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DAILY LIFE OF THE CAUCASIAN MOUNTAINEERS
IN THE MIDDLE OF 19TH CENTURY

The Polish society knew little for a long time about the Caucasus and life of peoples living there. Trade conducted with this region of the world since the Middle Ages did not provide information about the life of the Caucasian mountaineers. The situation was radically changed in the first half of 19th century. Many Poles, as a rule from the Polish territories annexed by Russia, made their way to the Caucasus. These were recruits sent to the Caucasian Corps, professional military men doing their army service in the Caucasus, people convicted for political offences, prisoners of war, travellers, clerks in the Russian service¹. It is not an easy task to determine the number of Poles, who could be found in the Caucasus in the first half of 19th century. On the basis of estimates made by the Polish diarists their number could be fixed at about 20 to 50 thousand, which accounted for ca. 20—30% of the Caucasian garrisons².

The first half of 19th century was a period of fights against the tsar's Russia, which was conquering these lands. The warlike mountain tribes of Czezens, from the Upper Dagestan and the south-we-

¹ B. Baranowski, *Znajomość Wschodu w dawnej Polsce do XVIII w.* [Knowledge of the East in old Poland till 18th century], Łódź 1950; idem, *Polskie zainteresowania z XVIII i XIX wieku kulturą Gruzji* [Polish interests from 18th and 19th centuries in Georgia's culture], Wrocław 1982; L. Widerszal, *Sprawy kaukaskie w polityce europejskiej w latach 1831—1864* [Caucasian affairs in the European policy in the years 1831—1864], Warszawa 1934; J. Reychman, *Podróżnicy polscy na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX w.* [Polish travellers in the Middle East in 19th century], Warszawa 1972.

² B. Baranowski, *Z dziejów polsko-gruzińskich stosunków kulturalnych z połowy XIX wieku (opisy Gruzji Mateusza Gralewskiego)* [On the history of the Polish-Georgian cultural relations from the mid- 19th century (Mateusz Gralewski's descriptions of Georgia)], „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska” 1976, sec. F, vol. 29, p. 176.

stern Caucasus launched their struggle for independence. Apart from their desire to preserve sovereignty and abolish oppression, the Caucasian mountaineers were encouraged to their struggle against Russia by the religion. Starting from the beginning of 19th century, there had been spreading in the Caucasus a fanatical Muslim religious trend known as Miuridism. Its ideologists were calling the mountaineers to undertake the „holy war” with infidels maintaining that a Moslem could not be a subject of believers in other religions, while his first duty was the „holy war” for freedom³. Consequently, bloody fights were fought in Dagestan and in the Northern Caucasus. The mountaineers were led by one of the most outstanding Miurids Kazi-Mulla. After his death, starting from 1832 the fighting with Russia was directed by Gamzat Bek. In his struggle for absolute subordination of the Dagestani liege lords he committed a crime on the family of Avarian khans. This was revenged and Gamzat Bek was treacherously murdered in 1834.

It was then that a Dagestani by the name of Shamil began to command the fighting mountaineers. Shamil was the most famous and indisputably the most outstanding from among them. He was proclaimed an imam similarly to Kazi-Mulla and Gamzat Bek earlier on. Utilizing his considerable military and organizational skills and abilities, he expanded substantially the war activities, united the mountaineers, subordinated to himself the local liege lords, and created a military-religious state — an imamate — in which he was wielding lay and religious power. He ruled practically over the entire territory of Chechnia and the Upper Dagestan. In 1848, the rule of the imam was proclaimed to be hereditary⁴. Shamil organized a permanent administration, judicature, fixed and levied taxes, maintained armed forces, strove to eliminate bloody vendettas and demanded strict observance of the Koran principles⁵. His state survived despite armed opposition of Russia till 1859, when Shamil was forced to surrender and Dagestan found itself under the tsar's rule⁶. The fall of Shamil did not put an end to fights in the Caucasus. Till 1864, the fight against Russia was conducted in its North-Western part by the Circassians⁷.

Throughout all the years of fighting there were many Poles in the Caucasus. Some of them left their impressions from the Caucasus in

³ Widerszal, *op. cit.*, p. 25; L. Bazyłow, *Dzieje Rosji 1801—1917* [History of Russia 1801—1917], Warszawa 1977, p. 162—163.

