

TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM

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*Reluctant Abolitionists:
Captivity, Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century Caucasus*

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Research Abstract

Although slaves from the Caucasus never worked on the plantations of the America's antebellum South, slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus became an integral part of the political and cultural discourse about the future of the institution of slavery in the United States and Europe. Situated in the distant and unremarkable southern periphery of the Russian Empire, in the nineteenth century the Caucasus region and its people were at the center of international attention and debates that engaged with contentious issues such as slavery, abolition, race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism. Indeed, the story of enslavement, captivity, and the slave trade in the Caucasus spanned far beyond the geographic borders of the Caucasus mountains or the domains of the Russian Empire. This is a story that inflamed the woes of white-slavery abolitionists in England, agitated the passions of pro-slavery pundits in the United States, and sustained commerce on the slave markets of the Ottoman Empire and Iran.

My research project begins in 1801, the year in which the Russian Empire annexed the fragmented Georgian kingdoms and embarked on a campaign to eradicate slavery in the region. It ends in 1917 when the Russian Empire ceased to exist. My research examines the practices of slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus by investigating archival documents stored at the National Archives of Georgia and putting the findings of my research in conversation with the

scholarship on slavery in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and the Transatlantic region. My work offers a perspective on the slave trade in the Caucasus that is global in breadth but local to the regional context. Specifically, my research project assesses the economic dimensions of the slave trade in the region and understand who its main beneficiaries were. Then, it sheds more light on the slaves as individuals and asks questions such as which ethnic and religious groups were particularly vulnerable to becoming enslaved? When completed, my research will demonstrate the pivotal role of the slave trade in the Caucasus in the evolution of international body of laws on suppression of white slavery and human trafficking. Further, my research will explain why slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus played such a prominent role in the European abolitionist discourse and the debates concerning the future of the institution of slavery in the United States in the decades leading up to the American Civil War.

Research Goals

This research project has a goal of making a significant historiographical contribution to the history of the Russian Empire and history of the Caucasus region in the nineteenth century. Moreover, this research project also aims to offer new insights into the practices and methods of Russian colonialism and exercise of Russia's hard and soft powers both in the past and the present. When completed, this research project will become a dissertation, which will provide the first narrative of slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus region that is based primarily on archival research of never before published primary sources. The central argument of this research and dissertation will challenge and debunk speculations concerning the notions of Russian abolitionism in the nineteenth century Caucasus. Specifically, it will explain the Russian policies as calculated and seeking to co-opt diverse indigenous elites into the fold of the empire by protecting their social and economic status quo. In practice, that meant not interfering with the slave trade in the Caucasus

and sometimes being complicit in it. My discovery of extremely rare sale deeds of Circassian slaves that Russian officials notarized with the imperial seal serve as an undeniable testament to the Russian involvement in the slave trade. Further, my research seeks to demonstrate that when the Russian monarchy finally summoned the political will and institutional determination to eradicate the practices of the slave labor and commerce in human bodies in the region, it was not the spirit of benevolence and abolitionism that influenced the imperial policy. Rather, the main catalyst behind the decision to address the still thriving institutions of slavery was a series of internal transformations known in the Russian historiography as the Great Reforms. Particularly, it was the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto, which abolished serfdom in the empire, that set into motion the planning efforts and legislative initiatives aimed at the emancipation of slaves and renegotiation of labor relations between the landowners and former slaves. However, the term ‘emancipation’ is misleading. In reality, the tsarist officials instituted the system of “temporary mandatory servitude” that extended the terms of slave labor for up to eight years. The length and terms of the mandatory service depended on variables such as slaves’ gender and age. Such policies prolonged the existence of slave labor in the Caucasus but served as Russia’s clear commitment to respect the financial interest of the slave owning class and to providing a fair compensation to the slaveowners who were going to lose their slaves. Lastly, the ultimate goal of my research is to publish a monograph with a university press and share the results of my multi-year research with the broader academic community.

