

Who brought masses of Armenians to the Southern Caucasus? (documentary evidence)

In October 2020, at the height of the hostilities in Karabakh, French historian and writer Olivier Delorme called [from the pages of Le Figaro](#) “stop using the word separatism in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh, Artsakh settled by more than 90% Armenians since antique times”. French intellectual did not make references to any sources or even more to documentary evidence of his words about «90% Armenians from antique times». [Qarabag.com](#) tried to verify the claim on the basis of Russian archival materials and Armenian academic research. In order to figure it out, let's start at the beginning.

In the first two decades of the 18th century, because of enormous efforts to modernize the social order and the system of state administration, the archaic Russian Kingdom became a world empire. During this time, Peter I created one of the strongest armies in the world, founded a new capital by European standards, and significantly expanded his territories to the west at the expense of the Baltic states.

Having consolidated his position in Europe, the Russian monarch launched an active expansion southward. **As a result of the Persian Campaign in 1722-23, Russia for the first time gained vast territories in the South Caucasus and Northern Iran. It was also the first time that Russia proclaimed itself to be a major player in Middle East politics.**

“If the Great Transducer cut a window into Europe, then it must be said that he was the first to cut our window to Asia, or, as it is sometimes put, “opened the gates to Asia”. This

expression successfully characterizes all Peter's activities during his campaigns in the East".

[\[Peter the Great's campaign to Persia // Russian Herald, 1874. P. 5\] \(Russian\)](#)

It was Peter I who established the unchanged principle of Russian policy in the East that is the search for allies and reliance on marginal forces in the region that share or at least proclaim common ideological values. For almost two centuries, the Russian Empire relied on the Christian peoples of the East. The Soviet Union relied on anti-western political forces of a socialist or communist orientation in the region. The main ally of modern Russia in the Middle East is the anti-Western Assad regime which represents the interests of Syria's ethno-religious Alawi minority.

During the Persian campaign of 1722-1723 the Russian Empire made a bet on Eastern Christians, Armenians and Georgians. The Armenian component of the Peter's strategy of relying on ideological allies in the form of ethno-religious minorities remains unchanged until now. Observance of this principle by Peter's successors in the XIX century created preconditions for the formation of a modern administrative-political division of the South Caucasus, its ethnic composition, and, consequently, the Karabakh conflict.

Origin of Armenian migration plans

By the beginning of the Russian expansion to the East, Armenians were scattered across various regions of the Persian and Ottoman Empires. They could only dream of own statehood. However, the Russian expansion to the south gave them a unique historic opportunity. The Armenians didn't miss it.

Peter's imperial ambitions coincided with the dreams of a small Christian nationality scattered among outnumbering Persians, Turks, Kurds and Arabs. Thus, the concept of creation of the Armenian kingdom that was intended to become a footstep and an instrument of further Russian expansion in the

East was born. However, but for the places where the vast majority of Armenians settled in the Persian and Ottoman Empire this was not feasible. Therefore, the land which the Russians had conquered from the Persians and was inhabited mainly by the Turks had been chosen for the implementation of the plan. Due to their religious and ethnic affinity with Russia's opponents in the region, especially Ottoman Empire, the Turks were regarded as unreliable. Therefore, it was decided to establish the Armenian bridge step in the South Caucasus at the expense of the interests of the majority of the local population. As noted in the description of the Persian campaign published in 1874 in the journal «The Russian Herald» on the basis of «Senate archival collection», the purpose of the planned resettlement of Armenians to the South Caucasus was to «strengthen Christianity in the area and displace Muslims to the extent possible».

The earliest evidence from the official documents on the development of plans for the Armenian resettlement in the Caucasus can be found in the work of former member of the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire, Petr Butkov:

«They resorted to Peter the Great with prayers of relief or the permit to settle them on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Four deputies including Armenian pop Antony Kevtetchebey were sent from their side.

...

On 10 November 1724, the following Empire decrees were issued:

To Major General Kropotov: « The Armenian folk asked us to be taken under our protection and to be resettled into the convenient places in our newly acquired Persian settlements... and to deal with them in such a manner that there would be no complaints from their side, and that thy Armenian people would be granted with our special imperial mercy and protection».

