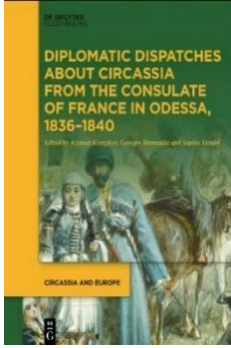


Review of *Circassia and Europe: Diplomatic Dispatches about Circassia from the Consulate of France in Odessa, 1836-1840* by Eds. Azamat Kumykov, Georges Mamoulia and Sophie Daniel

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Diplomatic Dispatches about Circassia from the Consulate of France in Odessa, 1836–1840

Ed. Azamat Kumykov, Georges Mamoulia ve Sophie Daniel

Çerkesya ve Avrupa Serisi I

Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston, 2024, 290 p.

ISBN 978-3-11-078518-0

As scholars of the Caucasus and other regions of the former Russian Empire continue to challenge the epistemology of the imperial metropole and “decolonize” the field, the release of the first volume in the *Circassia and Europe* series of primary sources is particularly timely. The series editors, Azamat Kumykov, Khatuna Gvaradze, and Hubertus Jahn, are opening new avenues for academic research on the North Caucasus and beyond—an

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(Received/Gönderim: 24.04.2024; Accepted/Kabul: 31.05.2024)

exciting development for a region that consistently yields new scholarly insights and offers rich comparative parallels.

The series promises to provide an intriguing panorama of unpublished primary sources related to the history of Circassia and the peoples of the North Caucasus. According to the editors, the documents are drawn from a wide array of archives across countries such as Austria, Egypt, France, Sakartvelo (Georgia), Germany, Hungary, Iran, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States (ix). Scholars and students of the Caucasus will have access to a diverse range of sources, including diplomatic dispatches, intelligence reports, personal letters, ethnographic sketches, commercial records, statistical data, and more.

The first volume of the series, *Diplomatic Dispatches about Circassia from the Consulate of France in Odessa, 1836-1840*, compiles a collection of reports authored by André Adolphe Challaye, the French consul in Odessa, and submitted to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris between 1836 and 1840. As the editors aptly note, “From the 1830s until the mid-1860s, the ‘Circassian Question,’ which concerned the political status of the Circassians and, more broadly, the peoples of the North Caucasus, was one of the most discussed, contentious, and potentially explosive issues in European politics” (ix-x). The records compiled by Challaye offer a valuable new perspective on the situation in Circassia at a time when the conflict between the Russian, Ottoman, and British Empires over the region's fate was beginning to intensify.

The book's Introduction provides an excellent entry point into the complex web of competing imperial interests in the Northwestern Caucasus during the first half of the nineteenth century. It carefully outlines the conflicts and treaties that shaped Russia's tenuous control over the Black Sea's eastern shores (see the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople) and explains French interest in the affairs of Circassia. France, alongside other European powers, was eager to capitalize on the waning influence of the Ottoman Empire and establish control in the territories the Ottomans once dominated. Recognizing the power of information, Challaye

gathered intelligence on key developments in the Caucasus, including Russo-Ottoman and Russo-British rivalries and Russian efforts to suppress indigenous resistance to Tsarist rule. This intelligence proved valuable in shaping French foreign policy toward its imperial rivals. Russia's war in the Caucasus also readily lent itself to comparisons with France's Algerian conquest, fueling public interest (xvi).

The book's introduction also provides valuable insights into Challaye's biography, revealing how his career was shaped by both family connections—which persisted through the French Revolution—and military service under Napoleon. This service took a heavy toll: "By the end of his military career, Challaye had been wounded 12 times (four seriously), almost completely lost the use of his left arm, and lost two fingers on his right hand" (xviii). Joining the French diplomatic corps in 1814, he was posted to the French consulate in Odessa by 1817, first as interim director. He later served two stints as consul there (1821–1832 and 1835–1846), retiring in the latter year and leaving behind a notable legacy of competent and dedicated service.

Challaye's dispatches provide valuable insights into Circassia between 1836 and 1840. Several important themes emerge, notably the prominent role of Russian efforts to conquer and colonize the region and their attempts to counteract perceived British meddling among the Circassians, which the Russians viewed as detrimental to their imperial interests. Challaye documented Russian military expeditions and geographic surveys, including the ultimately unsuccessful scheme to establish a Swiss colony on the Abkhazian coast (9-11). His account of the capture and detention of a British vessel, reportedly intercepted off the Circassian coast for allegedly violating the Russian blockade by smuggling arms, is particularly noteworthy (17-23). In short, each document in Challaye's folio of reports serves as an important corroborative source for the study of Circassia in the nineteenth century.

One of the most remarkable achievements of this volume is its trilingual publication of the primary sources, which allows readers to engage with the documents in their original French, as well as in meticulously crafted English and Russian translations. This

thoughtful inclusion significantly enhances the accessibility of these important texts, ensuring they reach a broader, more diverse audience of scholars, students, and interested readers. The editors and translators of this volume deserve commendation for their painstaking work, not only in the translation of complex historical documents, but also in the careful curation of the archival materials. The trilingual presentation of primary sources will ensure that the history of the Caucasus is not confined to a single linguistic tradition, but made available to international audiences.

The Circassia and Europe series provide an important new resource for scholars of Circassia and the North Caucasus. The first volume of the series opens a window onto the history of geopolitical jousting over control of Circassia and the North Caucasus. Challaye's dispatches not only enhance historian's understanding of 19th-century European diplomacy and Russian imperial expansion but also offer an insightful perspective on the Circassian struggle for self-determination in the face of encroaching colonialism. The excellent trilingual presentation of these sources makes this volume easily accessible to a wider audience of researchers. As the Circassia and Europe series progresses, it promises to continue enriching our understanding of the North Caucasus and its place in global history, making this inaugural volume a significant contribution to rethinking imperial narratives and expanding the scholarly conversation surrounding the Caucasus region.