Research Activities

During the tenure of my nine-month research grant in Tbilisi, the Republic of Georgia, I have explored the city’s archives and libraries and scoured over, read, scanned, and translated thousands of pages of primary source materials in search of information and data that have the

potential to shed light on the practices and history of slavery and the slave trade in the Caucasus region. The chief locations of my research activities were the National Archives of Georgia (1 Vazha-Pshavela Ave.) and the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia (7 Lado Gudiashvili St.). These two public archival entities store multi-volume repositories of primary source documents that cover the country's and the region's history from the medieval times to the present.

My research at the National Archives of Georgia commenced on September 27th, 2018, the day after my arrival in Tbilisi. I have made the necessary arrangements and received permission from the administration of the archive to conduct research at the archive's reading room and access the primary source materials stored there prior to my arrival. Therefore, I was able to begin reviewing the archival catalogues and select necessary for my research documents on the first day of my visit. In the first few months of my research at the archive, I focused my attention on *Fond 16* (Фонд 16), the archive of the chancellery of the Russian Governor of Georgia. The Fond contains thousands of archival folios covering a broad range of topics that include economic development of the Caucasus region, political developments, security, spread of infectious diseases in the region, reports of disputes over land tenure and, among others, reports concerning raiding, captivity, and slavery. In those three months, I reviewed and read descriptions of 3,103 archival folios. Of 3,103 folios, I selected 137 documents pertinent to my research and read through 467 pages of hand-written documents. The documents that I examined included correspondence, official reports, court records, petitions, etc., all composed in either Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, or Ottoman Turkish languages and written more than two centuries ago. On several occasions, I resorted to the help of my Georgian colleagues to help me translate these primary sources into English language. In the end, when I completed my examination of *Fond 16*,

I reviewed and read descriptions of 9,387 archival folios. Of 9,387 folios, I selected 373 documents pertinent to my research and read through close to 864 pages of hand-written documents.

In the following months, I focused my attention on *Fond 1* (Фонд 1) – the archive of the Georgia’s Supreme Government and *Fond 14* (Фонд 14) the archive of the Chancellery of the Civil Governance of Georgia. These archival funds offered additional bureaucratic and social dimension to the history of slavery and the slave trade in the nineteenth century Caucasus. The primary sources in these two fonds revealed previously unexplored documents that enabled me to draw relevant conclusion to the present reality of human trafficking and geopolitical relations in the region.

In the last months of my research, I made every effort to expand the scope of my inquiry and review a broad spectrum of available archival documents. In the end, I read descriptions of 11,083 archival folios. Of these folios, I selected 173 documents that were relevant for my research and read approximately 672 pages of hand-written and printed documents. These documents allowed me to gain a critical perspective on the inter-governmental discussions and debates concerning policies for emancipation of slaves and serfs in the Caucasus region. These documents are important because they demonstrate the human scale of slave ownership in the region and offer an insight into the policy-making processes of Russian state officials. In the last three months of my research work in Tbilisi, I also opened a library account at the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. My research at the library gave me access to the contemporary newspapers that covered major political and social developments in the region under the Russian control. The library also has a very rich collection of books published in the imperial publishing houses and other relevant reading materials that further supplemented the results of my archival findings at the National Archive.

In conclusion, while the process of archival research had been time consuming and required a great deal of concentration and ability to analyze and simultaneously translate official correspondence, governmental reports, court records, and privately written petitions, which were usually composed by hand and with various degrees of legibility, I am very content with the outcome of my research activities and the overall progress of my dissertation. The documents that I have discovered up to this moment will, without doubt, enrich the arguments of my work and offer a nuanced insight into the life of the society in the nineteenth century Caucasus and elucidate the history of captivity, slavery, and the slave trade in the region.

