of grander `*ayan* families of Anatolia, Karaosmanoğlus, and Çapanoğlus to Selim III's regular army stands as a fine example of local input to a reform process. For other fine examples of the intermediary roles of provincial notables in the 19th century, see Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); and Yaşar Tolga Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin: The Social and Economic History of a Multiethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016).

[13] Tolga U. Esmer, "Economies of Violence, Banditry and Governance in the Ottoman Empire around 1800," *Past & Present* 224, no. 1 (2014): 173.

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provinces by undertaking clinical duties in the name of the empire.[14] Appointed to positions by the government, Ottoman officers often highlighted their past achievements and local knowledge in particular areas to promote themselves as ideal agents for imperial tasks. Paying close attention to the socioeconomic qualities of notables more than their local origins, the present study argues that the Ottoman government, initially swayed by this local narrative, ultimately prioritized the economic power of provincial notables when employing them.

This history contributes to the literature on one of the most understudied regions of Ottoman rule—the Caucasus, which had been an imperial borderland since the 16th century, one of the most contested regions between the empire its great rival, Russia, and far less understood than its Arab and Balkan provinces.[15] Ottoman historiography of the Caucasus to date has mostly paid attention to the ethnic ties of Circassian pashas within the empire until the 19th century and the Caucasian immigration into the empire after the 1860s.[16] The region itself, however, is understudied.[17] Little systematic work has been undertaken on the role of the Caucasian communities in Ottoman warfare and on the essential relationship between local groups and Ottoman notables around the region.[18] One of the reasons for this lack of interest is that the study of the Caucasus has often been relegated to Russian and Eurasian studies because of the region's imperial Russian legacy. This study reasserts the region's place in Ottoman studies as a critical frontier by primarily employing Ottoman archival sources, supplemented by a select number of Russian memoirs. Locating the Caucasus in the imperial order will allow historians to understand both Ottoman administrative practices on the imperial scale and the particularity of the region within this imperial contextualization.

Mobile Populations in Eurasia and Imperial Rivalry to Secure Loyalty

In the history of Eurasian empires until the early to mid-18th century, mobile groups characterized by military traits were key to continued expansionism. In the Ottoman schema, the empire relied on Kurdish tribes in the east and nomads of Anatolia and the Balkans to provide the required dynamism and manpower for warfare during the early

[14] The literature on resilient notables is on the rise in the last decade: M. Safa Saraçoğlu, "Resilient Notables: Looking at the Transformation of the Ottoman Empire from the Local Level," in *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Matthew P. Romanello and Charles Lipp (London: Routledge, 2011), 257–78; Uğur Bayraktar, "Reconsidering Local versus Central: Empire, Notables, and Employment in Ottoman Albania and Kurdistan, 1835–1878," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 4 (2020): 1–17.

[15] For instance, see Halil İnalcık, "Osmanlı-Rus Rekabetinin Menşei ve Don-Volga Kanalı Teşebbüsü (1569)," *Belleten* 46 (1948): 349–40; and Fahrettin Kırzıoğlu, *Osmanlıların Kafkas-Ellerini Fethi (1451–1590)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1993), 2.

[16] Metin Ibrahim Kunt, "Ethnic-Regional (Cins) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, no. 3 (1974): 233–39. The latest and perhaps the finest example in this field of Caucasian immigration to the Ottoman Empire is Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024).

[17] Exceptions include but are not limited to Cengiz Fedakar, "Anapa Kalesi: Karadeniz'in Kuzeyinde Son Osmanlı İstihkamı" (PhD diss., Mimar Sinan Fine Arts Faculty, 2010); and Murat Yaşar, *The North Caucasus Borderland: Between Muscovy and the Ottoman Empire, 1555–1605* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

[18] Virginia H. Aksan, "Locating the Ottomans among Early Modern Empires," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3, no. 2 (1999): 130. Aksan, for instance, argues that the battlefields of the 1770s are sprinkled with names like "Çerkes Süleyman," "Abaza Mehmed," and "Dağıstanlı Ali," all drawn from the Caucasus. However, the connections that brought these people to the Ottoman army are yet to be elaborated by Ottoman historians considering the 18th century. See also Mehmet Beşikçi, "Başıbozuk Savaşçıdan 'Makbul' Tebaaya: 1877–1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşında Osmanlı Ordusunda Çerkez Muhacirler," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 23 (2015): 85–123.

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modern era.[19] In addition to these groups, the Albanians were particularly prized within the Ottoman military mechanism, with Albanian irregulars forming the core of the Ottoman army in the Balkans after the turn of the 18th century.[20] Located mostly on the frontiers, all of these irregular groups protected the mountain passes and trade routes and were especially important for expanding and defending imperial frontiers.[21]

Its great rival, Russia, deployed similar methods to defend its borders. Cossack communities became a crucial part of the military structure during the Muscovite and Imperial periods of Russia, as free warriors and wanderers on behalf of the Russian Empire rather than as part of a formal army.[22] The Russian Empire, in addition to its conscripted army, relied on the Cossack military, which arguably had a more consistent relationship with the Russian government than Ottoman irregulars had with their own.[23] The relations between the Ottoman government and mobile groups, by contrast, were much more fraught before the long 19th century. Unlike its main rival, the Ottoman Empire did not have much control over its mobile populations. In the 18th century, frontier populations who sometimes protected imperial routes as irregulars also turned to pillage and robbery when it suited them. Although the government exclusively relied on these irregular bands for military purposes, these groups posed potential threats to provincial stability as they turned to making their own living.[24] Frequently, the irregular forces who were hired for a military campaign refused to demobilize and began to live off the land, blurring the lines between peasant, soldier, and bandit.[25]

The central government could not adequately address this problem, however, because irregulars continued to be essential to the Ottoman military. At the turn of the 19th century, the Ottoman government did not have a sufficient population for a regular conscripted army. In the mid-19th century, military labor within the Ottoman context continued to be shouldered by the irregular bands of provincial notables and auxiliary troops from the border areas.[26] In the Caucasus, this trend was more evident than elsewhere. According to Virginia Aksan, "half of the forces mobilized for any campaign into the area were certain to be irregulars: from Georgians (Imeretians, Mingrelians and Gurias, Acars, Lazis, Abkhazians

[19] Reşat Kasaba's view on mobile groups and their value to the Ottoman Empire is critical. Reşat Kasaba, *A Movable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants and Refugees* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009). As one of the latest examples of their value for imperial expansions, see Oliver Jens Schmitt and Mariya Kiprovska, "Ottoman Raiders (Akıncıs) as a Driving Force of Early Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans and the Slavery-Based Economy," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 65, no. 4 (2022): 497–582.