⁴ *Bolšaja Sovietskaja Encyklopedija* [further: BSE], vol. 29, Moscow 1972, p. 278.

⁵ Widerszal, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁶ BSE, vol. 29, p. 278.

⁷ Bazyłow, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

writing. These were diaries, literary works, letters, articles to magazines, contributions of scientific character, etc.⁸ Since educated people (teachers, students, etc.) predominated among the exiles many of them took to writing. A considerable part of their output has survived till today. Some of their writings were published, others remained in their manuscript form. Their value is quite differentiated — some are rather mediocre, others contain a rich knowledge, especially of the ethnographic nature. Of such a nature is the work of Florian Zieliński, which has never been published and continues to be in a manuscript form, and which has not been utilized at all⁹.

Very little information is available about Zieliński. Whatever is known about him can be found in his preserved personal documents concerning his army service, state of health according to medical certificates and his attempts to secure a disability pension after his numerous contusions suffered in battles fought in the Caucasus. It can be learned from these materials that Antoni Florian Zieliński was born in 1806 in the family of a Volynian nobleman — Kasper Zieliński. The documents do not say much about his educational background or about his life till the moment he was arrested for participation in the conspiracy of Szymon Konarski. The penalty for this conspiracy was exile in the Caucasus and his enlisting to the Tiflis Regiment in the rank of a private still in 1838¹⁰. Zieliński treated his army service very seriously and he was soon promoted to the rank of a non-commissioned officer for his merits in the fight against enemy, and transferred to the Stavropolski Battalion. In 1846, he got a promotion to the rank of an ensign, and next — Second Lieutenant. He served and fought in the Small and Big Czeczenia. His military records say that he took part in numerous battles, in dispersion of herds of warlike mountaineers, destruction of their villages and crops, resettlement of families of mountaineers, etc.

During the fights, he was wounded several times. On 2nd June 1845, a fusillade broke out during the crossing of the Kara Kojsu Ri-

⁸ M. Inglot, *Polacy piszący na Kaukazie w pierwszej połowie XIX w.* [Poles writing in the Caucasus in the first half of 19th century], „Pamiętnik Literacki” 1957, No. 1—2, p. 538—551; W. Kubacki, *Malwy na Kaukazie* [Mallows in the Caucasus], Warszawa 1969, p. 36 and the following; Reychman, *op. cit.*, p. 181—244.

⁹ F. Zieliński, *Opisanie o plemionach kaukaskich górali, z ich obrzędami, obyczajami w cywilnym, wojennym i domowym bycie* [Description of the Caucasian mountaineers' tribes with their rites, customs in civil, war and home life], manuscript in Biblioteka Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich in Wrocław, No. 4967/III.

¹⁰ F. Zieliński, *Papiery osobiste* [Personal papers], manuscript in Biblioteka Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich in Wrocław, No. 4967/III, p. 127.

ver. Zieliński was wounded in his head, his jaw, eye and ear were damaged. On 1st July 1845 he got a rifle-shot wound in his leg¹¹. Some time later near Grozny fortress he was wounded in his left side. These wounds left numerous indispositions and pains. All this was confirmed in a certificate of the regimental physician¹². Because of these contusions, Zieliński was granted a pension from a special fund. Intensifying sufferings made him decide to abandon the army service. In 1857, he requested his discharge. The military authorities gave approval and in July 1857 Zieliński was dismissed from the service „with a due rank, uniform and a full pension”¹³. The pension proved to be insufficient and in March 1859 he requested raising of his benefits because invalidism did not allow him to undertake any service, while the pension did not satisfy his basic needs. Having been discharged from the army service, he left the Caucasus and settled down in the village of Michajlowka (in Ushycki District, Podolska Guberniya). He got married and probably tilled the soil. Florian Zieliński died on 7th April 1891.

During his 19 years in the Caucasus, Zieliński made many interesting observations, which he presented in his book later on. It contains an introduction and several small chapters, in which the author describes daily life, household equipment, home life and customs, wedding and funeral rites, men's convival gatherings, religious ceremonies, upbringing and education of children, girls, superstitions, administration, some laws, tales. All the inhabitants of Dagestan and the Northern Caucasus are called „Caucasian mountaineers” by him. Very complex ethnic problems proved to be too difficult for Zieliński¹⁴. However, the information provided by him is extremely interesting, and the fact that it was a result of several years' observations enhances considerably its value. Although we are not always sure about which Caucasian tribe he is writing at a given moment, it is worth getting acquainted with his work.

