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THE 'LONG MILLENNIUM'

The Caucasus from the medieval to the early modern periods

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Introduction

Any historical account covering a millennial timespan presents challenges of complexity, inclusion and perspective. The Caucasus in the 1,100-year period covered in this chapter presents extreme versions of these challenges. Due to the Caucasus' significance as a strategic location at a multi-facing frontier, it was sought after by Sasanian Iran, the Arab Caliphate, Byzantium, the Khazar Khaganate, the Seljuk, Mongol, Ottoman, Safavid and Russian empires and other major Near/Middle Eastern and Eurasian powers, which treated it as either the northern or southern periphery of their realms. As a result, various powerful external influences significantly affected the region's internal political, cultural, religious and ethnic divisions while it still, paradoxically, largely managed to sustain its distinctly 'Caucasian' civilisational core going back to the first millennium BCE when it was part of the Iran-centric *oikoumene* (Vacca 2017: 11; Yemelianova 2014). Political fragmentation, social stratification and cultural pluralism remained salient features of the Caucasus throughout this period, as neither distant suzerains nor intermittently consolidating local power centres were able to firmly rein in centripetal tendencies. Consequently, various parts of the contemporary Caucasus reflect particular syntheses and synergies between this Caucasian civilisational core and Iranian, Arab, Armenian, Greek, Turkic and Slavic ethno-cultural and religious infusions over what we term here the 'long millennium' from the seventh to the eighteenth century.

It is somewhat daunting to research what actually happened at different stages of the Caucasus' medieval and early modern history because of the scarcity and unevenness of available sources. Modern historians have to read between the lines of fragmented and often conflicting historical accounts based on Greek, Roman, Iranian, Armenian, Georgian and Arab geographical and political treatises which are far from impartial and imbued with political meanings reflecting the particular political environment and loyalties of their authors (Vacca 2017: 52). Since many cultural artefacts, such as place-names, languages and religious identities, have survived to the present day, the retrojection of modern national identities into the distant past is a constant temptation. Yet the meanings of terms such as 'Armenia', 'Georgia' or 'Azerbaijan' were not stable, but varied considerably across time, source, and perspective. Nationalist narratives of continuity across the long millennium do not take into account perennial innovation and cultural adaptation by pre-modern populations (Vacca

2017: 15). Rather than continuity and consistency, there are numerous factual, geographical and perceptional discrepancies, as well as inconsistencies and mismatches between the various employed toponyms and ethnonyms, in addition to the problematic nature of 'super-Armenia' and other geographical and political concepts (Vacca 2017: 54).

A major epistemological challenge is the considerable imbalance between the relatively large number of medieval Greco-Roman, Armenian and Georgian written sources on the Caucasus and the absence, or near absence, of such sources by Caucasian Albanian, Khazar, Turkic and Turkic-Genghizid writers. Inevitably, this imbalance affects Caucasian historical studies in the West, which largely draw on Christian sources and thus tend to over-emphasise the Christian dimension of Armenian and Georgian histories while downplaying their lengthy existence within the Persianised *Dar-i Islam*. Among the few Western scholars who have based their research into Caucasus history on both Christian and Islamic sources are Minorsky (1953), Toumanoff (1963), Vacca (2017) and Rapp Jr. (see Chapter 4). In contrast, Russian and Caucasian historians of Islamic heritage prioritise the available Arabic sources, which accounts for their substantially different historical perspective on the region. In particular, they emphasise the formative role of Caucasian Albania (Arran, in Arabic sources) in the political and cultural development of various peoples of the region, corresponding to most of contemporary Dagestan and the south-eastern Caucasus.[1] Additionally, since the late Soviet period, historical studies of the contemporary southern Caucasus have been affected by the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, which has contributed to some historicised essentialisation of Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnicities by projecting their supposed 'continuity' in the contested area from 'pre-national' times when Caucasians' affinities were primarily of a regional and dynastic nature.

Chronologically, this chapter surveys the period between the conquest of the Caucasus by Muslim Arabs in the seventh century until the beginning of the imperial Russian advance in the region in the eighteenth century (see Chapter 7). It acknowledges the existence of a developed material and spiritual culture in the region prior to the Arab conquest. From the second millennium BCE the region had been part of sophisticated urban civilisations centred on present-day Iran, Iraq and Syria, including Akkadia, Assyria, Phoenicia, Babylon and later Persia. These civilisations were among the first to cultivate cereals for food, to invent terrace agriculture and artificial irrigation systems, to extract and forge copper, then iron, for tools and to create the first known alphabets (Ibrahimov 2006: 12; Forsyth 2013: 8). Given the topic's complexity and *longue durée*, we do not attempt to provide a detailed historical account but rather seek to introduce readers to the major internal and external political and cultural forces and their specific interactions contributing to the 'making' of the contemporary Caucasus.

The Arab conquest

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE and the creation of the first Medina-based Arab Caliphate under the four Righteous Caliphs (*Rashidun*, in Arabic, 632–61)[2] the Arab *ghazis* ('Muslim warriors') advanced southwards – towards Yemen – and northwards – towards Syria, Egypt and southern Iraq. The Arab conquests reached a new level during the second Arab Caliphate under the Umayyads (661–750) centred on Damascus so that by the end of the Umayyad period, the Caliphate also encompassed the Maghreb, the Iberian peninsula (Al-Andalus), Sindh in present-day Pakistan, the Ferghana valley (Transoxiana) in Central Asia and most of the Caucasus. The Arabs regarded control over the Caucasus as an important condition for their political and economic domination of the Near/Middle East (Khanbabaev 2010: 84).

The Muslim Arabs' drive towards the Caucasus put them on a collision course with the Byzantines, Sasanians, Caucasian Albanians and Khazars. In 636 CE the Arabs defeated the Sasanians in a battle at al-Qadisiyya (in present-day Iraq) and moved northwards, where they met fierce opposition by Byzantium and the Khazar Khaganate or their proxies. In 643/4 Arab troops under the command of Salman ibn Rabi'ah al-Bahili and Habib ibn Muslim conquered Darband (Derbent) and some other parts of Caucasian Albania. In 645 the Arab troops took Barda/Partav (in present-day Azerbaijan) and Tiflis/Tbilisi. The Arabs named Darband *Bab al-Abwab* ('Gate of all Gates'), referring to its strategic position as the gateway to their northern territories. Barda was made the Caliphate's regional administrative and military centre from where the Arabs conducted their attacks against the Caucasian Albanians and Khazars. The first Arab governor of the Caliphate's northern territories was Mughira ibn Shu'ba al-Taqafi, Prophet Muhammad's companion (Vacca 2017: 25).

In 705 the Arabs decisively defeated Caucasian Albania and re-organised its territories in southern Dagestan, most of present-day Azerbaijan and eastern Georgia into the province of Arran (Caucasian Albania). In 736, in Jurzan (Kartli and Hereti) caliphal emissaries established the Emirate of Tbilisi which existed till 1122, when it was finally defeated by the Georgian king, David IV. But it was Darband and the adjacent parts of southern Dagestan where the Arab Islamic impact was the greatest. The region received over 24,000 Arab settlers from Greater Syria, resulting in its substantial ethno-linguistic and cultural Arabisation (Abdullayev 1993: 91). In Darband the Arabs built the Grand Mosque as the marker of this ancient city's transition from Caucasian Albania's eastern outpost of Christianity to the Caliphate's northern centre of Islam and Islamic scholarship. Another Arab legacy is the proliferation in Dagestan of a stricter Shafi'i *madhhab* (school of Sunni jurisprudence) and the prevalence of Arabic-based Islamic scholarship and culture in Dagestan, whose Islamic scholars – the *'ulama'* (*'alims*) – were directly involved in the codification of the Shafi'i *madhhab* (see Chapter 5).