[20] Gültekin Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok: Zorunlu Askerliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti'nde Siyaset, Ordu ve Toplum (1826–1839)* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2009), 198; Virginia H. Aksan, "Mobilization of Warrior Populations in the Ottoman Context, 1750–1850" in *Fighting for a Living, A Comparative Study of Military Labour, 1500–2000*, ed. *Erik Jan Zurcher* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 344.

[21] Uğur Bayraktar, "From Salary to Resistance: Mobility, Employment, and Violence in Dibra, 1792–1826," *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 6 (2018): 878–900.

[22] The history of the Cossacks in the Russian Empire has been widely studied. The latest examples are Thomas M. Barrett, *The Terek Cossacks and North Caucasus Frontier, 1700–1860* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); and Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[23] Will Smiley, "The Battle of Ali Hoca Burnu: Framed Privateers, Questionable Loyalties, and a Sultanic Prize Court," in *Ottoman War and Peace Studies in Honor of Virginia H. Aksan*, ed. Frank Castiglione, Ethan L. Menchinger, and Veysel Şimşek (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 387.

[24] Halil Inalcık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600–1700," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 303.

[25] Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700–1870: An Empire Besieged* (London: Pearson Press, 2007), 169; Tolga U. Esmer, "Notes on a Scandal: Transregional Networks of Violence, Gossip, and Imperial Sovereignty in the Late Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 1 (2016): 105.

[26] Virginia Aksan, *Ottomans and Europeans: Contacts and Conflicts* (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2004), 227.

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[Abazas]), Circassians (Çerkes), Ossetians, and Dagistanis (Chechens, Andis and Avars)."[27] The Circassian army project, therefore, should be located in these imperial and regional contexts. In an era when the Ottoman government was finalizing a wholesale military reform, a highlander army in the Caucasus appeared to be a panacea for the government's self-appointed role of protector of the Eastern Black Sea coast and Caucasian highlands against the Russians. Aware of their military shortages and the tenuousness of their military structure, the Ottoman government envisioned building a solid and stable military integration of local highlanders from the ground up. Although no similar army projects were documented with the same explicit goals as the one at Anapa, the vicinities of the fortresses of Khotin, Kars, and Daghestan were among the places where the Ottoman government sent their envoys and approached locals for stronger military alliances.[28]

The imperial rivalry between the Ottoman and Russian empires unfolded over securing the loyalty of such military populations at the Caucasian frontiers.[29] During the long 19th century, these two empires vied "for the services of many of the same fighting men."[30] The era witnessed a Russian expansion into the Caucasus toward the eastern shores of the Black Sea, entrenching Russian rule in formerly Ottoman zones. Within two decades following the military confrontation of the Russians and Ottomans in 1806, the Russian Empire secured its rule over regional principalities, strengthened its military line, and expedited the settlement of Cossack communities along the defensive line. Before the beginning of the 1828–29 Russo–Ottoman War, the Ottoman government controlled only a few fortresses on the Eastern Black Sea. As a result of Russian expansion, borderland communities like the Circassian tribes became an integral part of geopolitical territorialism in the Caucasus.

A potential alliance with the Ottomans seemed advantageous for the tribes, too, as they found a powerful ally against the Russian expansionism that had begun to threaten their existential conditions. Given the increasing numbers of Cossack forces between the Kuban and Terek rivers in the Caucasus and the Russian fortresses since the 1790s, the highlanders were navigating a game of survival by pragmatically shifting their loyalties between the two empires. They endeavored to maximize their gains from potential alliances. Concerning the Ottomans, the highlanders promoted their self-interests by initially adopting a superficial form of Islam. At the beginning of the 19th century, while professing their Islamic identity, most tribes remained Muslim in name only, mostly due to the strict feudal structure of these communities.[31] The chief characteristic of this Islamization wave was its accelerated form and superficiality.[32] Despite the shortcomings of Islamization in the Caucasus, the Ottoman

[27] Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 462.

[28] Fatih Yeşil, "Nizâm-ı Cedîd'den Yeniçeriliğin Kaldırılışına Osmanlı Kara Ordusunda Değişim, 1793–1826" (PhD diss., Hacettepe University, 2009), 80.

[29] Literature on the Ottoman–Russian borderlands has been on the rise for the last two decades. See Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzones of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013); and Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands from the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[30] Aksan, "Locating," 121.

[31] Here I discuss the Islamization of the highlander tribes in the northwestern Caucasus whose residences fall on the west bank of the Kuban River and stretch toward the Black Sea. I am not discussing the infamous rebel Shamil and his Naqshbandi-centered Islamic state located in Dagestan and Chechenia. Even though both the Ottomans and Shamil had sent envoys to the area, the tribes continued their heterodox practices until very late in the 19th century. See Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism: A Longitudinal Perspective on Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2005): 40–41.

[32] Maurus Reinkowski, *Die Dinge der Ordnung: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung über die osmanische Reformpolitik im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 99–100. Regarding the Albanian highlanders in the late 17th and 18th

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government remained eager to disburse funds to secure the loyalty of tribal leaders. The Ottomans implemented a tribal policy that Reinkowski has defined as "ethnic containment," in which the Ottoman officers provided accommodation and sent titles, presents, symbolic gifts, and money to control the external ties of the tribes.[33] In a sense, the rivalry between the Russians and Ottomans offered alternative revenues to the highlanders within the economy of the imperial borderlands in the Caucasus.[34]

The Russian government pursued a colonizer's strategy concerning the area between the Kuban and Terek rivers. Although Russian officers expected to pacify Circassians for their settlement plans for Black Sea Cossacks and state peasants, they also sought alliances with the highlanders to form auxiliary units.[35] Unsurprisingly, the Russian agents at the Kuban border were a source of anxiety for the Ottomans. In the aftermath of the 1806–12 war, the Ottoman government several times urged the commanders of the Anapa fortress to prevent Russian agents from venturing into the region. Also, they warned the Russian ambassador in Istanbul, claiming that the area stretching to the western bank of the Kuban River was under Ottoman control; as a result, people living there naturally were Ottoman subjects.[36] Sending instructions from the capital both to Anapa and Trabzon, the Porte underlined the strategic importance of the tribes around the Kuban area as guardians of the frontier and a fiercely martial people with strong military potential for their struggle with the Russians.[37]