The introduction to the manuscript contains some explanations concerning settlement of the Caucasus. Differences between tribes are due, according to the author, to the fact that they came from different nations, which made their way to the Caucasus at some time in the past¹⁵. For this reason, it is difficult to explain the origins and history

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 69.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

¹⁴ B. Baranowski, *Polsko-azerbejdżańskie stosunki kulturalne w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku* [Polish-Azerbaijani cultural relations in the first half of 19th century], Łódź 1979, p. 36.

¹⁵ Zieliński, *Opisanie o plemionach...*, p. 1.

of every nation in the Caucasus, and everything we know about them is not sure. Zieliński says that there were 9 national settlement waves to the Caucasus from the East and three from the South. This process is presented in a further part of his analysis. In this connection, he also discusses the spreading of Islam and obstinate attempts made by Arab Moslem to subordinate the Caucasus and its inhabitants to the caliph in Damascus. This was done using arms and cunning devices. The Caucasus was also settled by the next tribes sent by the caliph under troops protection. When the power of the caliphate was shaken, the Caucasian princes severed their subordination ties. There were created separate and sovereign duchies of Kazikumyk, Karakaidah, and Tabasaran. The invasion of Tatars led by Genghis Khan little changed in the Caucasus. A part of the Mongolian tribes settled down in the Caucasus, while a part of them went further west. The way of living and ceremonies of all inhabitants of the mountains, with the exception of Kubeczi tribes, were considered to be very similar by Zieliński and that may be the reason why he did not try in his description to make any differentiation or attach names to the nations observed by him¹⁶.

All the Caucasian nations called their seats „auls”. W. Jurkowski wrote in his letter to Pelagia Podhorska that an aul was „a big piece of land, usually on the mountain slope, in open places, surrounded by a low fence, and composed of many homesteads scattered around without any order or symmetry”¹⁷. Houses or saklas were usually built of timber or dry twigs and covered with clay. The mountain tribes were building houses of stone. Size of a house depended on the number of family members. Cattle was placed in the same building. Interior of such houses was strawn with plaited reeds, colourful felts, and even carpets. In the middle of a room or by the wall there was a chimney. Long, narrow pillows were lying along walls. At night they served for a bedding and during day they were a place for sitting. Women and children occupied one part of the house, men — the other. In the men's part of the house guests were received. Zieliński stresses that the mountaineers welcomed their guests with great joy, entertained them gladly, and held responsibility for guests' lives and security with their own lives and property¹⁸.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1—8.

¹⁷ W. Jurkowski, *Listy W. Jurkowskiego zesłanego w roku 1838 na Kaukaz, opisujące ekspedycje przez niego odbyte w latach 1839—1842* [Letters of W. Jurkowski deported to the Caucasus in 1838, describing expeditions made by him in the years 1839—1842], manuscript in Biblioteka Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich in Wrocław, No. 1163, p. 20.

¹⁸ Zieliński, *Opisanie o plemionach...*, p. 9.

Household vessels included copper and bronze pots of different sizes, copper and wooden containers, and earthenware jugs for water. All these vessels were made by the mountaineers. Meals were prepared from millet and maize flour, milk, butter or mutton suet, with a kind of broth being cooked from these ingredients. This modest meal was supplemented by sheep cheese — fresh or molten. In richer homes, there were eaten cooked or fried mutton (shashlik), and honey-pies on butter. A basic drink was sour milk diluted with water, and a drink prepared from millet flour — buza, which after addition of mead made a strong and tasty drink. Wooden, slightly dented spoons were used for eating meals. When a meal was to begin, older men were the first to take seats by the table followed by young men. The same order was observed in the feminine part of the house. According to Zieliński, respect for older people was unparalleled and greater than in any other nation. No young man would dare take a seat before older men and young men were always standing up when welcoming their elders to show respect in this way¹⁹.

