

BOOK REVIEW

Giorgi Kazbegi, Bir Rus Generalinin Günlükleri “Türkiye Gürcistanı’nda Üç Ay”

[Giorgi Kazbegi, Diary of a Russian General, “Three Months in Turkish Georgia”], Translated from Georgian into Turkish by Rıdvan Atan, İstanbul: Doruk Yayıncılık, 2019, 173 p. ISBN: 978-975-553-720-7

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Giorgi Kazbegi (1840-1921) was born into a notable Georgian family in Kazbegi region, northern Georgia. He had had his primary education at the best schools in Tbilisi before he enrolled at a military school and graduated as a lieutenant (*teğmen*) to serve in the Russian army. Later in his career Kazbegi rose to the rank of General in Tsar’s Army. He was assigned to the Caucasian Front and actively served at 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War.

In 1874, Kazbegi undertook a reconnaissance work at the Southwest Caucasian region, the territories within the borders of Ottoman Empire. During his tour in the region he took notes which later on was published as a book. Though never does Kazbegi state the true nature of his visit to

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the region explicitly, it is highly likely that his mission was strongly associated with the pre-war preparations.

This region is called “Georgia within Turkey” (*Türkiye Gürcistanı*) in the literature. During this tour, Kazbegi paid a visit to a local notable Hemşiaşvili (*Hamşioğlu*) family with the company of Grigol Gurieli, another general in the Russian army. One interpretation suggests that Kazbegi participated this visit undercover as an insignificant officer of General Gurieli thus no one knew what his real identity was. Kazbegi took his notes encrypted and recorded every member in his unit but with only their initials in case his tour was to be interpreted as an espionage activity by the local Ottoman officials.

The book titled “*Three Months in Turkish Georgia*” (*Turkish translation: Türkiye Gürcistanı’nda Üç Ay*) was compiled of Kazbegi’s systematic notes on geographical regions he took within the territories of ancient Georgia; Upper Adjara, Şavşat, Ardanuç, Artvin, Borçka, Hopa, Arhavi, Pazar, and Hemşin.† His trips were planned according to the geographic conditions of the region, sometimes on the back of a horse, sometimes on foot, or by river-going boats. Kazbegi made observations and took detailed notes during this three-month tour and he discovered the uncharted or less known parts of the territory. He even corrected some misinformation of the European travelers. His findings are most probably accurate when the date of this book is considered.

He used technological devices like a compass, aneroid barometer, thermometer to minimize error margins at determination of terrain, direction and altitude. He measured water temperature and collected water samples to analyze later. Moreover, he noted on vegetation cover at the places he visited and collected plant samples as well.

In his book, Kazbegi gave details about demographic structures of the places. He mentioned the numbers of Turks, Georgians, Armenians, Greeks, Laz, Hemşin and Kurdish people living at each place (district, town, and village), and noted their economic activities, and religious beliefs.

† the Russian original of the book: Georgiy Kazbegi, *Tri Mesyatsa v Turetskoy Gruzii, iz Dnevniko Putushestvennika, Osobyi Ottisk iz Zapisok “Kavkasskago Otdela Imperatorskago Russkago Geograficheskago Obshtestva (s Kartoyu)*, Tiflis: Tipografiya g. Chantseva, 1876; the book was translated from Russian into Georgian by Ramaz Surmanizde in 1995 under the title *Sami Tve Turqetis Saqartveloshi* (Batumi: Ajara, 1995).

He specifically mentioned roads and routes. He went from Artvin to Borçka over Choruhı River by a river-going boat and told how transportation worked over this river to Batumi. He also wrote about the mountains, valleys, streams, water resources, and soil structure.

Another important contribution of this book is that it includes the architectural data of the region, such as bridges, castles, towers, mosques, and churches. At one subchapter of the book, he recorded a church noting its building date, physical measurements, construction materials, paintings in it, and even legends about it. Such data is especially important in terms of providing an inventory of destroyed, lost or ruined architectural pieces of the region.

The author of the book aimed to relate geographical, societal, and economic structures of the region to its administrative mechanisms. He also tried to build a historical connection between "Russian Georgia and Ottoman Georgia" and to show how closely they were related to each other. With this objective, he defined a generic Georgian typology and attempted to express similar features of the Georgian people.

The book has four chapters and an introduction part. Chapters are "Upper Adjara/Yukarı Acara" (31-72), "Şavşat" (73-103), "Ardanuç and Livan" (105-126), and Lazistan" (127-169). There is also a list of collected plants and water samples, and analysis of them at the end of the book.

"Yukarı Acara" (Upper Adjara) chapter tells the history of Hemshiashvili - *Hamşioğlu* family/ household. It focuses on the importance of this particular family in terms of relations between the center and the province, and how a provincial household could be an agent (assigned by the state) of controlling a provincial region. This chapter also mentions the history and characteristics of people of Adjara, and contrasts of similarities and differences there were between the people of Adjara and rest of Georgia.

"Şavşat" chapter defines the administrative borders of the region and gives detailed information about a Tbeti'an monastery there. This part tells about a regional administrative person named Selim Hemshiashvili, his rise against *Tanzimat* applications of the 19th century and the consequences of this mutiny.

"Ardanuç and Livan" chapter points out the importance of building proper roads and thus connecting Batumi port to the Central Anatolian

cities emphasizing also the importance of the port of Batumi because of its location. It points out that the roads built in accordance with standards would develop commercial activities with Iran and would increase commercial capacity of Anatolia with European cities. In parallel to this suggestion, the chapter has vast information and evaluations on roadworks from Batumi to Ardanuç over Choruhi River, and then to Kars region.

Kazbegi, in his last chapter "Lazistan" which he identifies as the regions of "terra incognita", defines administrative features of the Lazistan region and describes its geography. It has information about the general history, language, and beliefs (when they converted into Christianity or Islam) of the Laz people. The chapter makes some corrections about their history and adds some unknown information to it.

Kazbegi is certainly one of the most important figures in the formation of Georgian nationality, and nationalism. He was the successor of the founder of Georgian national identity, İlia Chavchavadze. He succeeded İlia Chavchavadze as the Chairman of "Association of Popularization of Literacy Among the Georgians" (*Gürcüler Arasında Okuma Yazmayı Yaygınlaştırma Derneği*). Surely, technical information mentioned at the book has its own merit. However, this book proceeds this contribution and has become a study deserving deeper analysis with its societal and historical evaluations. When it comes to its limitations, one should see that Kazbegi could not examine and evaluate all geographic regions equally due to the weather conditions, geographic difficulties, and time concerns. The author himself admitted that this book did not appear to be the one he had once imagined, and that it had been hard to take notes in a foreign country since he was an outsider.

Kazbegi's book is the first comprehensive scientific study on this region. Being a good military expert and a geographer, he managed to note almost everything he heard and saw meticulously. Not only did he record geographical data, but he also tried to track ethnographic, sociological, architectural, and engineering data and record them to build a more wholistic picture of the region. He gave us information about the various subjects, tangible and intangible cultural properties, river discharges, taxing, transportation structure, economic relations, mutinies, and wars. This book is translated into Turkish by Rıdvan Atan. He used a very fluent Turkish that could be read easily and added

explanatory footnotes to the main text. As a last word, I should mark that this book can be regarded as a significant contribution to the history and studies of Southwestern Caucasus despite its aforementioned lacks. Kazbegi managed to compile a rich variety of information about this specific region and period and provided a comprehensive book for interested researchers.