During the third Caliphate under the Persianate Abbasids (750–1258) the Caucasus was divided into the three *wilayahs* ('provinces') of Arran, Arminiyya (present-day Armenia and parts of eastern Turkey) and Azerbaijan (present-day Azerbaijani provinces in north-western Iran), although the borders between these three provinces were obscure.[3] During this period the region was included into the Caliphate's tax system – *'ushr* ('tithe'), and *zakat* ('alms') for its Muslim population, and the much heavier *jizyah* ('individual tax') and *kharaj* ('land tax') for non-Muslims (Osmanov 2004: 185–86). Still, the caliphal control of the region was neither tight nor consistent. The majority of eastern Georgians and Armenians preserved their Christian beliefs by paying *jizyah*. In the first part of the eighth century the territory of modern Azerbaijan became an arena for the popular anti-Arab movement under the leadership of Babak al-Khurrami (Khorramdin, d. 838), which also engulfed most of north-western Iran (Sattarov 2010: 148).

From the 870s *Bab al-Abwab* and adjacent areas of southern Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan gained de facto independence from the Abbasids. The former came under the control of local Muslim *amirs* (*emirs*, 'rulers'), while the latter became the centre of the Sunni Muslim state of Shirvanshahs (Shirwan).[4] By the tenth century the Shirvanshahs controlled most of present-day Azerbaijan and some other parts of the southern Caucasus and northern Iran. The Shirvanshahs made their lasting impact on modern Azerbaijanis by introducing a sophisticated architectural style and distinctive musical and literary traditions embodied in the romantic epic and lyric poetry of Khaqani (d. 1199) and Nizami Ganjavi (d. 1209).

The revival of Christian kingdoms

Under caliphal rule, Christian Armenia, Albania and Georgia had remained hotly contested territories, claimed by Byzantium, the Caliphate, the Khazars, local Arab *emirs*, Armenian, Georgian and Albanian noble families and local Iranian elites around the Caspian (Vacca 2017: 33). The caliphal elite was consequently preoccupied with the protection of these territories of the 'North', given the persistence of the Byzantine military threat. Caliphal rule aimed at preventing the emigration of Christian subjects from these territories, in order to preclude their vulnerability through depopulation, and at encouraging Arab settlement within them (Vacca 2017: 163). Local noble families oscillated between Byzantium, on the one side, and Damascus (till 744), Harran (till 750) and Baghdad (till 1258), on the other, while mounting frequent rebellions against caliphal rule. Led by the Mamikonian family, the Armenian *nakharars* (nobility), for example, repeatedly rebelled, unsuccessfully, in 705, 748, 774 and 850 (Panossian 2006: 58). Campaigns of reprisals following the defeat of these revolts decimated the ranks of local nobles, none more so than the campaigns of Bugha al-Kabir (Bugha al-Turki, d. 862), a Turkic *ghulam* ('military slave') in the service of the caliph sent to reassert caliphal authority in the North in 851–52 and 855–56. Yet a Muslim versus Christian reading of violence in this era would miss the mark: local nobles frequently formed alliances with Muslim overlords against their Christian peers, while Muslims and Christians suffered in unison during periods of reprisals.

In 861 Caliph Mutawakkil (r. 847–61) was assassinated, inaugurating the 'Decade of Anarchy' in Baghdad, after which the Abbasid caliphs were never able to re-establish total control over the North. This enabled noble families that had survived the preceding decades by accommodating Arab rule, and whose claims to dynastic precedence were strengthened by marital alliance and genealogical accident, to revive the lapsed traditions of Armenian and Georgian statehood. In Armenia the Bagratuni dynasty had come to terms with Arab rule, being designated 'princes of Armenia' (*išxan Hayoc*) since 806 (Hewsen 2001: 109). In 862 Ashot Bagratuni acceded to this title; having consolidated local power, in c. 884 Ashot was sent crowns by both Byzantine Emperor Basil I and the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tamid, becoming King Ashot I of Armenia (r. 884–90) and founder of a new royal dynasty. To the north, another Ashot from an offshoot of the Bagratuni family, the Bagrationis, had been recognised by the Byzantine emperor as the 'prince of Kartli' (*mtavar kartlisa*) in 813. Ashot I Bagrationi was subsequently murdered by rebellious nobles, but after the 'Decade of Anarchy' Adarnase IV restored the monarchy in 888. This inaugurated what Cyril Toumanoff refers to as 'the Bagratid Condominium', the restoration of Caucasian kingdoms under parallel branches of the same Bagratid dynasty in Georgia and Armenia (cited in Hewsen 2001: 108).

A number of other Bagratid family lines and other families sought to emulate the two Ashots in having their claims to royalty recognised. Beyond the Caucasus, the Armenian Artsruni family founded the Kingdom of Vaspurakan in the Van area in eastern Turkey in 908; in 962 another Bagratid royal line established a kingdom in Kars (previously Vanand) in north-eastern Turkey. Other, lesser, dynasts followed suit, so that princely houses in Syunik, Lori-Tashir, Gardman and Khachen also sought the recognition of their kingly status in the final decades of the tenth century. King Ashot I's grandson, Ashot II 'the Iron' (r. 914–28), in alliance with Byzantium, ousted much of the Arab presence from Armenia, and was recognised as 'King of Kings' by both Byzantium and the Caliphate. Under his rule and his successors King Abas (r. 928–52) and King Ashot III (r. 952–77), Armenia experienced a revival as a loose congeries of kingdoms and principalities ranging from Vaspurakan in the west to Khachen in the east, a concept of Armenia that stretched far beyond the modern understanding of

the Caucasus. In 961, the city of Ani, a site located just beyond the modern Armenian border with Turkey, became the Bagratuni capital: 'By medieval standards Ani was truly a magnificent metropolis, of 100,000 people at its peak – a city of "1001 churches", of trade, commerce and wealth, as well as of impenetrable fortifications at the height of its power' (Panossian 2006: 60).

The Armenian revival was nevertheless short-lived, weakened by systemic fractiousness deriving from struggles over dynastic inheritance and perennial shifts of allegiance under conditions of almost continuous warfare. In the eleventh century, Byzantine Emperor Basil II undertook a gradual conquest of the Armenian kingdoms. Annexing Vaspurakan in 1021, Byzantium advanced on the Armenian kingdoms to the north-east. Ani surrendered in 1045 and the Bagratid Armenian kingdom ceased to exist. The Byzantine advance was only stemmed by Seljuk invasion. In 1064 invading Seljuk forces conquered and looted Ani. The city would later intermittently fall under Georgian control, enjoying a short-lived revival under the Zakarid dynasty at the dawn of the thirteenth century, before being sacked again by Genghizid forces in 1236, and being finally destroyed by an earthquake in 1319. The disparate Armenian kingdoms and principalities were absorbed by new Turkic overlords, with only a small number of princely houses retaining some autonomy in the Lesser Caucasus mountains which converge with the high plateau of Eastern Anatolia.

The Bagratid condominium continued, however, under the aegis of its Georgian Bagrationi line. The Caliphate had extended over the eastern parts of what is now Georgia, namely the eastern provinces of Kartli, Kakheti and Hereti. In the west, the kingdoms of Tao-Klarjeti and Abkhazia, the latter by the late eighth century encompassing much of what is now western Georgia with its capital at Kutaisi from 790, remained under Byzantine suzerainty. The unification of these disparate kingdoms in 1008 was the result of ecclesiastical convergence, genealogical accident and political vision. Early in the tenth century, allegiance among bishoprics in the western Caucasus increasingly shifted from Constantinople to Mtskheta, with Georgian gaining ground on Greek in Christian service. This yielded an early definition of 'Georgia', by writer and monk Giorgi Merchule, as consisting 'of those spacious lands in which church services are celebrated and all prayers said in the Georgian [*kartuli*] tongue'. In 975 the childless David III of Tao, originating in an obscure Bagrationi subline, adopted his nephew, the fifteen-year old Bagrat. The teenager's grandfather was Bagrat II of Kartli; through his mother, Gurandukht, he was also nephew to the childless Theodosius III of Abkhazia (Rayfield 2012: 69–70). Thus embodying claims to Abkhazia and Kartli, as David's adopted son, Bagrat also became heir to Tao-Klarjeti. These converging royal claims resulted in Bagrat's recognition as king of a unified Georgia in 1008. Georgia prospered sufficiently for many key cultural landmarks to appear, including the construction of a royal palace and new cathedral in Kutaisi, the (re)construction of the Church of the Living Pillar (Sveti-Tskhoveli) at Mtskheta, and the collation with royal patronage of the *Life of Georgia* (*kartlis tskhovreba*) by Leonti Mroveli in the 1060s, chronicles that provide the principal source for this era of Georgian history. From this time, Georgia became known through the unifying term *sakartvelo*, meaning 'place of the Kartvelians' or just 'Georgia'. Bagratid Georgia was nevertheless a multi-ethnic commonwealth: the *Life of Georgia* acknowledges six languages spoken in Kartli: Georgian, Armenian, Khazar, Syriac, Hebrew and Greek.