Important Research Findings:

My meticulous study of the nineteenth century primary sources in Tbilisi' archives and libraries' has rewarded me with major discoveries that will likely have important academic implications for the study of the history of slavery and the slave trade in the nineteenth century Caucasus. These discoveries include sale deeds of slaves (Figure 1), petitions of former slaves seeking the assistance of the Russian imperial officials in rescuing their family members from captivity and enslavement (Figures 2 and 3), and correspondence with the religious leaders in the region seeking their assistance in further entrenching the Russian imperial control over the Caucasus mountains (Figure 4). These and other documents that I uncovered in the course of my archival work, contain a vast amount of data on the captured and enslaved in different parts of the Caucasus people who were subsequently sold on the slave markets in the Ottoman Empire and Iran or were returned to their families after intervention from the Russian administration in the region. These documents allowed me to map the commercial routes of the slave trading merchants, identify the major transitional hubs for the slave trade in the Caucasus, and gain a better understanding of the age and gender composition of sold into slavery people. In addition, I

discovered archival files that shed light on the plight and experiences of enserfed in the Caucasus peasants. Understanding the living experiences of the serfs will allow my research project to offer a comparative perspective on the living experiences of the two most subjugated social groups in the region and explain the chief differences as well as similarities between the serfs and slaves.

Furthermore, I came into possession of the internal correspondence of the Russian imperial officials who were charged with developing and implementing abolitionist policies in the Caucasus in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is very important to note that these policy debates and discussions were prompted by the unveiling of Tsar Alexander II's Emancipation Manifesto of 1861. The long-overdue reform promised the serfs in the empire to obtain freedom and secure permanent ownership over their land. The implementation of the peasant reform, however, was delayed in the Caucasus due to the political instability and security concerns in the region. Nevertheless, the evidence of the discussions about slavery in the region, particularly in Degestan and Kabarda, suggest that the Russian officials had been well-aware of the issue but took no concrete steps to dismantle the institutions of slavery in the Caucasus until the declaration of the peasant reform propelled the legislative efforts of the local officials. These documents largely confirm validity of my theory centered on the notion of reluctant abolitionist plans of the Russian administration in the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century. I also explored the archival fonds of Tbilisi military governor, the archives of the military-historic office of the Caucasus military district, the archives of the Society of Restoration of Christianity in the Caucasus, and archives of the Chancellery of the Russian Viceroy in the Caucasus. All of these fonds provide additional primary source foundation for understanding of the slavery and the slave trade in the nineteenth century Caucasus.