Recruiting Chinggisid khans was among the topics of competition between the Russians and Ottomans, given the formers' credibility among the Circassian tribes.[38] From the mid-to-late 1810s, Ottoman officers in Anapa considered appointing a certain Mehmed Giray as *serasker* (commander-in-chief) over the area from Anapa to the Kuban River with a salary of twenty thousand piastres.[39] The Ottoman government, however, had serious doubts about him. After apparently falling out with the former Anapa commander, Mehmed Giray crossed the Kuban River to become a Russian subject with his people, herds, and belongings. By sending Mehmed Giray as an envoy to the highlanders and sending material incentives like gifts, salt, and precious metals, the Russians hoped to convince other tribes to settle under Russian jurisdiction.[40] A close reading of documents shows that Mehmed Giray was a borderland figure with shifting loyalties toward the Russian and Ottoman establishments, as both empires considered him a major factor in their plans for the northwestern Caucasus.[41]

centuries, Reinkowski argues that the Ottoman government ventured into an accelerated form of Islamization within the context of the Ottoman–Habsburg rivalry over the region. The motives on the part of the Ottomans against the Russian Empire in the early 19th century in the Caucasus appear similar. For a discussion on the different characteristics of conversion waves, see Marc D. Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18.

[33] Reinkowski, *Die Dinge der Ordnung*, 103–14.

[34] Tolga U. Esmer, "*A Culture of Rebellion: Networks of Violence and Competing Discourses of Justice in the Ottoman Empire, 1790–1808*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009), 75.

[35] Rieber, *Struggle*, 390–91.

[36] BOA, HAT 1103/44584, 21 Cemaziyellevvel 1231 (19 April 1816).

[37] BOA, HAT 285/17084, no date.

[38] Hakan Kırımlı and Ali Yaycıoğlu, "Heirs of Chinghis Khan in the Age of Revolutions: An Unruly Crimean Prince in the Ottoman Empire and Beyond," *Die Welt Der Islam* 94, no. 2 (2017): 496–526.

[39] BOA, Cevdet Eyalât-ı Mümtâze 21/1029, 8 Safer 1231 (9 January 1816); Cevdet Dahiliye 251/12519, 23 Zilhicce 1231 (14 November 1816); C. AS 884/37968, 12 Şaban 1231 (8 July 1816).

[40] BOA, HAT 1106/44621, 7 Ramazan 1235 (18 July 1820); HAT 1106/44621, 23 Şevval 1235 (3 August 1820).

[41] BOA, Ali Emiri Tasnifi Sultan Mahmud II (hereafter AE. SMHD.II), 82/6442, 5 Rebiülahir 1245 (4 October 1829). Given that he had only two cannons and one hundred troops, his importance perhaps lay in his influence on certain tribes. He happened to be a middling local notable whose loyalty needed to be guaranteed by an employer. Mehmed Giray seems to have been retained by the Ottomans who assigned him with the guardianship of "the Black Sea Strait" during the 1828–29 Russo–Ottoman War. Also see BOA, AE. SMHD.II 9/465, 17 Zilkade 1244 (21 May 1829).

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Figure 1. Green parts show formal Ottoman territories, and areas under Ottoman suzerainty (shaded). Arthur Tsutsiev, *Atlas of the Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus*, tr. Nora Seligman Favorov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

Buying off the loyalty of leaders was indispensable to the imperial game. In line with this purpose, the government released funds to form alliances with them and sent titles and ammunition to ward off Russian expansion. Scattered documents from the era show that fifteen to twenty tribal chiefs who professed to be serving Ottoman interests within the region were awarded a salary.[42] Even independent military action was rewarded by the Ottomans. A group of tribal chiefs in 1821, for instance, managed to seize the abandoned Soğucak Fortress and settle in it. The six leaders were then awarded annual salaries from the funds dedicated to Anapa customs.[43]

The Anapa Fortress and the Limits of the Ottoman Mission during the Time of Ahmed Pasha

The Anapa fortress was built in the early 1780s at a strategic point where the Kuban River empties into the Azov Sea (Fig. 1).[44] The fortress construction and the Circassian army project in the region during the period exemplified Ottoman attempts starting in the late 18th century to "integrate lost or tenuously held territories such as the mountainous frontiers."[45] In the early 19th century, after consecutive battles lost to the Russian Empire,

[42] BOA, HAT 1106/44618, 28 Şevval 1231 (21 September 1816); Cevdet Maliye 14/639, 25 Rebiülevvel 1236 (31 December 1820).

[43] BOA, HAT 1556/23, 3 Ramazan 1236 (4 July 1821). Six leaders were awarded annual salaries from one hundred to two hundred and fifty piastres. Although this money was not a significant amount, it was still very close to how much an Ottoman irregular earned annually during wartime.

[44] Today the port city of Novorossiysk in the Krasnodar region of the Russian Federation.

[45] Aksan, "Mobilization," 337; Mikhail and Philliou, "Imperial Turn," 739.

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the Eastern Black Sea ports in the Caucasus represented a strategic problem for the Ottomans. Although occupied several times by the Russian troops in the previous half century, the port fortresses were among the places that the Ottoman government was reluctant to give further concessions.[46] From a geographical perspective, the cities on the Eastern Black Sea were integral to this history. The administration of the fortresses in the Caucasus, including Anapa, and military recruitment of Circassians relied on the influence of provincial notables within the regional Black Sea network, which Ottoman officers tapped for manpower, information, and economic help.[47]

The Anapa fortress resembled more of a town than a military garrison by the turn of the 19th century. In its most prosperous period, the population of the fortress reached thirty thousand. The entire establishment contained at least two hundred and fifty shops, as well as libraries, madrasas, bakeries, public baths, and inns.[48] During the time of Ferah `Ali Pasha in the 1780s, of Georgian background, who was the main representative of the Ottoman interest in the northwestern Caucasus and the patron of the fortress construction, the Ottoman agents strove to convert the chief of the highlander tribes to Islam.[49] The most telling aspect of Ferah `Ali's rule was arguably the spread of Islamic practices among the tribes by establishing mosques, changing the names of the tribal chiefs to Islamic ones, and sending the children of these leaders to the madrasas in the Ottoman provinces.[50] The Ottomans asserted a cultural superiority over the highlanders, leveraging their conversion to Islam to facilitate their recruitment into the imperial military ranks.