Unity remained incomplete (Kakheti avoided incorporation for the rest of the century, while Arab *emirs* retained residual control over a kind of city-state in Tbilisi until 1122) and extremely precarious, and geopolitically viable largely because of Byzantine and caliphal distraction with military threats. Continuous warfare characterised the reigns of Bagrat and his immediate successors. Successive rounds of conflict with the Seljuks in particular depleted the kingdom, lending this era the name *didi turkoba* in Georgian, approximately meaning the

'great Turkish domination'. In the late eleventh century, the tide turned with the accession of David IV (r. 1089–1125), commemorated in Georgia as *davit aghmashenebeli*, 'David the Builder'. David IV reined in nobility and church, established a modern ministerial government at Kutaisi, reformed the army, sponsored learning, conquered Kakheti, Hereti and the Tbilisi Emirate and spread Georgian hegemony over adjacent territories (Rayfield 2012: 85–97). A string of military victories over larger forces, notably over a Seljuk army at Didgori in 1121, sealed his reputation as a brilliant if ruthless strategist.

Georgia's medieval 'golden age' followed under a succession of Bagratid monarchs including Giorgi III (r. 1156–84) and, perhaps most famously of all, (Queen) Tamar Mepe (r. 1184–1213). At its apogee, Bagratid Georgia was the dominant regional power, forming an empire stretching from Muslim Shirwan on the Caspian to Christian Trebizond (Trabzon) on the Black Sea, far in excess of Georgia's borders today. After the sacking of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204, Bagratid Georgia saw itself as the major Christian power in the east. The royal court nevertheless featured enduring Persianate influences, expressed, for example, in the elaborate lexicon describing official positions, such as *mandaturtukhutsesi* ('minister of the interior'), *amirspasalari* ('commander-in-chief') and *msakhurtukhutsesi* ('chancellor'). The court's chivalric culture was captured in the literary monument of the era, Shota Rustaveli's epic *vepkhistqaosani* (*The Man in the Panther's Skin*), thought to have been written around the turn of the thirteenth century in 1189–1207. A 'Persian tale' composed of 1,666 stanzas, this epic poem and cornerstone of Georgian literature narrates the adventures of a mysterious, melancholic knight, T'ariel, dressed in a panther's skin (Rayfield 1994: 73–86).

Bagratid decline began with initial encounters with militarily superior but transient Mongol armies in the early 1220s, and subsequent defeats by the shah of Chorasmia (Khwarazm), Jalal al-Din. By the middle of the thirteenth century Georgia had fallen under Genghizid suzerainty, although it retained considerable autonomy. Georgian political traditions survived and even thrived, such as under King Giorgi V ('the Brilliant', r. 1329–46), who codified 'a sophisticated, efficient feudal monarchy' (Rayfield 2012: 145), advised by a *sabch'o* (cabinet of ministers) and a *darbazi*, a legislature of lords (Rayfield 2012: 141–42). Weakened by bouts of anthrax and bubonic plague in the mid-fourteenth century, the kingdom was definitively destroyed by Timur Leng (*Amir* Timur, r. 1370–1405) in 1386. The demise of the kingdom at the hands of 'eastern hordes' provides the basis, as it does for numerous eastern Christian communities, for a mythic narrative of Georgia as *antemurale christianitatis*, an eastern Christian rampart martyred for the sake of Western Christendom.

The fate of the third Christian kingdom dating back to Caucasian antiquity, Caucasian Albania, is shrouded in mystery and controversy. Mystery proceeds from the near-total absence of Caucasian Albanian sources. Although the existence of a distinct Albanian alphabet was discovered in 1937, only in 2003 were palimpsests preserving fragments of Albanian text (a lectionary and parts of St John's Gospel) discovered at St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (Gippert and Schulze 2007). The primary extant texts on the history of Albania are, rather, written in Armenian. Controversy proceeds from conflicting historiographical perceptions of Caucasian Albanians among some Armenian historians, on the one side, and Dagestani, Azerbaijani, and some other historians, on the other. Thus, the Armenian historiographical tradition tends to downplay the role of Caucasian Albanians in the medieval Caucasus and focuses on various Armenian kingdoms including the Kingdom of Artsakh (present-day Nagorny Karabakh) (Hewsen 2001:118–121). By comparison, the respective Dagestani and Azerbaijani historiographical traditions are centred on Caucasian Albania and tend to perceive the Caucasian Albanians as an ancestor community for various peoples of Dagestan, modern Azerbaijanis and some other peoples of the Caucasus (Gadzhiev et al. 2002; Khanbabaev 2010; Mamedova 2005; Shikhsaidov 1969).[5]

Leaving these debates aside, establishing distinct historical, geographic or cultural coordinates for Albania is extremely challenging. After the demise of the Albanian kingdom in 705, Albania lived on as the Arab province of Arran (Armenian: Aluank or Aghvank; Georgian: Rani). Arabic sources suggest that as late as the tenth century Albanian was still the dominant language in Albania (Vacca 2017: 30). Albanian was a North-East Caucasian language related to Lezgin and surviving to the present day as the modern Udi language (some sources refer to Albanian as 'Old Udi'), spoken by some 8,000 speakers in a small number of villages straddling Georgia and Azerbaijan (see Chapter 3). Increasingly, Albania came under strong Armenian influence, mediated by the Miaphysite (Monophysite) doctrine of both Armenian and Albanian Christian traditions. This was not always a harmonious process: the hegemony of 'super-Armenia' as a tradition claiming primacy among Caucasus Christian traditions, and, by implication dominance over the Albanian Church, was not always accepted (Vacca 2017: 54–55; Hewsen 2001: 40). Yet the fact remains that while local Armenian and Georgian elites also lost their statehood to the Caliphate, they saw utility in maintaining Armenian and Georgian cultures and invested in them. For reasons that are still unclear to us, Albanian elites did not. They exercised a different kind of agency by assimilating into larger surrounding groups: Armenians, Georgians and the Turkic culture brought into the Caucasus with the arrivals of Seljuks, Genghizids, Timurids and Safavids. Yet the claim to Caucasian Albania, subsuming a royal titular claim to an ancient throne and to the distinctive Eastern Christian tradition in the Caucasus, lived on, to be contested to this day.

The role of Khazars, Seljuks and Genghizids

From at least the second century BCE the Caucasus' geographical location on the southern fringes of Eurasia accounted for its invasion and lengthy political and cultural domination by major nomadic and semi-nomadic Eurasian tribal confederations. Among the early Eurasian tribes who left their ethno-cultural imprint in the region were Cimmerians, Scythians and Sarmatians.[6] Between the fourth and sixth centuries CE part of the Caucasus was under the political and cultural influence of two rival powerful nomadic confederations – the Alans,[7] an Indo-European people who were likely contributors to the formation of the modern Ossetians and Balkars, and the Huns,[8] a Turkic people who participated in the emergence of the region's various Turkic peoples. In the fifth century both Alans and Huns expanded their dominance in a westerly direction, while the latter were able to directly challenge the Eastern and Western Roman Empires (Golden 1992: 107).