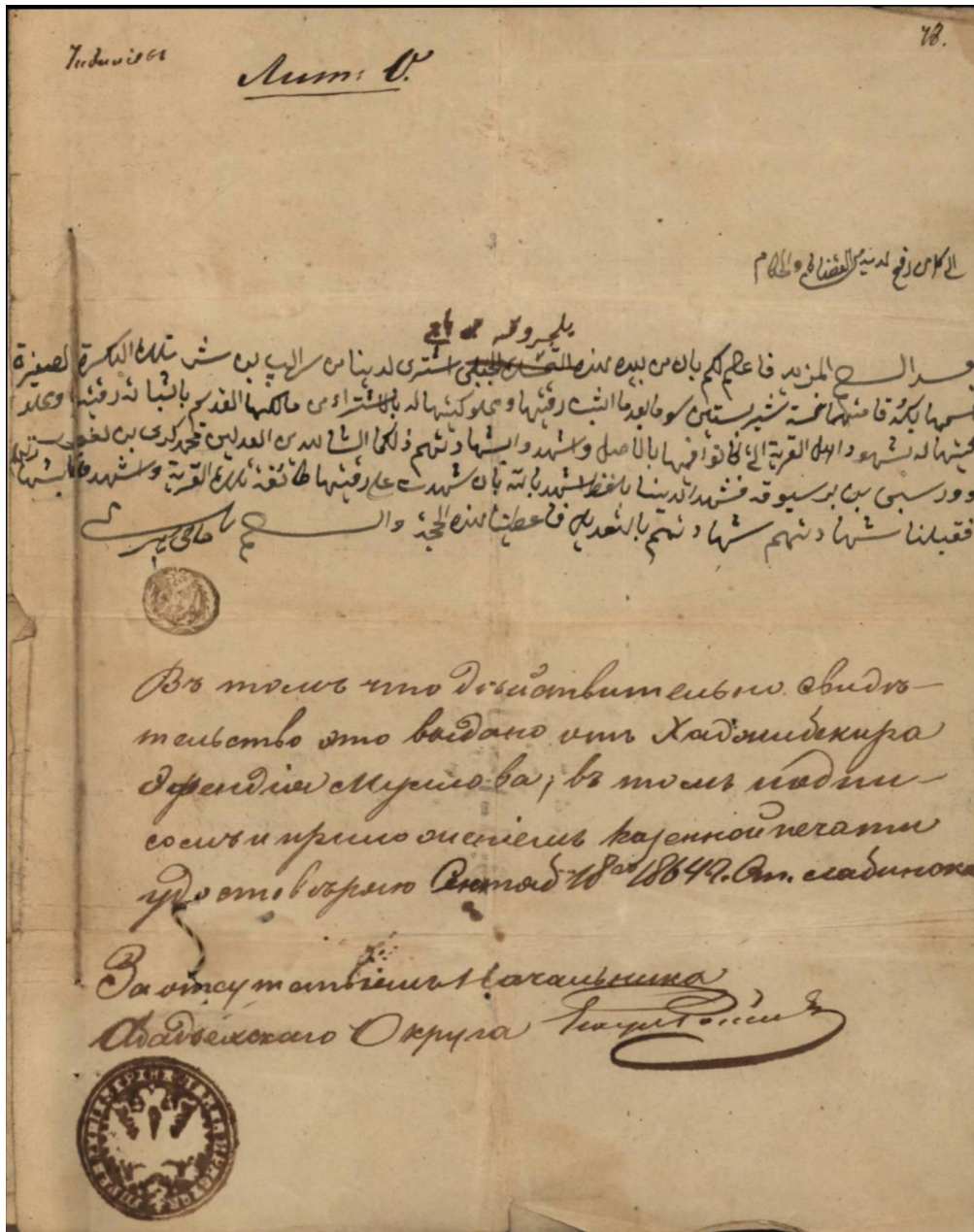


Figure 1. Sale Deed of a Circassian Slave (1864)
(Arabic and Russian languages)