The opportunity to turn Anapa into a more distinctly military base arose toward the end of the 1806–12 war. In November 1811, Seyyid Ahmed Pasha led thousands of Circassians across the Kuban River to fight against the Russians and, after two days, secured a victory. The Ottoman government welcomed the news with particular enthusiasm.[51] Due to his achievements in the war, Seyyid Ahmed became a very popular figure within government circles.[52] Afterward, he became a vizier and replaced the former commander of Anapa, Hüseyin Pasha, sometime in 1815, with a mandate to establish a Circassian army.[53] Ahmed Pasha's background also can shed light on a few aspects of his appointment. The record in *Sicil-i Osmani* shows that Seyyid Ahmed Pasha was of Crimean origin, with no reference to his earliest employment by the Ottomans.[54] Some archival documents from the early 1810s mention him as Hacegan-ı Divan-ı Humayun (imperial clerk).[55] The rank in question indicates his close relations with officers in the Ottoman government.[56] His extensive

[46] Virginia H. Aksan, "Ottoman Military and Social Transformations," in *Empires and Autonomy: Moments in the History of Globalization*, ed. Stephen M. Streeter, John C. Weaver, and William D. Coleman (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 67. The fortress of Anapa, for instance, fell to Russian troops in 1791 and 1807.

[47] Michael E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 188. In his famous work, the borders of the Black Sea region were delineated by Meeker as from Batum to Ordu.

[48] Cengiz Fedakar, "Anapa," *TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi*, accessed 5 January 2022, https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/anapa.

[49] Kesbi Haşim Mehmed Efendi, *Ahval-i Anapa ve Çerkes* (Istanbul: Kafkas Vakfı Yayınları, 2017).

[50] Fedakar, "Anapa Kalesi," 13–20.

[51] BOA, HAT 966/41286, 9 Cemaziyelevvel 1227 (20 June 1812).

[52] BOA, AE. SMHD.II, 19/1165, 3 Muharrem 1227 (14 March 1812); C. AS, 173/7542, 13 Cemaziyelahir 1227 (24 July 1812).

[53] BOA, C. AS 51/2354, 26 Şevval 1237 (16 July 1822); BOA, HAT 724/34479, 25 Ramazan 1230 (31 August 1815).

[54] Mehmed Süreyya, "Ahmed Paşa," *Sicil-i Osmani* I (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), 160. The name Seyyid Ahmed also appeared in 1789, describing a janissary (*serdengeçti ağası*) who was sent from Istanbul as the chief of 120 soldiers. BOA, MAD 3365 vr.152b, 24 Zilkade 1203 (15 September 1789). However, it is quite unlikely that this Seyyid Ahmed is the one who would become Seyyid Ahmed Pasha in the 1810s.

[55] BOA, HAT 282/16791, no date.

[56] Orhonlu argues that the rank had lost almost all its prestige by the 1830s. Cengiz Orhonlu, "Khwadjegan-i Diwan-i Hümayun," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, vol. 4, accessed 21 May 2024, https://referenceworks.brill.

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experience in the area and wartime accomplishments with the highlanders likely played a significant role in persuading the Ottoman government to trust Ahmed Pasha's commitment to recruit the Circassians. He appears to have become deeply integrated into the local context during his long service at the fortress. Even after the loss of Anapa to the Russians, he intended to stay in the Caucasus after the Russo–Ottoman War of 1828–29, asking permission from the Russian authorities to permanently reside in Soğucak, reflecting his strong ties to the region.[57]

During the first five years of his service in Anapa, however, Ahmed Pasha struggled to legitimize the Ottoman mission to tribes that, contrary to the Ottoman plans, "encouraged the cultivation of the qualities of self-sufficiency and independence" among themselves.[58] Although willing to serve as irregulars, the highlanders were not interested in devoting their entire military prowess to establishing Ottoman power in the Caucasus. Additionally, convincing tribal men to adopt a settled life within the fortress proved genuinely challenging, as the tribes had long valued the notion of freedom.[59] Seyyid Ahmed Pasha, complaining about the difficulties of his mission, noted that although certain tribes volunteered to serve as itinerant cavalry in the vicinity of Anapa, they were reluctant to serve as infantry because that would require them to reside within the fortress.[60] Despite the government's expectation that the tribes would furnish a certain number of local troops to serve as infantry to protect the fortress, their innate social characteristics kept them from fully submitting to Ottoman rule. Circassian recruitment on behalf of the Ottoman pashas at Anapa remained elusive until 1820.

Seyyid Ahmed Pasha's failure to convince the highlanders to join the Ottoman army led to a shortage of manpower and, eventually, the deterioration of the fortress. Reports from 1820 indicated that the fortress was in terrible condition compared to the last decade of the 18th century.[61] A petition from the fortress signed by 'ulama', janissary commanders, and garrison troops revealed how dire the situation was. The signatories of the petition complained about the enemy aggression, noting that Russian troops had attacked the fortress five times in the past two decades due to the insufficient number of troops in the garrison. Additionally, the signatories mentioned that they had to beg for a supplemental grain provision, as their current supplies were inadequate for the foreseeable future, further compromising the fortress's defense.[62] The chief problem was that, after six years of Ahmed Pasha's command, the fortress still depended on the irregulars from the Black Sea provinces, contrary to the initial projections of Circassian recruitment. Ahmed Pasha constantly remarked on the insufficient manpower, financial aid, and need for more staff in his correspondence with the Sublime Porte. In 1821 he notified Istanbul that no more than a

com/display/entries/EIEO/SIM-4127.xml?rskey=PWCj7z&result=18. Nevertheless, the sultan had the last word on the conferring of this title. See Michael Nizri, "Rethinking Center-Periphery Communication in the Ottoman Empire: The Kapı-Kethüdası," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no. 3 (2016): 479.

[57] Adolf Berzhe, ed., *Akty Sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Komissiei* 9, doc. 15, 29 August 1830, 965. His son Alyanak Mustafa Pasha also was sent to the Caucasus to lead the Batumi army during the Crimean War. This might indicate the family's warm relations with the highlanders. See Mayor Osman Bey, "Vospominaniya O 1855 Gode," *Kavkazskiy Sbornik* 2 (1877): 143–214.

[58] Reynolds, "Myths," 41. From the perspectives of the Circassian tribes, any imperial projection would be unwelcome. The borderland communities were not happily waiting for a superior culture to come and dominate them with a colonizing attitude. This argument applies well to the highlander tribes of the northwestern Caucasus as well. Whereas the Ottoman existence provided a tool for the highlanders in their struggle with the encroaching Russian troops, the relationship between the Ottomans and the tribes was by no means organic and natural.

[59] Ibid., 40.

[60] BOA, HAT 1084/44155, 5 Şevval 1238 (15 July 1823).