The Khazars

From the early seventh till the tenth centuries CE most of the northern Caucasus became dominated by Khazars, semi-nomadic Turkic peoples who in the fifth century CE broke away from the Western Turkic Khaganate[9] and established their own state – the Khazar Khaganate,[10] or Khazaria. It gradually expanded westwards and encompassed the Volga-Don steppes and present-day central Russia. In the eighth and ninth centuries Khazaria's heartland was in the northern Caucasus with its centre in Balanjar (between 650 and 720) and Samandar (between the 720s and 750), both in Dagestan; from the 750s till the 960s its capital was in the city of Itil (Atil) in the Volga delta. Economically, Khazaria presented as a major Eurasian commercial emporium, which controlled much of the western branch of the Silk Road trade that connected China, the Near/Middle East, proto-Rus and Europe (Bassin 2016: 82). The maritime importance of the Khazars in the Caspian basin is reflected in the fact that until the present day the Caspian Sea is called *Bahr al-Khazar* and *Bahr-e Khazar* (the Khazar Sea) in Arabic and Farsi (Forsyth 2013: 61).

At the apex of the Khazar Khaganate were two *khagans* (rulers) who relied on *tarkhans* (Turkic aristocracy). One *khagan* had a symbolic and representative function and appeared in public only once every four months. The other *khagan*, who was accountable only to himself, was in charge of governance and possessed the exclusive right to declare war and peace (Forsyth 2013: 62). Politically, Khazaria, like other major nomadic powers, presented a loose and decentralised empire with ill-defined external borders. Consequently, the various Khazar-controlled local polities[11] and communities maintained a high degree of autonomy and were able to preserve their social and administrative structures. At the ethno-cultural level, Khazaria was a multi-ethnic and poly-confessional state. It appears that originally, its Turkic ruling elite adhered to Tengrism which presented a mixture of shamanism, animism, ancestor worship and elements of poly- and monotheism.[12] Later on, for tactical reasons, some *khagans* chose to adhere to monotheism. For example, in 721 or 730, *khagans* officially converted to Judaism; however, following the Khazars' defeat by the Arabs in 737, they adopted Islam. In the mid-eighth century the Khazar elite formally returned to Judaism, albeit the extent of their Judaist beliefs was questionable as they did not observe the Sabbath (Forsyth 2013: 62). By comparison, Khazaria's local multi-ethnic population largely retained their pagan, Eastern Christian and Islamic creeds, while *'adats* (customary norms) continued to act as the main social and moral regulators among various peoples of the Caucasus (see Chapter 5).

In the early seventh century Khazaria served as Byzantium's proxy in its confrontation with Sasanian Iran. Following the fall of the Sasanian Empire as a result of the Arab victory over it in 637, Khazaria assumed the position of a buffer state between Byzantium, proto-Rus, major nomadic confederations and Muslim Arabs (Magomedov et al. 1988). In the Caucasus, for over a century, the Khazars' major opponent was the Umayyad Caliphate, with which Khazars fought two wars. In the context of the Arab–Khazar confrontation, control over Arran, Arminiyya and historical Azerbaijan repeatedly shifted from the Arabs to Khazars and vice versa, thus forcing local rulers and tribal and community leaders to regularly adjust their political allegiances. In general, the Arabs had the strongest positions in *Bab al-Abwab*, while the Khazars prevailed in the northern and south-eastern Caucasus. Among the consequences of the Arab-Khazar rivalry in the Caucasus was the initial tactical rapprochement between the Khazars and Byzantines, who were also in conflict with the Arab Muslims over political and religious domination in Asia Minor and southern Eurasia. In the 730s the Byzantine-Khazar alliance was cemented by the marriage between Constantine, the son of the Byzantine emperor Leo III (r. 717–41) and the *khagan*'s daughter Chichak (Forsyth 2013: 62). In the late tenth century the Khazar–Byzantine alliance came to an end as a result of Byzantium's turn to the Khazars' opponent in central and western Eurasia – Kievan Rus, which adopted Byzantine Christianity. In the early eleventh century the Khazar Khaganate fell under intensified attacks from Rus, as well as Oghuz (Pecheneg) and Kipchak (Qipchaq, Polovtsy) tribes.

As noted earlier, unlike their Sasanian, Byzantine, caliphal, Armenian and Georgian counterparts, the Khazars, alongside the Caucasian Albanians, left no records in the Khazar language and only a few texts in Hebrew. For this reason, they present researchers with a number of enigmas. One is the Khazars' lack of ethno-linguistic relations with any other Turkic peoples of the Caucasus and wider Eurasia, although there are some suggestions as to their distant links with old Bulgars and present-day Chuvash (Forsyth 2013: 61). Another is the Khazars' conversion to Judaism and its implications for the ethno-genesis of various peoples of the Caucasus and the wider Eurasia (see Chapter 3). Since the dissolution of the USSR, of particular academic and political influence in the region has been the perception by the late Soviet ethnologist, Lev Gumilev, of Judaist Khazars as an ethnic and religious

'chimera', that is an invading ethnos which manipulated and exploited indigenous ethno-ecological systems (Gumilev 1989: 480; Bassin 2016: 72).

The Seljuks

In the late eleventh century the state of the Shirvanshahs and much of southern Caucasus became part of another major nomadic Eurasian empire, the Seljuks, who were Oghuz Turkmen originating from the area around the Aral Sea in Central Asia.[13] The Seljuks' advance in the region was part of their expansion into Khorasan and most of Iran. In 1071 the Seljuks defeated the Byzantines in the battle of Manzikert in present-day eastern Turkey and conquered most of Byzantine-controlled Anatolia.[14] Unlike the Khazars and other Eurasian nomadic confederations, the Seljuks were politically and culturally centred on Iran where they situated their capitals –Nishapur (1037–43), Rey (1043–51) and Isfahan (1051–1118). With time the Seljukid elite became highly Persianised in culture and language and New Persian became the language of historical records and literature, while the centre of Arabic-language culture shifted from Baghdad to Cairo. Consequently, the Seljukid elite laid the foundation for the creation of a sophisticated Turco-Persian material and ideational culture; they created universities and encouraged the development of sciences, philosophy, Islamic scholarship and literature. Their reign produced such world luminaries as the astronomer Omar Khayyam (d. 1131) and the Sufi scholars Muhammad al-Ghazzali (d. 1111) and Abu Bakr al-Darbandi (d. 1145).[15]

The inclusion in the Turkic Seljuk Empire of much of the southern Caucasus, encompassing the powerful Dvin-centred state of the Shaddadids,[16] triggered the considerable linguistic Turkicisation of the sedentary inhabitants of modern Azerbaijan, who nevertheless remained culturally Persianate. Subsequently, this process intensified during their domination by the Genghizids in the thirteenth century, the Timurids in the fourteenth century, by the Oghuz Turkic confederations of Aq-Qoyunlu[17] and the Qara-Qoyunlu[18] in the fifteenth century and the Safavid rule in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries. Another major legacy of the Seljukid period was the strengthening of the positions of Sunni Islam and Sufism among the Caucasus' various Islamised peoples. The reason for this was the Seljuks' positioning of themselves as the fervent defenders of Sunni Islam against Shi'a Buyids[19], who until 1055 controlled Baghdad, and the Egypt-centred Shi'a Fatimids.[20] The consolidation of Sunnism in present-day Azerbaijan was ensured through the network of Sunni *madrasahs* ('Islamic schools') which were initiated across the Abbasid Caliphate by the Seljuk *vezir* ('prime-minister') Nizam al-Mulk (1018–92) (Sattarov 2010: 149, 205).

The Genghizids

In the early thirteenth century most of the Caucasus became part of the world's largest contiguous empire, the nomadic Mongol (or Genghizid) Empire (1206–1368),[21] which also included much of present-day Central Asia, western China, Kievan Rus, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, western Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan. In the mid-thirteenth century most of the northern Caucasus, alongside Kievan Rus, were included in the Genghizid Golden Horde while southern Dagestan, together with northern Azerbaijan and Kartli, alongside most of present-day Iran, Iraq, western Afghanistan, north-western Pakistan and Turkey became part of the Genghizid Ilkhanate; most of Central Asia constituted the Genghizid Chaghatai Khanate. Despite the centrality of nomadic Genghizids in the history of the Caucasus and wider Eurasia they have not received due recognition and are overwhelmingly negatively portrayed in the available historical records largely authored by their urban opponents. Arguably, however, the Genghizid rule over

most of Eurasia brought about the emergence of a particular Eurasian economic, political and cultural model, which encompassed the Caucasus, and which has persisted, albeit with considerable modifications, until the present (Yemelianova 2018). Of particular significance was the Genghizid reinforcement of the multi-ethnic and poly-confessional nature of their expansive polity with ill-defined frontiers, contrasting with the ethnicity-based polity- and state-formation within clearly defined borders in contemporary Europe. As in the case of Khazar rule, the Genghizid elite which originally adhered to shamanism, Tengrism and Buddhism did not significantly interfere in the religious practices and beliefs of the various peoples of the Caucasus and the rest of their empire, thus creating the framework for ethnic and religious tolerance.