Lieutenant General Matyushkin and Brigadier Levashev were also

ordered (this was announced to the entire Armenian people) to address Armenians and other Christians calling for them to the settlement in the Persian provinces occupied by Russian troops: Gilan, Mazanderan, Baku, Derbent and other convenient places, to accept them kindly giving mercy and protection to them; to grant them land convenient for their settlement in decent places, and to give them those yards and belongings that are empty in cities and villages; also those of the Mohammedans (Muslims) who appeared in any opposition (resisted to the Russian authorities), or there is any suspicion on whom, should be removed, and their places should be taken by these Christians."

[\[Butkov P.G. Materials for the new history of the Caucasus from 1722 to 1803. St. Petersburg, 1869. T. I – pp. 67-68\] \(Russian\)](#)

Generals Matyushkin and Levashov, to whom Peter ordered «to involve Armenians and other Christians for settlement» commanded Russian troops in Persia. This would imply that the resettlement agitation was the description of the Persian campaign in the «Russian Herald» (1874), plans for resettlement were also applied to Turkish Armenians.

«In 1724, after long negotiations with the Turkish government... Brigadier Rumyantsev was sent to Constantinople as special envoy, who was instructed incidentally to persuade the Armenians to move to Gilan and other our territories».

[\[Peter the Great's campaign to Persia // Russian Herald, 1874. P. 57\] \(Russian\)](#)

After the death of Peter, Russia temporarily abandoned the expansion into Asia. But already in the 1780s, Prince Gregory Potemkin, who had been dreaming of the disruption of Ottoman Empire and the restoration of Byzantine Empire under the Russian leadership, resumed the expansion into Asia. Along with the idea, he revived the Peter's strategy of relying on the Armenians for promoting his large-scale eastern projects.

«In 1783, Russian troops occupied Georgia... and the almighty Potemkin came into an active contact with the Armenian

Archbishop Joseph to create a strong Christian state from Armenia in Asia under the supreme domination of Russia...

Prince Potemkin sought to become Tsar of the restored Armenia which would bordered with Persia, Turkey and Russia and have a harbour on the Caspian Sea...

In the political context, Armenia was designed under the patronage of Russia. A small Russian detachment would protect the borders from Turkish and Persian attacks.

It was decided to begin with the Karabakh Khanate to overthrow Ibrahim Khan and replace him with an Armenian ruler. The campaign was supposed to take place in the summer of 1784; troops were already being prepared. But while projects were being written and their execution was being prepared, political circumstances changed dramatically».

[\[Potto V. The Caucasian War in individual essays, episodes, legends and biographies. Volume III. The Persian War of 1826-1828 Saint Petersburg, 1888. Pp. 718-720; scan # 4\] 1888. Pp. 718-720\] \(Russian\)](#)

Despite the change in political circumstances and the death of Potemkin in 1791, the Russian advance to the South was delayed no longer. As a result of this, the old Peter's plans for the resettlement of Armenians were revived. The evidence to that is in the report by one of the Russian commanders in the Caucasus Peter Nesvetaev, which he sent to his supervisors on December 11, 1805.

«Recorded words of the Armenian Kocher: By order of y.e. from (Your Excellency), he was sent from me (Nesvetaev) 3 months ago, and, according to the local Armenians, he was an infiltrator in Bayazit (now Dogubayazit is a city in the east of modern Turkey), for an agreement to resettle us. More than 10,000 families answered him verbally: when, by the grace of God, Erivan will be occupied by the Russian army, then all Armenians will agree to enter to the patronage of Russia to be resettled into the Erivan province... ».

Migration of Armenians from Iran to the South Caucasus (1828-1830)

Two decades later, the Russian expansion to the East was well under way. As a result of the war with Persia in 1826-1828, the Erivan and Nakhichevan Khanates were included into the Russian Empire. After that, the implementation of the long-standing Peter's plans to resettle Armenians in the South Caucasus began.

«And soon after the Russian troops occupied Tabriz (at that time the capital of the Persian Empire, now the city of Tabriz is in the north-west of modern Iran), deputations from the Aderbeydzhan (North Iranian) Armenians began to appear to Paskevich's with the requests to resettle them by the Russian borders... This coincided with the views of the Russian government. The Commander-in-Chief fondled them and let them go home with permission to prepare for resettlement...