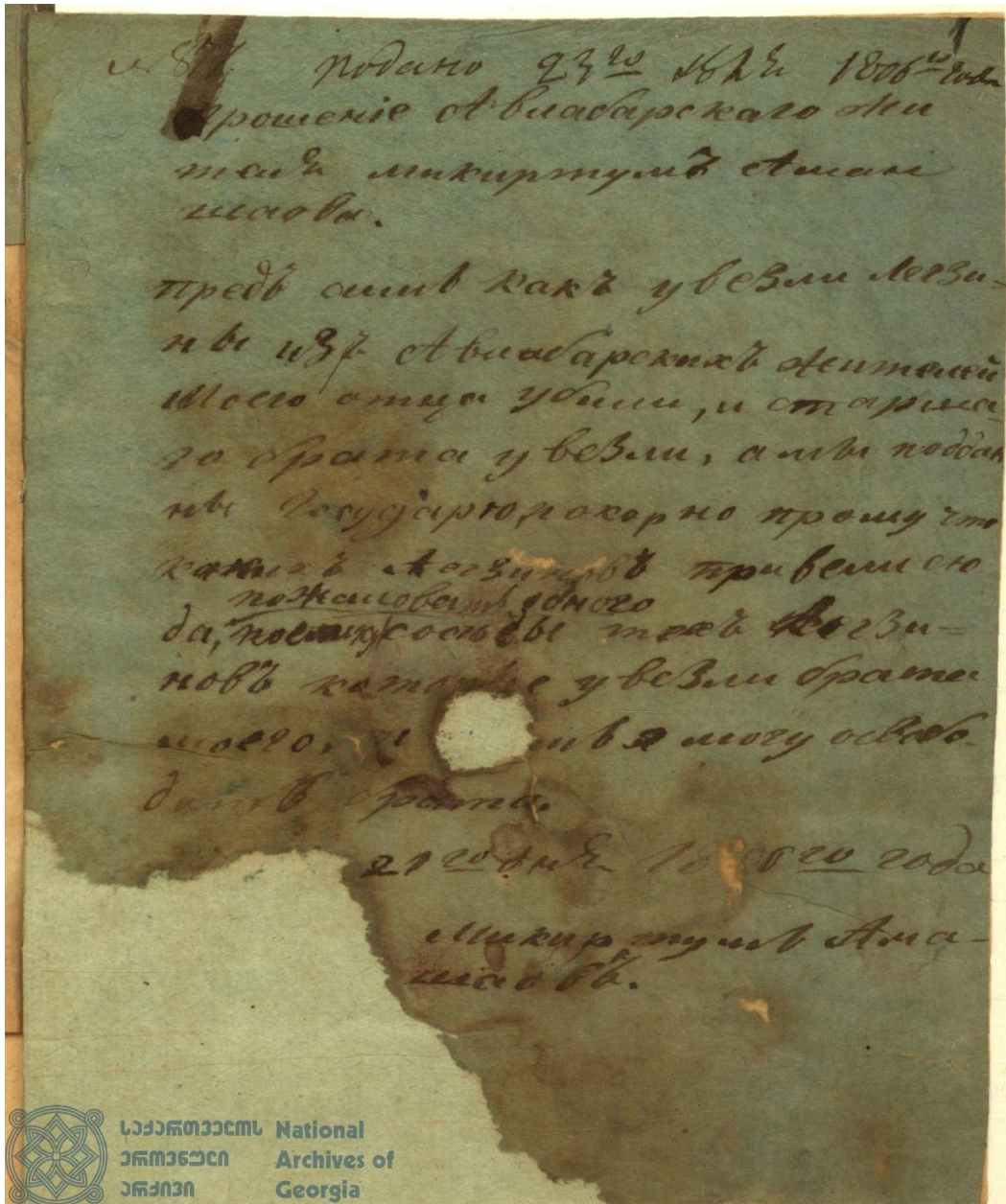


Figure 2. Petition seeking assistance of the Russian government to return captured in a raid family (1806)