As noted in Chapter 5, the Genghizid *Yasa* (customary law) well suited various northern Caucasians who absorbed its rulings into their own customary norms – *'adat*s. From the mid-fourteenth century, when the Genghizid elite became Islamised and substantially Turkicised, it encouraged the proliferation of Sunni Islam, especially of Sufi orientation, among the various Turkic as well as other peoples of the northern Caucasus. In the southern Caucasus Genghizid rule strengthened the Turkic component in the ethno-genesis of modern Azerbaijanis. To the plains of the northern Caucasus the Genghizids brought a large number of Kipchaks and contributed to the assimilation of various Mongolic and Iranian peoples into an emerging Kipchak Turkic majority, arguably the ancestors of present-day Nogais, Kumyks and Karachai-Balkars; it also contributed to the formation of the distinctive northern Caucasian Golden Horde ethno-political identity and mentality.

At the end of the fourteenth century most of the Caucasus was conquered by Central Asian Timurids who originated from the Genghizid Chaghatais. Their leader *Amir* Timur,[22] who sought to eclipse Genghiz Khan in his imperial ambitions and cultural and scientific endeavours, integrated most of the former Genghizid domain within the huge Timurid Empire (1370–1507),[23] which also included northern India, although, unlike Genghiz's empire, it did not include the territory of modern central Russia. Like Genghiz Khan, *Amir* Timur ran his empire through a combination of ruthless suppression and a divide and rule approach towards subjugated sedentary and nomadic polities, including the kingdoms of Georgia and the Shirvanshahs, the Kazi-Kumukh *Shamkhalat* and the Kaitag *Usmiyat*, as well as the nomadic confederations of *Aq-Qoyunlu*, the *Qara-Qoyunlu* and the *Jalair*,[24] which effectively controlled parts of the Caucasus prior to and during the Timurid rule (Golden 1983). The Sunni Timurids left a particularly tangible imprint on plains- and valley-dwellers of the northern Caucasus and present-day Azerbaijan by strengthening their 'Turkism' and by promoting among them Sunni Islam, especially the Sufism of the Naqshbandi *tariqah*. The southern Caucasus and the territory of modern Azerbaijan were also affected by their inclusion into the Timurid Turco-Persian Islamised high culture and sciences.[25]

The Ottomans and Safavids

From the early sixteenth century various Caucasian polities and communities were confronted with the advance of the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran, both of which considered the possession of the Caucasus as a vital condition for their imperial expansion and the security of their northern frontiers. This resulted in a series of Ottoman–Persian wars leading to several divisions of the Caucasus into Ottoman and Safavid zones of control and an exchange of population between the two empires.[26] The first major delimitation of the Caucasus occurred in the aftermath of the Ottoman–Safavid war of 1532–55. By the peace treaty signed in May 1555 in Amasya, the Ottomans acquired supremacy over the north-western Caucasus adjacent to the Black Sea, and the Safavids over the south-eastern Caucasus along the Caspian.

The Ottomans

The Ottomans (c.1299–1922)[27] were Turkmen who originated from Anatolia. By the mid-sixteenth century they ran the world's largest empire, encompassing most of the Middle East, south-eastern Europe and western Asia. Initially, the Ottomans turned their attention to the Caucasus in the late fifteenth century when they carried out several raids into Childir (Akhalzik) and Kutaisi in Imereti (Kirzioğlu 1998: 83), but their further advance into the region stumbled due to opposition from the Safavids. In 1555, in accordance with the Amasya Treaty, the Ottomans annexed Batum region which became part of the Trabzon *eyalet* ('province'); and they also established a 1,500-strong garrison in the Gornio fortress in present-day Adjara, which remained their military base until the 1870s. The Black Sea fortresses of Poti, Kutaisi and Sukhum were included within Gürcistan *eyalet*, while southern Georgia became part of the *eyalet* of Childir with its centre in Ahiska (Akhaltsikhe). These territories were subjected to Ottoman administrative and tax regulations while the Georgian kingdom of Imereti and the Georgian principalities of Guria and Mingrelia preserved their political and economic systems – albeit, as vassals, they were tasked with sending regular 'gifts'[28] to the Sultan and the *Vezir*. In Abkhazia, the Ottomans managed to take control only of a narrow strip of land on the coast as they failed to subjugate the Abkhaz tribes (Oreshkova 2016: 186–88).

Ottoman expansion in the Caucasus was enhanced by military and intelligence support from the Crimean Khanate[29] which in 1478 became a vassal of Istanbul and was administratively included in the Rumelia region of the Ottoman Empire. The establishment of the pro-Ottoman Crimean Khanate marked a shift in control of the Black Sea trade from Genoa[30] to Istanbul. In 1568, the southern Crimean city of Kaffa (Theodosia), which for centuries had been the emporium of the Asian-European trade, became the capital of the Ottoman *eyalet* of Kaffa (Kefe). The Sublime Porte proclaimed the Kaffa *eyalet* – comprising the south-western Crimean Black Sea area, the eastern Azov area and the adjacent areas of the northern Caucasus – the 'Defender of the Black Sea' (*Karadeniz Muhafizi*). As a result, the Black Sea was effectively transformed into a de facto 'Turkish lake'. Administratively, the Kaffa *eyalet* was allocated to the Anatolia region of the Ottoman Empire (Inalcik 1973: 106). In the same period, the Circassian (Adyghe) tribes of the north-western Caucasus pledged their allegiance either directly to the Ottomans or to the Crimean Khanate. The Circassians' alliance with the Crimean Khanate was secured through the institution *of atalyk* – the upbringing by Circassian chieftains of the Khan's sons. A corollary of the Circassians' subordination to the Ottomans and the Crimean Khanate was their Islamisation along Sunni Hanafi lines; among other implications of Ottoman dominance in the region was Ottomanised Islamisation or re-Islamisation of various Turkic and Circassian peoples of the western Caucasus (see Chapter 5).

The Safavids

The Safavids (1501–1736) were likely to have been Turkicised Iranians originating from Ardabil in north-western Iran. Their name derived from the Sufi *tariqah* of Safaviyya[31] which was influential among Kurds and other Sunni Muslims in Iranian Azerbaijan. Under the Shah Isma'il al-Sawafi (d. 1524) the Safavid elite switched from the Sunni Islam of the Shafi'i *madhhab* to Shi'a Islam of the *Ithna 'Ashariyya* (Twelver) orientation.[32] It is possible that this move was driven by Isma'il's quest to instil a religious and ideological dimension into the Safavids' confrontation with the Sunni Ottomans (Sattarov 2010: 149). By the early sixteenth century the Safavids established control over most of greater Iran, thus becoming

the first dynasty since the Sasanians to reinstate the political entity under the name of 'Iran' as the major regional power, with its capital in Tabriz.[33] In parallel, the Safavids advanced into the southern and south-eastern Caucasus by imposing their jurisdiction on the Shirvan-shahs, *Aq-Qoyunlu* and other major polities and tribal confederations of the region, which was divided into *baylarbayliks* ('provinces', sometimes spelled *beglerbegliks*) headed by *baylar-bays* ('governors') (Savory 1986). The Sunni population of what is now modern Azerbaijan and part of southern Dagestan was forcibly converted to Shi'ism by militant *Qizilbash*,[34] for which reason modern Azerbaijanis sometimes call themselves *qilinc müsəlman* (lit.'sword-Muslims') (Sattarov 2010: 149).