Paskevich also sent Colonel Lazarev, who had been summoned from Petersburg to supervise the entire relocation.

Colonel Lazarev belonged to the long-settled Armenian family in Russia, which were known for the founding of the Institute of Oriental Languages, the building of Armenian churches in capitals and, in general, the wide assistance of their countrymen...

One of the representatives of this family has now appeared in Armenia to facilitate the work of the Armenian resettlement using his influence. Lazarev himself traveled for this purpose to Maraga, Salmaz, and Urmia... (all these regions were located on the territory of the present North-Western Iran)».

«On March 9, 1828, the last Russian troops left Tavris... Armenians from various villages adjacent to Turkmenchay (the surroundings of Tabriz) set off to Karabakh».

[\[Glinka S. Description Of the resettlement of the Adderbidzhan Armenians to the borders of Russia. Moscow, 1831. P. 48\] \(Russian\)](#)

The Russian historian Sergei Glinka, who wrote a detailed description of the events only three years later, noted **that Armenians «were almost entirely displaced from Persia.»**^{[Glinka, 1831 P. 48].}

According to the official documents used by the historian, *«more than five thousand families crossed the Araks... At this time, Lazarev (who conducted the resettlement) was instructed to direct the path of the settlers from the Khanates of Nakhichevan and Yerivan to the Khanate of Karabakh, where, according to assumptions, there were abundant and reliable reserves »*^{[Glinka, 1831. P. 87].}

As a result, *«Lazarev added about 40,000 new subjects to Russia»* ^{[Glinka, 1831. P. 92] (Russian).}

The same author quotes an official document that is the appeal of Colonel Lazarev to the Armenian settlers of 30 March 1828:

«...The magnanimous Monarch of Russia gives those who want to resettle a safe, peaceful and happy refuge in His State, that is in Erivan, Nakhichevan and Karabakh, where you will choose. You will get bread-making land partially planted in abundance where only a tenth from the income will be sent in favor of the treasury. You exempt from any taxes for six years, and there will be provided assistance for the relocation of the poorest of you».

[\[Glinka S. Description Of the resettlement of the Adderbidzhan Armenians to the borders of Russia. Moscow, 1831. P. 108-109\] \(Russian\)](#)

On December 24, 1829, in another report to his chief, Count Paskevich, Lazarev wrote:

«...On May 8, I also received the order of Your Excellency No. 926 dated April 24 on persuading most of the immigrants, especially the poorest, to move to Karabakh where they can be provided with everything... In the absence of government lands in the Nakhichevan Khanate for the resettlement, I tried to persuade many Armenians to settle in the Erivan and Karabakh Khanates, and convinced them to follow my advice »[\[Glinka, 1831. Pp. 127, 129\] \(Russian\)](#).

For its part, the famous Russian poet Alexander Griboedov, who played an active role in the post-war negotiations with the Persians, and was appointed ambassador to Persia in 1828 , reported in the «Note on the resettlement of Armenians from Persia to our areas»:

«The Colo[nel] L[azarev] thought only about the composing of proclamations, which are rather inappropriate, and, incidentally, the formation of a regular Armenian militia believing even to include Karabakh itself and other regions in the scope of its designs. The plans were well-intentioned, but reckless...

Armenians mostly settled on Muslim lands. In the summer it could be possible. The masters, that's the Muslims, were mostly nomads and had few contacts with gentile newcomers.

No forests have been harvested and no other places have been set aside for the permanent resettlement of displaced persons. The opportunities were lost in due time. It is too late to correct the year's error. The settlers themselves are in in cramped conditions and push the Muslims, who have been all growling».

[\[Griboedov A.S. Works in two volumes. Moscow: Pravda Publishing House, 1971. II – pp. 339-340; V I – pp. 339-340\] \(Russian\)](#)

According to the calculations of Vardan Parsamyan, who was a senior researcher at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR in the 1980s, «during the

spring months of 1828, about 45-50 thousand Armenians» were resettled from the north-eastern regions of Iran. They were placed on the lands of the former Erivan, Nakhchivan and Karabakh Khanates [[Parsamyan V.A. History of the Armenian people 1801-1900.Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing House, 1972. Book one – pp. 50-51](#)].