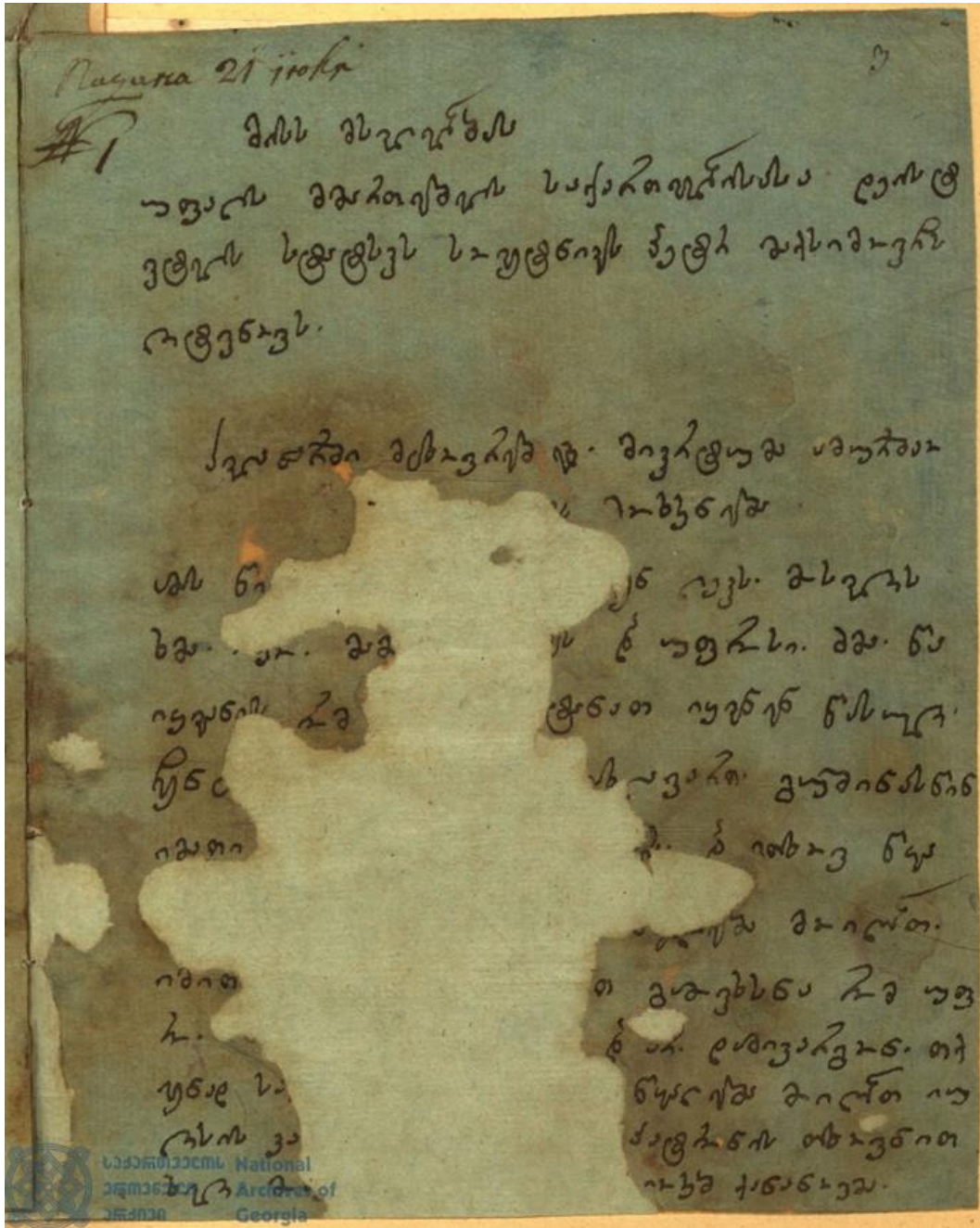


Figure 2. Petition seeking assistance of the Russian government to return captured in a raid family (1806) (Georgian language)