The rule of the Turkic Safavids completed the process of linguistic Turkicisation of modern Azerbaijanis which was initiated by the Seljuks in the eleventh century. Subsequently, the common Turkic heritage of Safavids and modern Azerbaijanis would become a contentious issue in relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, as both would claim historical ownership of the Safavids. At a cultural level Safavid rule, especially under Shah Abbas (r.1588–1625), accounted for the presence in modern Azerbaijan and other parts of the southern Caucasus of the recognisably 'Safavid' technique for the manufacture of refined silk and other textiles, rugs, china and metal products as well as a characteristically Safavid aesthetic in design, fashion and the arts.

Feudalism, fragmentation and re-absorption

From the sixteenth century, the Caucasus was squeezed between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires. Royal houses that had led the revival of kingdoms in the medieval Caucasus declined, while local dynasts were the beneficiaries of distant Ottoman or Safavid suzerainty. After the disintegration of the Bagratid kingdom in the late fifteenth century, 'Georgia' ceased to exist except as a cultural unity of elites, until the gathering of Georgian lands by Russian annexation in the nineteenth century. Until then, the remnants of the Bagratid line and their dynastic challengers existed as a patchwork of vassal kingdoms and principalities. This era saw significant shifts in socio-political structure, as princely houses encroached on waning royal power (Suny 1994: 42–44). In the classical era of Georgian feudalism (*patron-qmoba*) from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, upper nobles or princes (*tavadni*) were appointed by the monarchy as their representatives (*eristavi*). The right to land ownership gradually changed from being conditional on royal service to a hereditary right, effectively reducing peasantries to serfdom, but *eristavni* were still tied to monarchs by vassal relations. These ties were weakened between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the new system, *tavadoba* ('rule of the princes'), princes and regional dynasts increasingly failed to comply with their obligations to the monarch, and arrogated what had previously been royal prerogatives to themselves (Armani 1970: 148–52). A unique class of sovereign princes emerged, often reliant on the very harshest forms of serfdom (*batonqmoba*).

Tavadoba was accompanied by an intense process of political fracture. The sixteenth to eighteenth centuries offer an anarchical history of residual kingdoms and aspiring principalities at war. In the west the surviving royal line in the kingdom of Imereti was challenged by princely houses in Mingrelia (Odishi), Guria and Samtskhe. The extent to which power slipped to local dynasts is evident in the fact that the ruling dynasty in Odishi survived from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries with only one break. Moreover, surname became title: when the original Dadiani dynasty ended in 1694, the acceding dynasty (Chikovani) assumed the name of the previous dynasty as its title: *dadiani*. The ruling princes of Odishi, above all under Levan II (r. 1614–57) repeatedly defeated attempts by the surviving Bagratid

lines, ruling kingdoms in Imereti and Kartli, to reunite Georgia, and ruled as kings in all but name (Antelava 1990, 1999). In the east, for nearly 50 years King Teimuraz I of Kakheti (r. 1606–48) would wage an unsuccessful struggle to resist the Safavid shahs, suppress rival dynastic claims and unite Georgia (Rayfield 2012: Chapters 13 and 14). In a recurring pattern lasting through the eighteenth century, Teimuraz and other Bagratid monarchs sent missions to St. Petersburg and other Christian powers appealing for protection.

As a result of Venetian and Genoese commercial activity along the Black Sea coast and the arrival of Catholic missionaries and other European travellers, the medieval Caucasus was exposed to more intensive contacts with Europe. These contacts generated numerous outsider accounts, such as those of the Venetian ambassador to Persia, Ambrozio Contarini, dating from the 1470s, seventeenth-century Theatine missionaries Arcangelo Lamberti and Joseph Marie Zampi, and French traveller Jean Chardin, dating from the 1670s (Barbaro and Contarini 1873; Chardin 1811; Lamberti 1990). These accounts typically depicted the lands and peoples of the Caucasus through the prisms of barbarism and backwardness. Contarini arrived at the Black Sea port of Fasso, today's Poti, on 1 July 1474:

> Fasso belongs to the Mengrelians, whose chief is named Bendian. He has not much territory, as it may be traversed in three days, and consists principally of woods and mountains. The men are brutal, and shave their heads after the fashion of minor friars. There are stone quarries in the country, and a little corn and wine is also produced, but of no great value. The men live miserably on millet made hard like polenta, and the women fare more miserably still; and were it not for a little wine and salt fish imported from Trebisond, and salt from Capha, they would be very badly off. They produce canvas and wax, but in small quantities. If they were industrious they might procure as much fish as they required from the river. They are Christians, and worship according to the rites of the Greek Church, but they have many heresies.
>
> *(Barbaro and Contarini 1873: 118)*

While rich in local detail, these accounts reflect their authors' own biases. Some were familiar with classical sources on ancient Colchis and Iberia, and found in the contemporary Caucasus of their day a characteristically 'oriental' decline. Others read Caucasian decay through the lenses of Turkic or Muslim barbarity, and suspicion of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Of particular note are the illustrated albums left by Don Cristofo de Castelli, a Catholic missionary in Georgia in 1627–54 (Castelli 1976). Comprising some 570 items, de Castelli's drawings bequeath an extraordinary visual record of mid-seventeenth-century Georgia.

While Kartli and Kakheti were vassal kingdoms of the Safavid state, the principal Safavid unit of administration in the Caucasus was the khanate. Divided into administrative districts called *mahals*, and ruled by a khan (also referred to as a *beglerbeg/baylarbay*, 'governor-general', or *sardar*), the khanates developed into 'miniature replicas of the Iranian monarchy' (Swietochowski 1995: 2), in which succession became hereditary. Khans owned most of the arable land, renting out its use in the form of non-hereditary grants, and extended the prerogative of monopoly over other kinds of commodity, such as silk, oil or salt production, as well as levying head taxes on all adult males. Appearing at different times from the early seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, khanates covered the territory of modern Armenia (the khanates of Irevan, Nakhichevan and, in part, Ganja), modern Azerbaijan (the khanates of Baku, Quba, Shirwan, Talysh, Sheki/Shaki, Karabakh and Javad) and part of today's North Caucasus (the khanate of Derbent). Khanates were multi-ethnic, populated by Muslim majorities of Turkic, Persian, and

Kurdish sedentary and nomadic groups, and mainly rural and urban minorities of Armenians and others. More khanates extended southward of the River Araxes.

The khanates were beneficiaries of Safavid decline in the late seventeenth century, as allegiance to the Safavid shahs became increasingly nominal. In 1732 the last Safavid shah, Tahmasp, was overthrown and a military general, Nadir Qoli, crowned shah in 1736. Despite early military successes, Nadir Shah[35] would be assassinated in 1747, inaugurating a period of civil strife and anarchy in Iran that extended to the khans in its periphery (Tapper 1997: 111–15). Although Iran recovered to a degree with the founding of the Qajar dynasty in 1796, which ruled until 1925, the khanates retained a fractured autonomy from Iran through the latter decades of the eighteenth century. Campaigns of conquest and unification among them also failed, leaving them in a fragmented and weakened condition by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Ottoman-Safavid rivalry had far-reaching effects on lands associated with the former Armenian kingdoms of the early medieval period. These areas were subject to military campaigns, scorched earth tactics and mass displacements, notably the 'great migration' enforced by Shah Abbas in the early seventeenth century that saw hundreds of thousands of Armenians deported from Kars, Ani and Nakhichevan and resettled in Iran (Bournoutian 2003: 208–9). This era marked the end of a secular indigenous leadership in the Armenian population, as the last traces of the Armenian nobility disappeared in these areas. They would be replaced by merchants and traders who were not tied to Armenia itself, but to commercial opportunity in diasporic communities from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (Panossian 2006: Chapter 3; Aslanian 2011). Rather than territories associated with Armenia, it would be from these communities, notably the Catholic Armenian Mekhitarist brotherhood based on the island of San Lazzaro in Venice, that the beginnings of an Armenian cultural revival would emerge from the 1720s.