The resettlement of Armenians to the South Caucasus has only just begun hereon. The Turkish Armenians followed their countrymen from Persia.

Migration of Armenians from Turkey to the South Caucasus (1829-1908)

«In 1829-1830, more than 90,000 Armenians from Erzurum, Kars and Bayezet settled in Transcaucasia... Western Armenian refugees, like those from Persia, were exempted from state taxes for six years, and from zemstvo taxation for three years. Families in need were given an allowance of up to 25 roubles».

[[Parsamyan V. A History of the Armenian people 1801-1900.Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing House, 1972. Book one – p. 66](#)] (Russian).

According to another researcher at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, Hayk Kazaryan, immigrants from Turkey were also sent to the territory of the former Erivan, Nakhichevan and Karabakh Khanates [[Ghazaryan G. Resettlement of Armenians from Persia to the Armenian region in 1828 // News of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR №7, July 1957 – p. 71](#)] (Russian).

According to Parsamyan, **a total of 140,000 Armenians from Iran and Turkey moved to the South Caucasus between 1828 and 1830.** According to the same author, the majority of the inhabitants in the new for Armenians settlement were Muslims.

*«In cases of spontaneous resettlement, this **led to clashes with the indigenous population sooner or later... In most of the conflicts, the authority was on the side of the migrants...**»*

[[Ghazaryan G. Resettlement of Armenians from Persia to the Armenian region in 1828 // News of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR №7, July 1957 – p. 69](#)] (Russian).

«After the Crimean Campaign (1853-1856), a certain number of Armenians were settled, the exact number of which were not recorded...

The happy ended Turkish War of 1877-79 bring us a big influx of newcomers from Asia Minor : about 50,000 Armenians inhabited the Kara region... In addition, General Terkugas brings 35,000 caravans of Turkish Armenians in Surmalinsky County and they still remain there.

This is followed by a continuous influx of Armenians from Asia Minor moving alone and with families. On a larger scale, the resettlement of Armenians begins again in the period from 1893-1894 during the Armenian riots in Turkey».

[\[Shavrov N.N. A new threat to the Russian business in the Transcaucasus: the upcoming sale of Mugan to foreigners. St. Petersburg: Editorial board of Financial Journal of the Ministry of Finance. P. 59-60\] \(Russian\)](#)

«Among the unwelcome guardians of the Armenian people, the dream of creating an autonomous «kingdom» and especially within the Russian borders does not fade away, it has been flaring up. They had no territory in Turkey, and they want to create it artificially in the Caucasus. Tens of thousands of Turkish emigrants invade our borders, and our warriors do not dare to shoot these «peaceful» gangs because Armenians push forward women and children».

[\[Velichko V.L. Caucasus. St. Petersburg, 1904. V I, p. 106\] \(Russian\)](#)

«...1,000,000 people from the 1,300 thousands Armenians living in Transcaucasia are not indigenous in the province and were settled by us. How large the number of Armenians who have migrated to us over the past 13 years can be seen from the comparison of the following two figures: in 1896, in his Humble (that is, addressed to the Tsar) note, Gen.-ad. (Adjutant General) Sheremetev determined that the number of Armenians living in Transcaucasia was about 900,000 people, and in 1908 there were already 1,300,000 people of both sexes, that is, for this time the population have increased by no

less than 400,000 people. If a natural increase is excluded, it turns out that for 13 years we have brought more than 300,000 Armenians», – the founder and long-term head of the Caucasian silk station Nikolay Shavrov noted in 1911.

[\[Shavrov N.N. A new threat to the Russian business in the Transcaucasus: the upcoming sale of Mugan to foreigners. St. Petersburg: Editorial board of Financial Journal of the Ministry of Finance. P. 60\] \(Russian\)](#)

The policy of mass settlement of the South Caucasus by Armenians from Iran and Turkey pursued by the authorities from 1828 until almost the collapse of the Russian Empire fundamentally changed the ethnic composition of the region. Thus, preconditions were artificially created for bloody clashes between Armenians and Turks throughout the South Caucasus in 1905-1906, 1918-1921, 1987-1989, for the Karabakh war of 1990-1994 and for the current phase of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.