



THE WORK OF J.S. BELL AND D. URQUHART IN CIRCASSIA IN THE 1830S: ENABLEMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

While carrying out political interaction, economic cooperation and cultural exchange, cross-cultural communication employs diverse methods, such as diplomatic channels, business activity and cultural exchange. The issues concerning political and cultural communication and the formation of the country's positive image are very much on today's agenda and worth of the closest analysis. The purpose of this paper is to research into the work of British emissaries J.S. Bell and D. Urquhart in Circassia in the 1830s. A special focus is placed on the historical aspects of their efforts towards establishing communication between the Circassians of the Northwest Caucasus and the United Kingdom.

Keywords: Circassians, feature journalism, Circassia, United Kingdom

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1. INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the development of communication between different peoples of the world is especially important in the age of globalization. We are witnessing rapid globalization, extremely complicated and diverse (Iggers and Wang, 2012: 21). Cross-cultural communication is one of pillars of the modern world. A researcher V.S. Tormosheva believes that “in the mechanism of cross-cultural communication, the roles of the sender and receiver of messages is played by government, general public, communities (members of different nations and cultures), individual members of the public” (Tormosheva, 2011)

In expanding the borders of its colonial empire, promoting its products to new markets, exploring new sources of raw materials, the British government relied on diplomats, entrepreneurs, merchants who would pave the way for Britain in various regions of the world, transcend national and cultural borders, all the while establishing the “interaction in the public domain between communities” (Tormosheva, 2011). In the 19th century, this policy was shaped into an organized and consistent procedure. It makes the story of the development of communication between the peoples of Circassia and Great Britain all the more interesting.

The purpose of this paper is to use the political and journalist legacy of James Stanislaus Bell (1797-1858) and David Urquhart (1805–1877), both British citizens who visited Circassia, as an example to demonstrate the process of establishment of communication between the Circassians and the United Kingdom. The said communication actors were chosen for two reasons: first, their activity was in line with two integrated levels of the British diplomacy – business and political; second, both ambassadors have left behind a rich literary legacy. It is thought that their position regarding the Circassian matter represented the beliefs of a certain part of the British society of that time who were interested in pushing forward the English policy in the eastern coast of the Black Sea. The review of publications on the Circassian issue authored by J.S. Bell and D. Urquhart in the United Kingdom substantiates the conclusion as to the influence these works caused on the public opinion in the United Kingdom. The author’s key take-away from this is that the Britons’ diplomatic engagement with the peoples of Circassia stimulated the political interaction and brought forward the Circassian topic to the global limelight. By using this experience in today’s situation, it is possible to facilitate the establishment of relationship and communication between different cultural and ethnic groups in the face of globalization.

2. METHODOLOGY

The content of this paper is based on both published and unpublished sources, including archive materials, periodicals and feature materials of the United Kingdom and travelers’ journals.

The methodological framework for this paper is formed of the common historical principles of historical cognition – historicism and objectivity.

The study was based on traditional professional historical research methods.

- The dynamics of the historical processes that had taken place in Circassia in the considered period was studied using the historical genetic method. It enabled to study and identifies the cause-and-effect links and patterns in the development of the Circassians.
- The historical typological method also allowed identifying common traits in the development of UK's foreign relations with Northwestern Caucasus.
- The historical systems method helped assess the system of foreign relations and establish the place for Caucasus in the hierarchy of this system.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

J. S. Bell was a British emissary who fought in the Caucasian War alongside mountaineers. While living in Circassia between 1838 and 1839, he kept a detailed journal, which in 1840 was published as a book *Journal of a Residence in Circassia* (Bell, 1840). The book has a map inside it compiled by the author, with a detailed outline of the Circassian Black Sea coastline. The book is filled with numerous illustrations made by the author.