The only remaining indigenous leadership among territorialised Armenian communities was that of the *meliks* (derived from the Arab word for 'king') in the area of today's Nagorny Karabakh, as well as in Syunik, the very mountainous southernmost region of Armenia today. Dispossessed by Timur Leng/*Amir* Timur, Turkmen tribal chieftain Jahan Shah restored the autonomy of the *melikdoms* in the late seventeenth century. Five such *melikdoms* survived in Karabakh with full autonomy. As the last extant example of autonomous Armenian leadership, they would later attract the attention of romantic writers in the nineteenth-century Armenian national revival (Raffi 2010). In comparison the *meliks* of Syunik were only semi-autonomous; the Persian administration acknowledged *meliks* in many other areas under its rule, although these were often 'little more than hereditary ethnarchs – "mayors", as it were, of the local Armenian community of a given town' (Hewsen 2001: 163). Like their counterparts in Kartli-Kakheti, the *meliks* of Karabakh and Syunik sought out the protection of Christian sponsors in Russia and Europe; one scion of the *melik* house of Jraberd, Israel Ori (b. 1658), emerged as a leader of such initiatives but died without success in 1711.

Proliferating appeals to Russian imperial power signalled the arrival of a new power in the Caucasus. Fitfully from the sixteenth century, and subject to successive setbacks, the Russian Empire was advancing towards the Caucasus (see Chapter 7), to become an increasingly credible candidate for co-religionist sponsorship of local Christian kingdoms and dynasties caught between Ottoman-Safavid rivalry. In a treaty signed on 24 July 1783 in Georgievsk in the northern Caucasus, King Erekle II of Kartli-Kakheti pledged allegiance to Russia, foreswore relations with foreign states without Russian consent, and submitted all future monarchs of Kartli and Kakheti to Russian approval and investiture. It was, in Donald Rayfield's words, 'the deadliest document any Georgian king signed' (Rayfield

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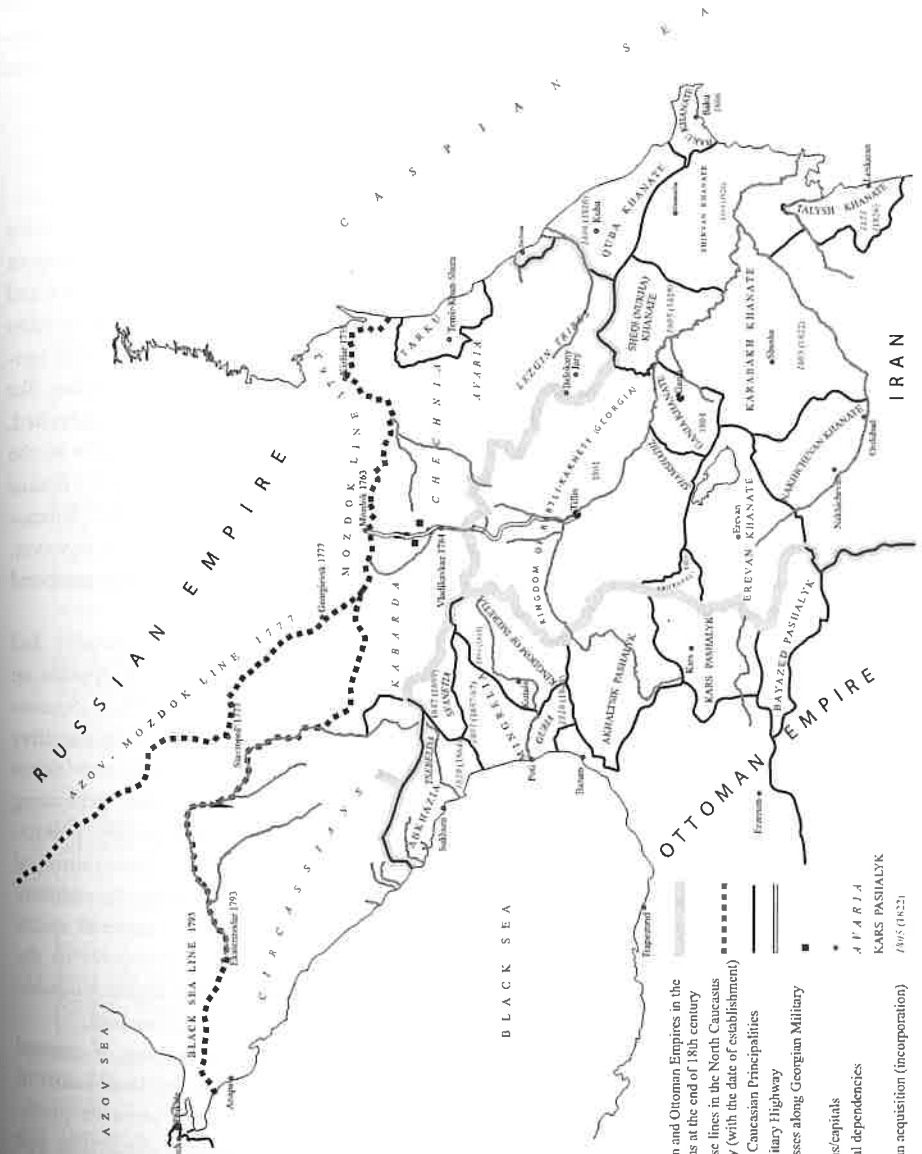

Map 6.1 The Caucasus in 1813. Reproduced by courtesy of Arsène Saparov, all rights reserved

2012: 251). Promises of military assistance proved empty 12 years later, when Agha Mohammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty of Iran, marched on Kartli-Kakheti to reassert Iranian dominion. In September 1795 Agha Mohammad Khan destroyed Tbilisi, killing 20,000 of its population and deporting as many again as prisoners. Kartli-Kakheti was devastated, Erekle II dying three years later. Crushed, depopulated and vulnerable, the kingdom was abolished and annexed directly into the Russian Empire in 1801. The Russian conquest of the Caucasus had begun.

Conclusion

Like other borderlands in Eurasia, the early modern Caucasus emerged as an example of what Alfred Rieber terms a 'complex frontier', an area contested by multiple 'multicultural conquest states', ruled by hereditary monarchs or emperors at the head of organised state systems of civil and military elites (Rieber 2014: 293; see Map 6.1). In the complex frontier of the Caucasus these states encountered not only each other but a plethora of indigenous polities and groups that sought variously to resist, accommodate or manoeuvre between external powers. As a complex frontier, like the western Balkans, Danubian frontier or Trans-Caspia, the Caucasus was not sharply delimited, but 'blurred and porous at the margins' (Ibid.). In many ways this situation was not new to the Caucasus, where at numerous points in history since antiquity local elites had operated in a liminal space between competing external hegemons. As a setting for the arrival of the modern bureaucratic state, principles of popular suffrage and sovereignty and ideologies of nationalism, however, the Caucasus was rich in conflict potential. Its accumulated history of liminality has profound implications for its modernisation according to the logic of territorialised nation-states.

One implication is the sheer plurality and incongruence of political, administrative and cultural traditions. Arbitrary borders are hardly unique to the Caucasus, yet it appears an extreme case where almost every border incites a claim of truncation or irredentism. Successive hegemons installed administrative regimes that sometimes recalled earlier administrative structures, at others deliberately effaced them. Numerous geopolitical units and spaces appear, disappear and then reappear throughout the history of the Caucasus, generating plural and almost always spatially incongruent traditions. Several contemporary polities, including Georgia, Abkhazia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and North Ossetia-Alania have historical precedents significantly larger in territorial scope than their modern successors. In addition, mass population movements were a salient feature of the demarcation of imperial spaces from at least the early seventeenth century. This created a context both receptive to the nationalistic retrojection of modern ethnic identities and resistant to their accommodation within a framework of modern, but historicised and territorialised ethnic nationalism.