[61] Fedakar, "Anapa."

[62] BOA, HAT 1102/44551, no date.

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few hundred troops arrived in Anapa from Canik (in the central Black Sea region, west of Trabzon).[63] A few months after Ahmed Pasha's notice, the government dispatched fifteen hundred troops, this time from the province of Trabzon.[64]

In 1822, the government finally sent money for the essential needs of Anapa, including the recruitment of troops and the urgent reconstruction of crucial parts of the fortress.[65] Ahmed Pasha, however, had to allocate this money to compensate for the unpaid salaries of military personnel in Anapa for the prior two years. Therefore, he requested an exorbitant sum, one hundred fifty thousand piastres, for the planned reconstruction of the fortress and further recruitment of garrison troops the following spring.[66] In one of his last letters to the government, dated 1823, in the early spring, Ahmed Pasha first reiterated the need for thousands of troops for the defense of Anapa, then provided a detailed account of the troops which were sent from the Black Sea provinces in the last two years. According to him, about half of these troops were useless old men, so they were sent back to their homes. The remaining group consisted of shepherds and poor peasants with no military capability. Even worse, because they had not been paid since their arrival in Anapa a year ago, they harassed him endlessly and treated him in a very abusive manner.[67]

A short note appended to the above report of Ahmed Pasha indicates that his credibility with the Ottoman government was in jeopardy. The note simply queried how and why Ahmed Pasha could not fulfill his promises pertaining to the recruitment of the tribes and generating a force that was capable of combating the Russians.[68] He defended himself by claiming that the elderly leaders of the Circassian and Abkhazian tribes had succumbed to a plague.[69] Although the deceased chiefs, who also had visited Istanbul, gained the trust of the government, the new chiefs were vagabonds, burglars, and plunderers. With regard to securing the loyalty of these new chiefs, Ahmed Pasha underlined that he had lost the struggle to the Russians, who were able to recruit the highlanders by offering stronger financial incentives.[70]

Another document that describes the fate of Ahmed Pasha reveals the government's discontent with him and his failures throughout a decade of his service at the Anapa fortress. He had already been under criticism for his harsh methods against the tribal chiefs.[71] Allegedly,

[63] BOA, HAT 1103/44580, 1 Zilhicce 1236 (30 August 1821): The troops were dispatched from the province of Canik in the central Black Sea region.

[64] BOA, HAT 1103/44582, 7 Muharrem 1237 (4 October 1821). At least half of the promised troops, however, were not available immediately due to a revolt led by the people of Rize. One notable from the district, a certain Mehmed, managed to collect a decree from the government, allowing the people to be exempt from duty at Anapa.

[65] BOA, HAT 1103/44582, 16 Muharrem 1237 (13 October 1821): In late 1821, the government received a report from an *ocak tatarı* (janissary courier) named Uzun Mustafa. These couriers were trusted government agents and responsible for communication between posts and fortresses. Other documents from the era reveal that Uzun Mustafa was an active courier in the Eastern Black Sea region in the 1820s. His report, therefore, could be among the reasons that the Ottoman government lent an ear to Ahmed Pasha's complaints. According to the report, the Russian forces possessed significant strength and could potentially besiege the fortress at any moment. Ahmed Pasha's insistence on not relying solely on the existing population within the fortress was deemed justified.

[66] BOA, HAT 1103/44580, 2 Muharrem 1238 (19 September 1822): Not surprisingly, the government was unable to send the demanded money.

[67] BOA, HAT 1084/44155, 5 Şevval 1238 (15 June 1823).

[68] Ibid.

[69] BOA, HAT 7063/ 33888 A, 12 Cemaziyelevvel 1239 (14 January 1824).

[70] BOA, HAT 1102/44551, 13 Receb 1236 (15 April 1821).

[71] As the relations between the tribes and Ahmed Pasha continued to deteriorate after 1821, the tribes were eager to propose Circassian candidates for Anapa, hoping to have someone of their kin in authority. Therefore, they presented three Caucasus-based Ottoman pashas. The government, however, rejected this proposal as it would likely encourage the tribes' tendency to act independently. BOA, HAT 285/17084, no date. This document implies a network connecting the Ottoman pashas mostly to the highlander tribes in the northwest Caucasus. The tribes were apparently aware of the advancements of their fellow kin in the Ottoman imperial system.

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Ahmed Pasha executed more than ten tribal chiefs and took their children captive at the fortress.[72] Also, he was accused of embezzlement of a significant amount of *atıyye-i seniyye* (imperial grants), which he was supposed to have transferred to the tribes. More importantly, however, his status as an Ottoman pasha was in doubt. His household consisted of no more than forty people, and he did not possess any other revenue than his salary as the Anapa commander. The writer of the document took the time of Ferah Ali Pasha (the first commander of the fortress from the 1780s) as an example, because he, during his service in Anapa, undertook several other governorships in Anatolia, thereby having multiple incomes.[73]

The Replacement of Ahmed Pasha with Hasan Pasha

Almost a decade after his appointment, in 1824, the government had completely lost trust in Ahmed Pasha.[74] Now in danger of losing the Caucasus, the government came to the realization that a pasha without soldiers and powerful financial means could not accomplish the Anapa mission. Sometime in 1825, Seyyid Ahmed Pasha was dismissed from his post, and the commander of the fortress of Kars, Çeçenzade Hasan Pasha, was promoted to the rank of vizier and sent to replace him. The government allowed the latter to keep a few governorships in the Black Sea region, including Trabzon, to secure his potential expenditures at the fortress. The most telling part of the report, however, is that Hasan Pasha was considered to be a fine replacement because he was part of a powerful network and capable of covering the financial costs of the fortress, unlike Ahmed Pasha.[75]

Further records supporting the government's perception show that Hasan Pasha was the leader of a populous household, and he was perfectly able to share the costs with the government, when necessary.[76] A native of Karahisar-ı Şarki (a district south of Trabzon) and former commander of the fortress of Kars, he had secured enough influence in regional politics to allow him to control large pools of human capital. His household consisted of about three thousand individuals, including one thousand troops who had recently been recruited. This prosperity made his appearance at Anapa more glamorous in the eyes of the government as well as the highlanders, compared to the forty-man household of Ahmed Pasha with obviously lesser financial means.[77] The term household here refers not only to the ties based on blood or marriage but also to a broader network of which a certain pasha was the leader or an influential member. This attribute apparently was very significant to the Ottoman government, more so than the formal social rank of either man.