Bell's book went beyond the usual memoirs of an ordinary traveler. His work contains a meticulous recollection of every-day routines of the Circassian community, with a detailed analysis of the Circassians' political life. The author, a Scot by birth, was clearly fond of the Circassians. Emphasizing the brave spirit, nobility and hospitality of the men and the beauty and humbleness of the women, Bell in its book created the positive image of the Circassian people. The author's text was accompanied by the map and illustrations. This way, Bell could relate to the interested British reader the idealized perception of the fair far-away land whose people defended their independence against unequal odds. The goal was reached, sparking interest and sympathy towards the Circassians in the English society. The establishment of contact with the Circassian people during the period of diplomatic and trade travels inspired communication. In his work, Bell acted as a mediator between the British and the Circassian worlds. The so-called "travel literature" was one of the numerous ways for the British to communicate with different parts of the world, and Bell was not pioneering this genre. The description of travels, of "relocations within the real geographical space, is classified as documentary prose, in which it merges with a large number of feature stories, gradually transforming into scientific communication" (Deremedved, 2004). J.S. Bell's work belongs to that latter genre. While living in Circassia, Bell was taking an active part in the general meetings of the local chiefs (Bell, 1840: 106; Longworth, 1840: 15). An attempt was made to establish the "Council of Ministers." Bell and his compatriot Longworth urged the locals to coordinate border protection efforts between Shapsugs, Abzakhs and Natukhajs (GAKK, file 1624. sheet 6). The Circassian peoples that lived along the Circassian shore of the Black Sea found themselves in a precarious situation, remaining under pressure and blockade from the Russian army.

Being a British agent, Bell advocated for the expansion of trade between Northwestern Caucasus and the United Kingdom. Some parts of his journal are dedicated to the review of Circassia's logistics and its connections with the neighboring regions of the Black Sea and England. As he frequently took sea voyages and hired cargo vessels, Bell believed that trade between Circassia and the United Kingdom could be a profitable enterprise and that the British would be able to bring products, take away raw materials, at the same time carrying passengers from Turkey to Circassia (Bell, 1840: 101, 451 (vol.1); 80 (vol.2); RGVIA).

The establishment of links with Circassia was to a great deal champion by the Secretary of the Embassy of the United Kingdom at Constantinople, David Urquhart, who was one of the bright political figures of the studied period. British diplomats of all ranks were engaged in

active work throughout the Ottoman Empire, traveled around the empire, made contact with the locals, spreading pro-British propaganda. To a certain extent, they influenced the public opinion of the foreign policy in Western Europe. In February 1833, having done his research into the economy of the Ottoman Empire, Urquhart compiled a memorandum on the prospects of the development of British trade in the region. To his credit, he was among the first to draw the government's attention to the benefits of trade communications between the regions, whereas professional diplomats did not duly focus on this area of collaboration.

The 1830s were the turning point in the history of the Circassians. Based on the outcome of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829 and the Treaty of Adrianople that marked its end, the Ottoman Empire ceded the territory of Circassia to the Russian Empire. The terms of the Treaty were worded in such a way as to never mention the people, only referring to the geographical borders. The Circassians furnished resistance to the advance of the Russian army deeper into their land. The Caucasian War persisted. The public wanted support. The Circassians viewed the Sublime Porte as a patronizing state. Circassian delegations repeatedly called the Sultan for help. In 1834, another Circassian delegation was sent to Istanbul to enlist the support of the "state of common faith." However, under the existing circumstances, the Ottomans were unable to render either material or political help. But D. Urquhart gave the Circassians a warm welcome, as he was very much interested in making contact with the delegates from Circassia.

The idea of the Circassian opposition to Russia was prompted to the British by the Turks, who were well informed about all the complications in the political dealings of the Mountaineers. Turkey managed to entice influential British noblemen with the idea of supporting the Circassians in their opposition to the establishment of the Russian rule (Allen and Muratoff, 1953: 46). Having looked into the political situation in Northwestern Caucasus, Urquhart concluded that the people there were independent and refused to obey the terms of the Treaty of Adrianople, whereas Russia had control only over several frontiers on the shore of the Black Sea. Therefore, he believed, the Circassians could be interested in getting support from the United Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire in their fight against the policy imposed by the Tsar dictatorship. According to data gathered by the British, the public was in need of arms and other goods, but their shipment was being disrupted by the Russian blockade of the Circassian coast.