Another implication is that the depiction of the Caucasus as a passive object of external influence denies the agency of local actors. Throughout the long millennium, local actors in the Caucasus exploited their interstitial positioning among great powers to preserve privileges, extract concessions and hold onto local power. Periods of imperial distraction and decline would be accompanied by a proliferation of local kingdoms, principalities, *melikdoms*, khanates and other dynasties of various kinds. Sometimes these framed their legitimacy by reference to antecedents in an earlier such recrudescence during prior intervals of imperial decay, in a cyclical pattern that actively constructed legacy and continuity. Local actors often recruited external forces to assist them in local power struggles, suggesting that an external *realpolitik* of 'divide and rule' is only part of the story since these actors often reciprocated with tactics of 'divide and survive'. This fractious impulse carried implications for the solidity of both external hegemony, which was always refracted through local power struggles,

and, in the case of the southern Caucasus, indigenous state-building, which only very exceptionally was able to rein in appeals to foreign patronage by challengers to centralised power. By comparison, political and social trajectories in the extremely multi-ethnic northern Caucasus were largely defined by the considerable detachment of various tribal, neighbourhood and religious communities (*tukhums*, *jama'ats*, *taips*, *wirds*, and so on) from both local and external political centres, and by the strong positions of *'adat*s and other customary institutions. Nevertheless, despite often bewilderingly complex and multifaceted political, social and cultural disruptions, refractions and re-alignments which the region endured throughout what we have called the 'long millennium', the Caucasus sustained its distinctive multi-faceted civilisational character – its 'Caucasianness' – to the present day.

Notes

1 See for example, Alikberov 2003; Barthold 1965; Buniyatov 1965; Gadzhiev 1975; Ibrahimov 2006; Khalidov 1985; Khanbabaev 2010; Mamedova 2005; Shikhsaidov 1969.
2 The *Rashidun* Caliphs were Prophet Muhammad's close associates Abu Bakr (r. 632–34);'Umar (r. 634–44); 'Uthman (r. 644–56) and 'Ali (r. 656–61) who was also Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Shi'a Muslims therefore regard 'Ali as the rightful immediate successor to Muhammad and Imam. On the *Rashidun* Caliphs, see Kennedy (2016): 43–70.
3 According to contemporary Balkhi geographers, the *wilayah* of Caucasian Albania/Arran included Darband, Barda, Baylaqan, Janza, Khunan, Qabala, Shabaran, Shakki, Shamakha, Shamkur, Sharwan and Tiflis; the *wilayah* of al-Arminiyya included Arjish, Arzan, Baghrawand, Bakri, Bidlis, Dabil, Khilat, Manazkird, Mayyafariqin, Nashawa, Qaliqala, Sirajtayr and Tayk; and the *wilayah* of Azerbaijan included Ardabil, Tabriz, Khunaj, Warthan, Muqan, Urmiyya, Barzand, Salmas, Marand, Khuwi, Mimadh and Maragha (Vacca 2017: 44; Alikberov 2003: 178).
4 The state of Shirvanshahs (Shirwan, 861–1538) was founded by Haytham ibn Khalid ibn Yazid of the Arab Yazidi dynasty. On Shirvanshahs, see Minorsky 1958 and Ashurbayli 2006.
5 Accordingly, historical Albania is depicted as territorially co-extensive with the modern Republic of Azerbaijan and inclusive of the territory of Nagorny Karabakh that is today contested by Armenians (see Chapters 15 and 16).
6 These nomadic tribes were of Indo-European, Finno-Ugric and Turkic ethno-linguistic origins (Forsyth 2013: 32).
7 On Alans, see Alemany 2000.
8 On Huns, see Golden 1992; Sinor 1990.
9 On the Turkic Khaganate, see Sneath 2007.
10 On the Khazar Khaganate, see Artamonov 1958 and Golden 1980.
11 In Dagestan, for example, those polities included Darband, Filan (Shandan), Gumik (Kumukh), Kaitag, Lakz, Sarir, Tabasaran and Zirihgaran (later Kubachi) (Shikhsaidov 1969: 154).
12 Since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Tengrism has been on the rise among the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Bashkirs, Tatars and some other Turkic and Mongolic peoples of the former Soviet Union.
13 The name 'Seljuk' derives from Seljuk Beg Dukak (d. 1938), the grandfather of the founders of the Seljuk Empire, Tughril Beg (d. 1063) and Chaghri Beg (d. 1060). On Seljuks, see Peacock and Yildiz (2013).
14 The Seljuk victory over Byzantines at Manzikert triggered the first crusade (1095–1099).
15 Al-Darbandi's famous *Rayhan al-haqa'iq va bustan al-daqa'iq* ('The Basil of Truth and the Garden of Subtleties'), alongside *Darband-name* ('History of Derbent') of unknown authorship, provided invaluable insights into the life of Caucasians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Alikberov 2003).
16 The Shaddadids were a Muslim dynasty of Kurdish origin who between the tenth and twelfth centuries controlled the area between the rivers Kura and Araxes (Bosworth 1997: 169).
17 *Aq-Qoyunlu* (lit. 'White Sheep', 1378–1501) was a Persianised Sunni Oghuz tribal confederation which dominated present-day northern Iraq, part of Iran, eastern Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
18 *Qara-Qoyunlu* (lit. 'Black Sheep',1375–1468) was the rival tribal confederation to the *Aq-Qoyunlu*. In different periods it controlled present-day eastern Iran, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

19 Buyids (Buwaihids) were Daylamites from northern Iran. Their rule over Iran and Iraq is known as 'the Iranian Intermezzo' as it represented a Shi'a interlude between the rule by the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate and the Seljuk Empire.
20 The Fatimid Caliphate (909–1171) was centred on Egypt and at the peak of its power it also included a large area of North Africa, the Levant, Hijaz and Sicily.
21 The Genghizids originated from northern Mongolia. The empire's name derives from Genghiz Khan (1162–1227), the Mongol chieftain and the founder of the empire. On Genghizids, see Allsen 2004.
22 Timur lacked a direct blood link to Genghiz Khan and therefore could not bear the title of 'khan', so he assumed the Islamic title of 'amir', which stood for *Amir al-Mu'minin* ('Leader of the Believers'), the prestigious title of the caliph.
23 On Timurids, see Marozzi 2004; Soucek (2000): 123–143 and Yemelianova (2019): 21–25.
24 The Jalairs were a Mongolic-speaking tribal confederation which broke away from the Ilkhanid Khanate.
25 The Timurids patronised the sciences, arts, literature and Islamic scholarship. They turned their capital city of Samarqand into a world scholarly and cultural centre hosting the famous Ulugh Beg Observatory, which continues to strike its visitors by the scientific advances of its time (Yemelianova 2019: 23).
26 Between the early sixteenth century and the 1820s Iran and the Ottoman Empire fought eleven wars, eights of which involved the Safavids and the other three the Safavids' successors, the Afsharids, Zands and Qajars.
27 The Ottomans are named after their ruler Osman I (Othman I, d.1323). On the Ottomans, see Howards 2017.
28 According to Evliya Çelebi (1611–82), a well-known Ottoman explorer who travelled extensively in the Caucasus, such gifts comprised of 'slaves, falcons, hawks, mules and Georgian women of exceptional beauty' (cited in Oreshkova 2016: 188)
29 The Crimean Khanate was established in 1441 on the territory of the Crimean peninsula by the Genghizid dynasty of Giray-khan (r. 1441–66).
30 The Republic of Genoa (1005–1797) dominated the trade in the Black Sea from the mid-thirteenth to the late fifteenth centuries. Its main colonies there were Kaffa in the Crimea and La Tana (present-day Azov). On the Genoese colonies, see Khvalkov 2017.
31 Safaviyya was founded by the Kurdish mystic Safi al-Din Aradabili (1252–1334). On the Safavids, see Newman 2006.
32 *Ithna 'Ashariyya* (Twelver) is the largest branch of Shi'a Islam. Its followers believe in twelve divinely ordained Imams and consider Muhammad al-Mahdi as the last Imam. By comparison, *Zaydiyya* (Fiver), for example, believe in five Imams and regard Zayd ibn Ali as the last Imam. On Shi'ism, see Halm 2004.
33 The Safavids had three successive capitals: Tabriz (1501–1555), Qazvin (1555–1598) and Isfahan (1598–1736).
34 *Qizilbash* (lit. 'Red Head') were Turcoman military groups which throughout the sixteenth century played a pivotal role in the expansion of the Safavid Empire and the imposition of Shi'a Islam on the newly conquered Muslim population.
35 Nadir Shah was the founder of the Iranian Afsharid dynasty (1736–96) which originated in Khorasan.

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