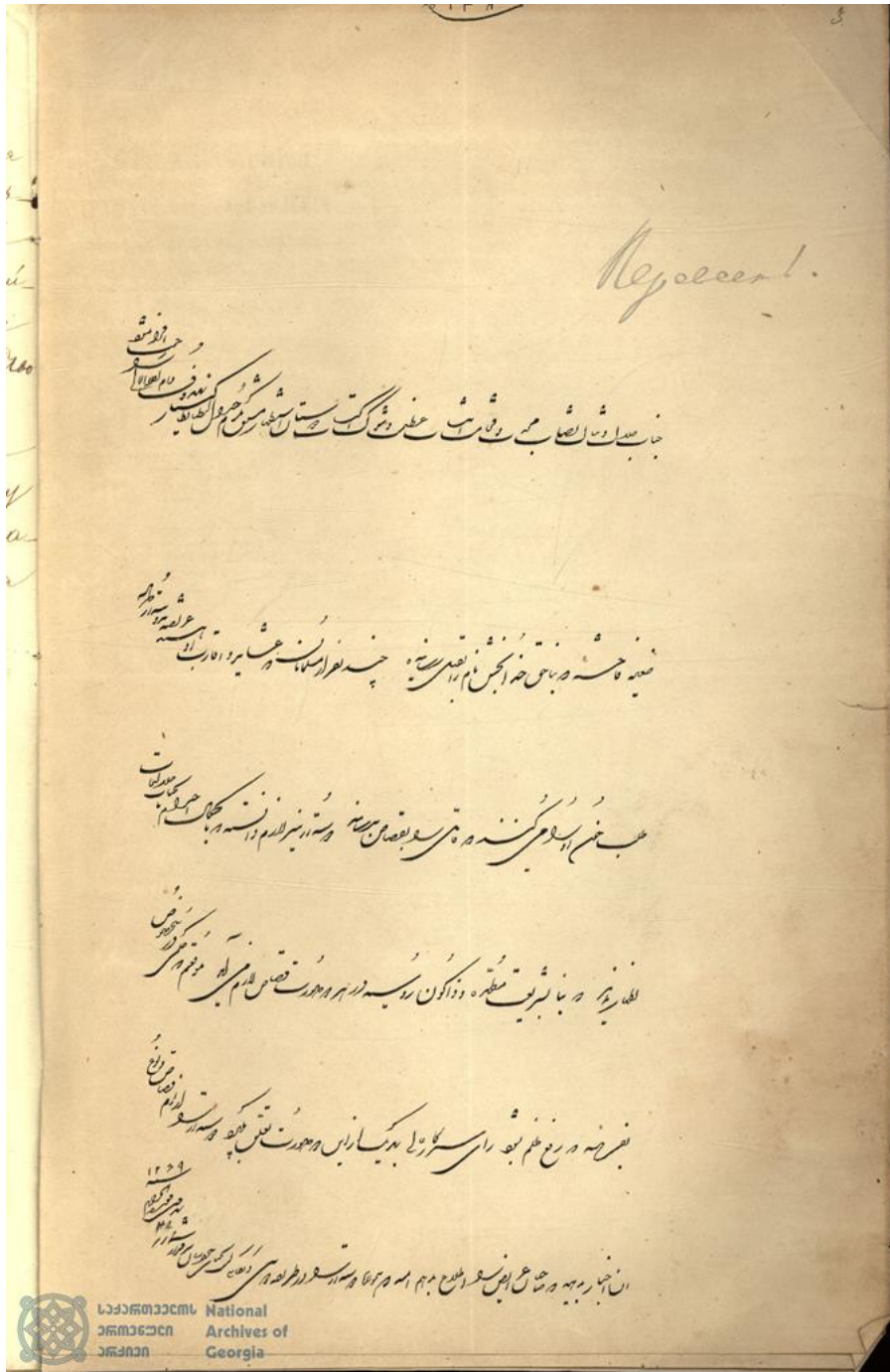


Figure 4. A letter written in Farsi (1853)

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

At the first glance, the study of the history of slavery and the slave trade in the nineteenth century Caucasus may appear as irrelevant to the geo-political concerns of the present. I argue, however, that history is the foundation of the present structure of the political, economic, social, and cultural institutions in the diverse region. Hence, attempts to create and implement a policy that seeks to promote the American national interests in the Caucasus, and Georgia in particular, without consulting historic records and utilizing historians' interpretation of the region's past will be shortsighted and likely ineffectual. My research will enable the policy makers and security agencies to understand how Russian soft and hard powers operate in the Caucasus region and attract political loyalty of the states whose geography and history placed them within the sphere of the Russian national interest. My research is particularly valuable for the U.S. multipronged strategy of fostering closer political, economic, and security links with the Republic of Georgia, the country that historically holds the key to the control of the entire Caucasus isthmus. In this section, I will limit my policy analysis and recommendations to understanding of Russian strategy of political domination of the states in the Caucasus region and specifically the Republic of Georgia. Russia is and will remain the U.S.'s chief geopolitical rival in the Caucasus in the foreseeable future. Hence, understanding of how the Russian policy works to sway political allegiances and consolidate its political clout in the countries of the Caucasus mountains will enable the American policy makers to counteract the Russian attempts to further entrenched its geo-political presence and damage the U.S. strategic interests in the region.

The practices of slavery, captivity, and social patronage have a long historic tenure in the Caucasus region; Georgia has not been immune to these experiences. Although the days of the

open slave markets in the Caucasus are long gone, the legacy of the rigid social hierarchies continues to inform Georgia's social fabric in formal and less visible informal ways. In fact, the study of the Russian imperial government's approach toward slavery and its abolition in the nineteenth century could serve as a reliable and time-tested blueprint for understanding and predicting how Russian government seeks to extend its influence and pursue its strategic national interests in the region.

Russian security agencies are extremely adept at exploiting social tensions and political chasms that currently percolate all levels of the modern Georgian society. The Russian foreign policy and soft power seeks to manipulate, antagonize, and otherwise exploit public sentiment to propel forward its own interests in the country. History teaches us that traditionally the Russian policy makers pursued their strategic goals in the Caucasus by co-opting the political loyalty of the discontent with the status quo elites. The promises of wealth, power, and/or protection of the elites' privileged social status and financial well-being have allowed the Russian Empire to consolidate its rule over a vast and difficult to traverse terrain of the Caucasus mountains in the past. Similar methods of co-optation and appeasement were used by the Soviet policy makers in the second half of the twentieth century in order to maintain a firm hold over the region's diverse populations through the authority of the local political elites. The Russian policy of the co-optation of the prone to the political opportunism elites has not changed dramatically in the recent past. Today, the Russian security agencies actively search for individuals and/or organizations who find themselves unable but willing to gain access to the institutions of political power and therefore prone to the outside influence. In the eyes of the Russian policy-makers ordinary people are a dispensable resource. In other words, common people are means for achieving ends; the elites, on the other hand, are regarded as the true assets that require investment, courtship, and protection.