Having gathered the necessary information from the British merchants, who operated on the Circassian shore, and consulted with the British ambassador at Constantinople John Ponsonby, Urquhart visited Circassia as a private person between July and August 1834. During his visit, he would frequent mountain villages, taking an active part in the social and political life of the locals. Urquhart wore a chokha (a Circassian coat) and called himself Daud Bey. Being a Scot by birth, he approached the mountaineers open-mindedly, but above all, he genuinely sympathized with their situation and strived to help. Such positive were the results of this communication, that the Circassians were "astounded by the visitor from the enormous outside world who would speak on behalf of – they later learned – such powerful state as Britain" (Hopkirk, 2004: 82). It should be noted that Urquhart talks were quite reserved. He did not give any groundless promises of help due to that help being impossible. Instead he proposed a system of efforts that could potentially consolidate the Circassians as the only possible way to act amidst the war. A consolidation symbol was designed – a united flag depicting twelve stars (the union of twelve tribes) and three arrows (the symbol of fight) on a green background (the color of the Circassian mountains and of the people's faith). Hoping for moral support from the British monarch, Urquhart suggested that the Circassians turn to him for help. With Urquhart on their side, the Circassians wrote their "Declaration of Independence of Circassia" with the intention to hand it to King William IV (AVPRI, Rikman

to Nesselrode, March 6-18, 1834; Butenev to Nesselrode, November 7/11, 1834). Urquhart turned down the eventual call from the Circassians to lead their fight, claiming that he would be of more help to them in London (Khavzhoko, 1933: 4-6, 29).

Urquhart's report on the actual political situation in Circassia influenced the official stance of John Ponsonby, the British ambassador at Constantinople, on the Oriental Question. In Ponsonby's updated concept, Circassia was viewed as one of the main guarantors of the balance of powers in Europe.

Starting from that moment, Urquhart became an ardent supporter of independence for Circassia. In his work, England, France, Russia and Turkey, he dwelled upon the place of Circassia in the British foreign policy in the East. In his reports to the Foreign Office of the United Kingdom, Urquhart argued that Circassia had to serve as a buffer between Russia and Turkey and stop Russia from advancing towards India. As long as Russia was yet to conquer the remaining lands in Caucasus, it had but put off its attacks on Turkey (Urquhart, 1835: 24).

Urquhart's ideas were popular in the United Kingdom, France and the Ottoman Empire (Bolsover, 1936: 455-456). They were backed by the majority of British newspapers that had voiced concern regarding the expansion of Russia's influence in Caucasus. Therefore, in Urquhart's plans, Circassia was seen as an important political factor of keeping the balance of power in Europe in a way that was beneficial for Britain. In his opinion, it possessed powerful instruments of opposition and so was considered a valuable ally.

Following a proposal from Urquhart, the British embassy in Constantinople decided to send a merchant ship to Circassia. Bell turned out to be the most suitable candidate for this voyage, as he was an agent of an English trade company and new the country well.

During the preparation of this mission, two possible outcomes were considered. Should the vessel make it to the shore without being spotted by military ships, this would prove Russia's inability to ensure the sea blockade of the Western Caucasus. The creation of such precedent of trade between the Circassians and the British would later allow expanding it, making the communication regular. Should the vessel be detained, it would pose grounds for raising the issue of protection of the UK's commercial rights and send the British navy to interpose in the matters of the Black Sea region.

The ship was arrested and seized on March 17, 1837 by the Russian coastal guards. The incident with HMS Vixen became a topic for debates at the British parliament. The review of parliament discussions of the HMS Vixen incident provides supplementary material for establishing Circassia's place in the UK's politics. The Circassians' fight for independence inspired interest in the British members of parliament but failed to be promoted to the status of an official government policy (Cheucheva, 2007: 219-243).

In their activity, the two Britons gave the Circassians a semblance of support for a while. Circassian delegates got to visit London, yet they eventually realized that the British government would not be willing to take any drastic action to help them (Felitsyn, 1904: 20).

Considering the official stance of the British government, Ponsonby suggested to the Circassian delegates, who were in Constantinople at the time, that they announce to their people that they had been misinformed by Urquhart and thus should not take all his assurances seriously (Felitsyn, 1904: 20-22; Widerzal, 1934: 47).

Living among the Circassians and dealing with the Caucasian War gave both Bell and Urquhart a most vivid, rich experience. In view of this experience, they regarded London's position in respect to the Circassian issue as quite passive. Having been refused support from the UK government, the Britons found themselves in a tough situation. In his instruction for Caucasus in 1838, the Russian Minister of War Alexander Chernyshov stressed that, "the

English emissaries ended up in extremely strained circumstances, having lost the trust of the mountaineers and dreading to fall victims of their revenge for the false promises of illusionary facilitation from foreign countries, with which the agents had long reassured them” (Tzagareishvili, 1953: 148). In April 1839, Bell was the only one to stay in Circassia.

