



Capture of Shamil, by Theodor Horschelt

The Murid Wars

(ghazavat) 1785-1861

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Murid is a follower of a shaykh. The two live in a khaniqah or monastery and lead a very austere existence. In the course of many years, the shaykh leads the murid on the path or tariqa of unity with Allah. The term "murid" is also used for an individual who fights voluntarily for social equality (Henze 15) and for national independence. In this latter context, Muridism is understood as a branch of Sufism in which the disciple follows the dictates of an imam who leads the ghazavat or holy war for equality and national integrity (cf., mujahid). The ghazavats were fought primarily in the Caucasus.

The first imam in the line of Transcaucasian leaders was Shaykh Mansour, also known as Mansour Bey and Elisha Mansour Ushurma. Little is known about Mansur's early life. There are, however, a number of surmises relating him to the Ottoman Empire, to Chechnia and to Geneva. In most likelihood, he was a Chechen from Aldy who had joined the Naqshbandi order in Bukhara.

The Naqshbandi order was founded in Bukhara by Baha'uddin Naqshband (1317-1389). It is an elitist popular and flexible order. Many rulers, military leaders, wealthy merchants, intellectuals and poets follow its precepts which include:

- Resistance to Evil
- Every breath must include cognizance of Allah
- Every step must be calculated so that the faithful is not lured away from the Path
- Travel must be extensive but within the self
- The individual must be social and must be alone with God at all times
- The individual must practice silent dhikr

Mansour arrived on the scene in 1785, during the reign of Kathrene the Great 1762-1796. After he defeated a Russian brigade at the Shunzha river, he called all the Muslims of the Caucasus to unity and mobilized them against the infidels. Although his ghazavats were supported by the Ottomans and the Perisans, his forces were defeated by Potemkin; Mansur himself was captured in the Ottoman fortification of Anapa in 1791. He died in exile in Solovetski in northern Russia.

Rather than an Imam, Mansour called himself a "preparatory mover." In this way, he opened the way for future imams to carry on his anti-Russian agenda. After Mansour Bey, for some 30 years, the Naqshbandiyyah and its Anti-Russian murid wars were silent. (Paul 1796-1801).

The second phase of the Murid Wars begins in 1803, when the kingdom of Georgia is annexed to Russia and when Persia, according to the Gulistan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1827) treaties cedes Azerbaijan to Russia. Dagestan becomes a Muslim enclave in Christian Russia. The Murid wars were centered first around the Aoul of Ghimri and, later on, on Gounib. They were led by three charismatic sufi Imams: Khazi Mullah, Hamzad Bey (during Alexander I: 1801-1825) and [Imam Shamil](#). The motive fueling the Murid wars was the concept that the Islamic heritage must be safeguarded at all cost.

The murids were members of the Naqshbandiyyah order. Khazi Mullah is the first Imam of Dagestan. He became Imam after he preached for many years and after he gathered a large following. He rose against the Russians in the late 1820s and was killed when, in 1832, the Russians stormed his Aoul.

Hamzad Bey was a commander under Khazi Mullah (1831-32). A treacherous person, he became Imam after Khazi Mullah's death. It was during his tenure that Shamil was in hiding. Hamzad Bey was killed by Haji Mourad in a general uprising in a mosque in 1834.

Shamil, also known as the Lion of Dagestan, was born circa 1796 in the Aoul of Ghimri and died in 1871 in Medina. He appeared on the scene in 1834, imposed the Shari'a on all the Caucasus, unified the region, and constantly harassed the Russian troops. He established a new law and order in Dagestan and sought to be recognized as a man with a divine mission.

Shamil is well-known in particular for his capture of two princesses--ladies-in-waiting for the Tzarina--in 1854. He was defeated in 1861. A bold warrior, he would not have been defeated if the Crimean war (1853-1856) had not freed the Russians' hand to bring the full force of their army to bear on the uprising in the Caucasus.

After Shamil, the Russians directed their attention to the East and to the tribal peoples of Central Asia.

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