This axiom of the Russian foreign policy in the Caucasus remained constant for more than two centuries and is unlikely to change any time soon.

Recommendation: Although the pendulum of public opinion in the United States is notoriously capricious and prone to influence from subjective factors or lack of credible information, I strongly recommend the United States Department of State and other relevant federal agencies to continue the ongoing efforts of collaboration with and amicable diplomatic and security relationship with the Georgian government and look for more opportunities to entrench the presence of the American educational and political organizations in the country's civil society via humanitarian and business opportunities. More efforts and resources ought to be invested to entrench the image of the U.S. government and the American people as friends and allies of the Georgian people in the popular imagination of Georgia's civil society.

Co-Curricular Activity:

While conducting research in Tbilisi, I started a formal study of the Georgian language. Namely, I enrolled in Georgian as a Foreign Language (A1) class offered at the American Language Center. The thirty-hour crash course allowed me to enhance my reading comprehension skills and develop beginner level of fluency in the language. After several weeks of attending the class, I noticed a significant improvement in my reading and listening skills. Also, I had a privilege to attend an exhibition about Georgian cinema production, which was organized and curated by the staff of the National Archives of Georgia. The exhibition showcased the history of the Georgian film in the twentieth century with displays of photo cinematography and film posters.

Furthermore, I attended the Association for Slavic East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) conference in Boston, Massachusetts on December 6th-9th 2018. At the conference, I organized and participated on the panel on slavery and captivity on the borderlands of the Russian

Empire. I delivered a paper titled *Reluctant Abolitionists: Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century Caucasus*. The presentation was well-attended and my paper received good feedback and encouragement. Attending the conference allowed me to meet other scholars in the field of the Russian history and make important professional connections that will certainly benefit my work and research in the future.

On March 15th 2019, I presented the preliminary results of my research in the format of a public lecture at the Ilia State University in Tbilisi. The university is one of the two main state universities in the country's capital. This public lecture was attended by graduate students, faculty, and other Georgian scholars; the presentation was well-attended and proved to be academically significant event. In addition, I am continued to regularly attend the Work-in-Progress series of lectures sponsored by the American Councils, the Caucasus Research and Resource Center, and the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus. These lectures offer scholars an opportunity to present their research and build important professional networks for future interdisciplinary collaboration.

Finally, I also participated in the opening of the Academia Europaea, Tbilisi knowledge hub on April 24th. The knowledge hub will foster academic cooperation of between European scholars and their Georgia counterparts. The event was an excellent opportunity to meet other academics and share my research for colleagues from different European universities.

Conclusions and Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

The nine months of meticulous archival work at the archives and libraries in Tbilis allowed me to test the viability of my dissertation project, confirm the validity of my hypothesis, discover rare and previously unpublished primary sources, and refine the thesis of my dissertation. I accumulated a substantial number of archival documents and began to write the first two chapters

of my dissertation, which I intend to edit and complete by the end of the current academic year. I am currently studying and working on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara. In the upcoming months, I am hoping to fully immerse myself in the analysis, interpretation, and translation of archival documents and writing the remaining chapters of my dissertation. The Title VIII Fellowship gave me a financial peace of mind and offered an invaluable opportunity to focus all my time and energy on conducting the requisite archival research in order to write a dissertation that will be sure to open a new chapter in the historiography of the Russian Empire.

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Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), 36 Zanevskii Prospekt, Saint Petersburg, 195112, Russian Federation

The Russian Geographical Society (RGO) Grivtsova Pereulok, 10, Saint Petersburg, 190000, Russian Federation

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