Urquhart continued his active political life, even though his position on Circassia and some other problems was not backed by the official London. Having won the support of the British public, Urquhart made a call to self-publish a newspaper in order to relay his own concept of foreign policy to his readership. The periodical, called *Le Portfolio* (1836), was published in English and French. For the first time, the British press issued regular features about the remote Caucasian region. The British readers were getting information about the life of the Circassian people, they were told about their fight for independence against all odds. The newspaper materials explained how the opposition from the Circassians could affect the development of foreign relations and Britain’s interests in particular. One of the issues contained the full text of the Declaration of Independence of Circassia and the map of the country. “We hear the voice of the Circassian land, this old boulevard between Asia and Europe,” the article said (*Le Portfolio*, 1836: 11).

Lord Palmerston read the newspaper materials and edited a geographical map on which Circassia was denoted as an independent territory. Palmerston received detailed information about Urquhart’s visit to Circassia in 1834. In addition to that, the Declaration of Independence of Circassia was published in a newspaper related to the Foreign Office of the United Kingdom. Such publication was interpreted as the official recognition by the British government of the righteous fight of Circassians for their sovereignty.

Portfolio’s publications made a stir in the British society. The *Times*, The *Morning Chronicle* and other daily papers mentioned them. The collection of the articles also achieved prominence abroad; it was used to spread propaganda of Circassia’s independence on a global scale (Khavzhoko, 1933: 3). The newspaper was also popular in the East. However, *Portfolio* made the biggest splash in Circassia. The paper was repeatedly brought to the attention of the Russian war administration. According to Count Vorontsov, in 1836 the residents of Anapa Region were widely using *Portfolio* as a sign of the British support of their strife, along with the Address by the King of the United Kingdom, which was widely copied and distributed. The Circassians even asked the Russian authorities for help in translating the royal letter (GAKK, Sheet 3–3 rev.; Sheet 1; Sheet 162).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the unwillingness of the British Foreign Office to back Urquhart’s agenda, he succeeded in promoting his ideas, and not only in the media. Thanks to his relentless efforts, Britain’s public opinion “definitely” grew pro-Circassian. In every more or less large city and town, foreign affairs committees started emerging, which insisted on pushing forward the British policy in Caucasus. Starting from that period, affinity towards Circassia became a popular trend in the West. It peaked in the United Kingdom where Circassian advocates tried to influence the official policy of the British government. It is also worth mentioning that the British papers of that time would publish articles arguing that the Circassians were not in fact a nation of scoundrels and rogues. Europe’s perception of the Circassians was morphing into a positive image.

Due to his post in the government, D. Urquhart was restricted in his methods of pursuing policies, but being a public figure, he rolled out a massive publicity campaign. Urquhart’s point of view reflected a radical take on this problem. Among the deficiencies in his works were their emotional intensity and certain subjectivity in his assessment of Russia’s policy in the East and Britain’s interests in this region.

The legacy of J.S. Bell and D. Urquhart was continued. Numerous travelers and politicians would later write about Circassia. The region kept remaining in the spotlight up until the end of the Caucasian War.

In summing up the communication-building activity by J.S. Bell and D. Urquhart aimed at establishing a link between the United Kingdom and Circassia, it should be stressed that despite all the efforts undertaken by the Britons, Circassia never received any official political and military support. However, the communication process also rendered some positive outcomes. Thanks to the extended pro-Circassian propaganda, first in British and then in European Continental press, the world grew aware of the events that were taking place in Northwestern Caucasus. People “discovered” Circassia. Pressed by the public opinion, the “Circassian question” found its way into parliamentary debates. The two Britons managed to inspire some degree of consolidation in the Circassian society. The bottom line for the contemporary Circassians is that the literary legacy of J.S. Bell and D. Urquhart helped us preserve the unique factual materials about the local life in Circassia. The Britons left their trace in the cultural and political life of the Circassians. It should be noted that the problems of political and cultural communication and the building of a positive image for a country are all topics worth of most careful research. By applying this experience to modern reality, it is possible to establish links and a dialogue between members of different cultures.

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