Hasan Pasha's appointment raised questions about how the Ottoman government assessed the qualities of pashas when hiring them for various posts, and what aspects

[72] BOA, HAT 285/17084, no date. In his defense, Ahmed Pasha said that he took these measures to deter the tribes from crossing the Kuban border and attacking the Russian residents in BOA, HAT 1041/43073, 15 Rebiülevvel 1240 (7 November 1824). He might have been right. After his dismissal, the captives escaped Anapa and gathered three thousand highlanders to attack the Russians. BOA, HAT 1041/43066 9 Rebiülahir 1240 (1 December 1824).

[73] BOA, HAT 1295/50363, no date.

[74] Actually, starting in 1822, the government started to seek a replacement for Ahmed Pasha after dissatisfaction with him became apparent within government circles. For instance, a certain Bahadır Giray, although he rejected the offer, was among the alternatives considered to lead the Circassians as the fortress commander. This also demonstrates the continuing tendency of the government to find a Crimea-based commander for Anapa. BOA, HAT 1103/44580, 1 Zilhicce 1237 (19 August 1822).

[75] BOA, HAT 1295/50363, no date. Another reason for the preference was proximity. The commander of another fortress, Yergöğü (today's Giurgiu in Romania at the Bulgarian border), Hakkı Pasha, also was willing to move to Anapa. However, the government noted that it would be arduous to bring Hakkı Pasha's soldiers from the Balkans to Anapa, and Hakkı Pasha could not gather troops immediately because he would be new to the region.

[76] BOA, HAT 1103/44571, no date; BOA, HAT 1103/44569, 25 Rebiülahir 1242 (26 November 1826).

[77] BOA, HAT 1103/44571, no date; BOA, 1058/43503, 5 Safer 1242 (8 September 1826).

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motivated them to make these decisions. Particularly for Anapa, why did the government believe that Hasan Pasha could bring anything substantial to the staggering future of the fortress? The Ottoman government must have found the justification for this decision in Hasan Pasha's social background, political competence, and experiences in the Black Sea region. Çeçenzade Hasan Pasha, although originally from Karahisar-ı Şarki as mentioned above, was a man of Trabzon province. He was indebted to the regional politics that brought him to Trabzon and made him an Ottoman pasha. Politically, he had been active in wars against the Russians and provincial conflicts since the late 18th century, including but not limited to the dynastic rivalry in the province of Trabzon between Hazinedarzades and Tuzcuoğlu families in the 1810s, working for the former.[78]

This shift in the direction of appointments of fortress commanders demonstrates how the Ottoman court reassessed the situation. Seyyid Ahmed Pasha had been appointed as the commander of Anapa right after the end of the 1806–12 Russo–Ottoman War, on the strength of his war record and his particular vision and commitment to recruit the highlander tribes into Ottoman service. As events beginning in the early 1820s suggest, given that he could not convince more than a few groups of highlanders to settle in the fortress, he was not able to provide the necessary human capital for the Ottoman establishment in the Caucasus. That is arguably why the government selected Çeçenzade Hasan Pasha as the Anapa commander. Hasan Pasha had access to the required means to bring armed men to the fortress as well as to recruit and feed highlanders. Moreover, as an ally of the most powerful *`ayan* family of Trabzon province, the Hazinedarzades, in the early 19th century, it was quite unlikely that he would suffer from financial problems as Ahmed Pasha did in the last years of his service at Anapa.

This shift illustrates the flexibility of the Ottoman government in departing from a planned course of action when Caucasian politics led them to a stalemate. On the one hand, instead of a direct relationship between the Ottoman government and a centrally favored, Crimean-based officer embedded in Caucasian networks, the government chose a regional pasha for Anapa from the Black Sea provinces.[79] The replacement of Ahmed Pasha with a provincial notable, Hasan Pasha, represents a strategic move in which the Ottoman government resorted to provincial power networks to overcome the problems of Circassian recruitment in the Caucasus. While revealing the flexible attitude of the Ottoman government in terms of policymaking, this episode also proves that the Ottoman system of government was obliged to rely on the regional network of a provincial notable for centralization efforts. The timing of the succession is notable as well, as the replacement took place just one year before the abolition of the janissary corps.[80] The Anapa fortress normally housed janissaries among its garrison. Arguably, it is unthinkable that Seyyid Ahmed Pasha, with his tiny household of forty people, would be able to execute the abolishment order of the corps. At the time of the abolition, Hasan Pasha with his provincial troops resided within the fortress. According to Hasan Pasha's statements, he received a letter from Istanbul regarding the abolition, and duly fulfilled his duty of arresting and incarcerating Anapa janissaries.[81]

[78] M. Münir Aktepe, "Tuzcu-oğulları İsyanı," *Istanbul Üniversitesi Tarih Dergisi* 3, no. 5/6 (1953): 21–52.

[79] A "regional" pasha follows Michael Meeker's terminology. He often uses this terminology for notables to underline the spatial division within the Ottoman *`ayan* and the limits of their networks. In his study, "local" and "imperial" pashas and notables also are present. Meeker, *Nation of Empire*, 213–26.

[80] On the challenges of the abolition of the janissaries and the earliest period of the Ottoman regular army in the 19th century, see Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok*; and Veysel Şimşek "The First 'Little Mehmeds': Conscripts for the Ottoman Army, 1826–53," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 44 (2014): 265–311.

[81] BOA, HAT 1058/43503, 2 Cemaziyelevvel 1242 (8 September 1826).

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The Era of Hasan Pasha and the New Potential of the Ottoman Mission

In contrast to Ahmed Pasha's sometimes brutal reign, missionary activities accelerated under the administration of Hasan Pasha. The government sent one *kadı* (Islamic judge) and several *na'ib*s (deputy judges) to Anapa to continue the religious training and Islamization of the tribes.[82] The Porte still viewed the Islamization of the highland tribes as essential for their incorporation into the empire. A Crimean-based Cossack regiment officer who was born in the northwestern Caucasus and educated in Russian military institutions, Khan Girei spoke highly of Hasan Pasha in his memoir.[83] Although he argued that some tribes remained pagan despite the efforts, Hasan Pasha achieved significant improvements in terms of Islamization. During his time, tribal leaders swore an oath to convert, accepted *kadı*s and *na'ib*s, and agreed to give a tithe to the Ottoman officers.[84] After more than a decade of Hasan Pasha's commandership in Anapa, another Russian imperial officer, Serebriyakov confirmed that at least half of the *kadı*s and *na'ib*s who were sent by Hasan Pasha were still active in the tribal area in the early 1840s.[85]

In alignment with their civilizing mission, the Ottomans in Anapa during the time of Hasan Pasha managed to collect extensive information regarding the tribes. Praising the efforts of Hasan Pasha, Khan-Girei wrote that "he tried to find out the slightest details about the region for the management.... He asked about local customs, and about ancient songs and traditions, which, according to him ... should have a strong influence on the spirit of a warlike people, devoid of written history."[86] Ottoman officers in Anapa started to use specific tribal names, the subgroups of the Circassian communities, instead of exclusively using the term "Circassian" for all tribes. The Ottoman application of ethnographic labels to hitherto undifferentiated tribal groups seems to be a definitive outcome of the waxing interest in the warrior populations settled around the frontier.[87] A report from 1827 investigated the differences between Abdzeh, Shapshugh, and Natukay tribes—the leading and the most populous tribes of the northwestern Caucasus—regarding their inclination toward Islam, the degree of Islamization within the tribe, and their political affinity with the Ottomans.[88] Khan Girei also reflected upon these differences and verified the findings in the report prepared by Hasan Pasha. According to the notes of the former, although Natukay tribes were better adjusted to Ottoman governance and Islam, Ottoman officers struggled with the Shapshugh. In the words of Khan Girei, "overcoming the rebellious spirit of this warlike people" due to their stricter feudal structure was a serious challenge for Hasan Pasha.[89]

Improvements at the fortress and the military recruitment of tribes also dramatically advanced during the reign of Hasan Pasha when compared to his predecessor. Hasan Pasha sponsored a wide-ranging reconstruction of the fort with the intention of adding a few barracks and quarters as well as a bigger warehouse.[90] Right after his appointment, he also transferred gifts and ammunition to the tribes, including shovels, broadcloths, rifles, and

[82] BOA, HAT 1042/43137, no date.

[83] A British agent in the Caucasus in the 1830s, James S. Bell, also mentions that tribes still adored Hasan Pasha. See James S. Bell, *Journal of a Residence in Circassia during the Years 1837, 1838 and 1839*, vol. 2 (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), 67.

[84] Khan-Girei, "Knyaz' pshskoy Akhod'yako," in *Sbornik materialov dlya opisaniya mestnostey i plemen Kavkaza Vypusk* 17 (Tbilisi, 1893), 19–23.

[85] Berzhe, *Akty* 10, doc. 240, 11 December 1852, 243. The Russian officer, however, thinks that Hasan Pasha used crude power to convert them but met with resistance. According to him, Islam spread through marital and commercial relations.

[86] Khan-Girei, "Knyaz' pshskoy Akhod'yako," 23.

[87] Aksan, "Mobilization," 337.

[88] BOA, HAT 1102/44560, 21 Rebiülahir 1243 (11 November 1827).

[89] Khan-Girei, "Knyaz' pshskoy Akhod'yako," 22.

[90] BOA, HAT 1058/43503, 5 Safer 1242 (8 September 1826).

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robes worth 26,000 piastres.[91] In several cases, it is quite clear that Hasan Pasha bore the expenses together with the Porte.[92] Aiming to boost the Ottoman credibility, he acted on behalf of the tribes and demanded compensation for their losses from the governor-general of the Caucasus, Prince Yermolov, the chief administrator of the Russian areas in the entire Caucasus, after material damages inflicted by the Russians.[93] He sent out an announcement to all the tribes about his commandership in Anapa and invited princes, nobles, clergy, and elders of the people to consult with him.[94] Eventually, he persuaded several tribal chiefs to camp at the walls of the Anapa fortress for three months. During this time, he held councils with these leaders, where they exchanged ideas about their conflict with the Russians and other tribal chiefs who were allied with the Russians.[95]

In the summer of 1826, Hasan Pasha started military training with the highlanders, focusing on cannon and rifle use. In a document he sent to the Porte regarding his training activities, he shared positive feelings about the tribes and admired their courage and character. Accordingly, he reported that even though the Porte was not at war with the Russian Empire, they should remain on alert against the Russians. Therefore, at his own initiative, he began to prepare the tribes with the aim of potentially providing more than thirty thousand troops for the new Ottoman Imperial army. Moreover, he argued, they did not have any monetary system, so the Porte would not have to spend excessive amounts to maintain this army.[96] These military training activities seem to have worried the Russians, as the Russian ambassador in Istanbul fiercely protested Hasan Pasha's work. The ambassador underlined the fact that the Treaty of Bucharest of 1812 did not specifically classify the tribes as Ottoman subjects. The Porte, however, claimed that it was legitimate to train the tribes.[97]

According to Hasan Pasha, the tribes already upheld a strong military tradition, which was even comprehensible from their behaviors and their costumes. In his reports to the government, he often emphasized the fact that the government did not have to send military attire as the traditional costumes of the tribes fit well in the military context.[98] The government was not receptive to this idea, however, as clothing was a definitive mark of Ottoman military modernization. Standardized military attire of disciplined soldiers instead of traditional costumes of warriors distinguished the stagnant past from the "modern self" that the Ottoman military reform aimed to achieve. Although Hasan Pasha's insistence on tribal costumes was an outcome of his admiration of the Circassian tribes, the noble savages, in this respect he fell short of the ideals of imperial military reform.[99] Framing his duty as integrating Circassian tribes with their costumes into the modern imperial army instead of establishing a combatant tribal army for the particularity of the region ran against everything that the Ottoman military reform after 1826 represented.

Nevertheless, the mood in the government concerning the Caucasus took a definite positive turn. Especially after 1826, Hasan Pasha's term and his accomplishments in the North Caucasus were praised in government reports.[100] From the perspective of Hasan Pasha,

[91] BOA, C. AS 458/19110, 25 Zilkade 1240 (11 July 1825).
[92] BOA, HAT 1103/44569, 21 Rebiülahir 1242 (22 November 1826).
[93] BOA, HAT 1104/44592, 20 Muharrem 1241 (4 September 1824). Yermolov, however, in his defense, claimed that the tribes, especially the Kabardians, crossed the border, committed plunder, and made the Russians pursue them.
[94] Khan-Girei, "Knyaz' pshskoy Akhod'yako," 26.
[95] BOA, HAT 1003/44569, 15 Ramazan 1242 (12 April 1827).
[96] BOA, HAT 1071/43831, no date.
[97] BOA, HAT 1169/46251, 23 Zilhicce 1242 (18 July 1827).
[98] BOA, HAT 1071/43831, no date.
[99] Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 786.
[100] BOA, HAT 1102/44560, 21 Rebiülevvel 1242 (23 October 1826).

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his appointment as the governor of Trabzon and the commander of Anapa was taken as a great career opportunity and the regional network that he was part of rendered him the strongest man within the province, at least for a while. However, from the government's perspective, he, as a provincial notable, channeled the benefits of those local and regional networks into the imperial political system "showing multiple and ambivalent forms of integration."[101] Within a few years, he became integrated into the Ottoman political system through Trabzon and the northwestern Caucasus by the seriousness with which he undertook the imperial projects regarding the Caucasian frontier. During a period when the Ottoman government was dealing with military reforms and trying to find soldiers to serve the regular army, Hasan Pasha, as instructed, approached the Circassians, gathered information about them, and, according to his statements, recruited a certain number of tribes. He distanced himself from the inadequacies of earlier commanders, without mentioning names, and defined himself as the best for the job.

The era of Hasan Pasha is highly illustrative of the political shrewdness of provincial notables who undertook administrative roles in the Ottoman government. First of all, Hasan Pasha spoke the language of his time. He noted that the government forces had managed to suppress multiple janissary rebellions in the capital and the provinces in mid-1826 and, finally, abolished the janissary corps, and that the New Order forces, namely Asakir-i Mansure, at least nominally held the dominant position in the Ottoman world. He took care to frame his deeds at Anapa by making references to the new order. In this way, endeavoring to gain legitimacy for his duty in the Caucasus, Hasan Pasha showed discursive support for Ottoman military reform, underlining his contribution to the imperial cause of the period.

Correspondence between the government and Hasan Pasha regarding the possibility of the tribes' inclusion in the new order shows that the content of Ottoman military reform in the first half of the 19th century was often left to the input of the provincial notables. This reality contradicts the perception that provincial notables were always a conservative bulwark against Ottoman reform. Considering that military training for the tribes was part of initiating the new regular army, the pasha, at least nominally, exceeded the expectations of the government. Nevertheless, his deeds in Anapa were downplayed by the Porte. A short note from the government, which was appended to Hasan Pasha's report, in which he expressed his intentions regarding the military training of the Circassians and his contribution to the new army, indicates that the government regarded Hasan Pasha's ambitions for the tribes as senseless, if not completely idiotic. The note says:

> We still could not clarify the New Order (Asakir-i Mansure) to the Muslims of Anatolia and Rumeli. This (Hasan Pasha) is trying to conscript soldiers from these populous tribes for the regular army even though they have just been honored by the glory of Islam. It will not get back on the rails immediately. God willing, [but] it will come right gradually.[102]

The communication between Hasan Pasha and the Ottoman government demonstrates that the expectations of the Ottoman government were by no means clear. The government genuinely wanted to be present in the Caucasus and, simultaneously, cement relations with the highlanders, but training them for the regular army was not among their expectations. Their very recent conversion to Islam also acted as a barrier to their full inclusion in the imperial agenda and, by emphasizing their nascent Muslim identity, the government, in a

[101] Marc Aymes, *A Provincial History of the Ottoman Empire: Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2014), 50.

[102] Author's translation. BOA, HAT 1102/44560, 21 Rebiülevvel 1242 (23 October 1826).

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sense, maintained a politics of difference toward the highlanders.[103] The note regarding Hasan Pasha's "misunderstanding" highlights the complexity of implementing policy on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. Carrying out the imperial mission in the borderland was far from straightforward, depending on the individual initiative of multiple social actors and their interpretations of government policies rather than a panacea that could overcome difficulties overnight.

Conclusion

Most literature on the making of the modern Caucasus relies heavily on the contributions of the historians of the Russian Empire. This tendency partly stems from the extensive knowledge production of Russian officers and intellectuals in the 19th century, who viewed the region through the lens of a colonial establishment and left ample writings in their wake, and partly from the fact that Anapa, at long last, was absorbed into Russian territory. Except for the military encounters between empires, the Ottoman past of the region that chiefly took place around coastal fortresses and through the relations with the frontier populations by the mid-19th century has not seemed central to the empire's story. The history of the Caucasus, however, could yield more concerning the roles of provincial notables and frontier elites in the functioning of the Ottoman Empire as well as the impact of tribal structures on the imperial projects targeting the region, especially given the heightened concern at the Porte in the early 19th century.

The account of the Circassian highlander army project in the northwestern Caucasus, underlining the significance of the qualities of individual Ottoman officers for particular posts, lays the foundations for more extensive inquiries into the positionality of provincial notables in the making of imperial frontiers. Any type of new policy that the Ottoman government wished to insert into the administrative and military structure of the empire must have passed through the complicated network in the provinces, which was replete with numerous local actors with multiple agendas. Although the provincial notables in the region genuinely benefited from the already-established itinerant military networks in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus during the early 19th century, examining their particular attachment to imperial projects and their sociopolitical power to realize these projects provides a different perspective through which to understand the prospects and limits of the partnership between the Ottoman government and the notables.

The Ottoman deeds in the Caucasus in the early 19th century also challenge the temporal boundaries of the Ottoman "civilizing mission," as works dealing with this topic almost always date their narrative to the second half of the 19th century. This article heeds a criticism raised by Christine Philliou, who argued that the first quarter of the 19th century, which the time frame of this study falls into, "is lumped into a murky, 'pre-Tanzimat' world that does not seem to merit careful attention."[104] Rather than putting exclusive emphasis on the conventional periodization of the current literature, this study has shown that the Ottoman establishment on the Caucasus frontier, with the contributions of provincial notables and local agents, was capable of studying, training, and disciplining the tribal populations during a time of increasing Russian threat at the frontier in the early 19th century.

By investigating the Circassian army project in the northwestern Caucasus and the sociopolitical power of provincial notables over regional politics in the Eastern Black Sea

[103] Hamed-Troyanski, *Empire of Refugees*, 14. In literature on the topic it has generally been accepted that even when the Circassian tribes arrived in the Ottoman Empire later in the 19th century, their Islamic identity remained new and inconspicuous.

[104] Christine Philliou, "Mischief in the Old Regime: Provincial Dragomans and Social Change at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 25 (2001): 104–5.

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region, this study has demonstrated the dynamics of frontier administration while avoiding binary readings of local, regional, and central regarding the origins of Ottoman officers. Within the context of Ottoman borderlands in the long 19th century, the question of whether the Caucasus was a unique case deserves careful attention. Further inquiries centering on frontier areas during the same period will lead to a reassessment of the perception of borderlands by the Ottoman government and of the forms of employment of Ottoman officers.

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