Division of the house into its masculine and feminine parts was so strictly observed that one could not enter the other part belonging to the opposite sex. Adult people were communicating with one another through children under 7 years of age or when meeting in the courtyard. Men dealt only with work in fields and taking care of cattle. All housework including gathering of food supplies and sewing of clothing for the whole family was the duty of women. Among other jobs performed by men willingly were cleaning of weapons and grooming of horses. A man could also leave for a few days without notice. A favourite occupation of men were hunting, visiting friends and relatives, taking care of cattle, and even robbery. An exception were men involved in handicrafts e.g. blacksmiths. Young married women had to cover their faces. On the other hand, unmarried women were allowed to appear outside their homes without covering their faces, they even benefitted from relative freedom, could talk to men, take part in merry-making, dance and sing. However, if they abused these rights they could not hope for any forgiveness. Two holidays were observed during the year: Ramazan — 7 days and Kurban-Bajram — 4 days. It was a time of merry-making with participation of girls and unmarried men, people danced, played different instruments and sang. Those dancing were not allowed to touch each other. The most favourite dance was „lezginka”. Zieliński described with admiration the way in which dancers behaved saying that it was a great pleasure to look at them²⁰.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

A young man, who completed his 20 years of age, could begin thinking about getting married. Having chosen his girl, he would inform his parents about it. After a council, his parents would make a proposal to the parents of the girl of his choice. If agreement was reached, the date of wedding and payment for a wife — kalym were fixed. From this moment the boy could not see his girl during the day or even pass by her house. They could meet only at night and had to keep their meetings secret not to cover themselves with shame. On the day fixed for the wedding, parents of the bride took her to her fiance's house where a mulla and wedding guests were already waiting. After the wedding ceremony, during which the girl had a long white cover on her, the bride and the bridegroom were led to separate rooms. Even a husband could not see his wife during the day until she became mother. It was only maternity which was giving freedom of contacts for husband and wife. A young wife till she gave birth to her child could neither speak nor answer any questions, she was only taking orders to do various jobs and remained silent. Above the bed of a young wife, her husband would hang a loaded pistol. When she gave birth to a son she would announce that with a shot, when a daughter should would not touch the pistol.

If the parents of a chosen girl did not agree to her marriage, a boy could decide to kidnap her. He informed his friends about such a plan, they accompanied him armed on horses, the girl was given a notice in advance where she was supposed to appear, and she was kidnapped. In the boy's house, there were already waiting his parents and guests to complete the wedding ceremony. If the girl's family learnt soon about the kidnaping, it would try to get her back. At such times bloody scenes could happen but the girl was never returned to her parents. The pursuit and fight were arranged only to save the honour of the family. After wedding, both families would usually come to terms again and they concluded an agreement on the payment for the girl (kalym).

Conjugal infidelity of wife could be punished by her husband with death or impairing her beauty and returning her to her parents. Nobody took part of a woman who covered herself with shame. Zieliński states that such events were few and far between among the women in the Caucasus²¹.

Funeral rites in the Caucasus were completely different from those in Europe. Body of a deceased man was left in the place where he died. The corpse was washed and dressed in clean clothes to be covered with white linen next. Weepers were called in, relatives and friends were gathering. Women would go inside the cottage, while

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12—14.

men remained outside. The wife of the deceased man with ruffled hair and torn clothes sat motionless in the house. Weepers improvised funeral songs, in which they listed the deceased man's virtues and accomplishments. At this time, his wife uttering piercing shrieks was beating her breast, scratching her face and displaying her huge sorrow and despair. The participants of this funeral ceremony would enter the cottage next and kneeling in front of the widow they would scratch their foreheads till blood showed. When night came, close relatives would take the deceased man to his burial place. They would put the corpse in a burrow prepared earlier on his side with his face turned towards Mekka. Then a text i.e. a prayer or a verse from Koran were passed before his eyes. The grave was covered with planks, and the mulla would say a prayer. During this time all those present at the ceremony had to move back not to hear the prayer. After this the grave was filled with earth. At the feet of the deceased a stone with some inscription was placed. At dawn of the following day, all the women who has taken part in the funeral together with wife or mother of the deceased man, went again to the cemetery singing a farewell song on the way. The widow would display her sorrow loudly, falling on to the grave and tearing her hair. This ceremony was followed by the funeral banquet lasting three days. The widow was not supposed to change her underwear or clothing during one whole year, it means the clothing she was wearing at the time her husband died. After this time, if she did not intend to get married again she would put on a black dress and a white head cover. However, if the deceased man had a bigger property, the widow would be usually married by one of his brothers in order to preserve the property. Only a son had the right to inherit the property of his father. The widow could also satisfy herself with a small part of their belongings and return to her parents' house²².

On the main street in an aul or near a mosque, there were meeting men. Older men talked about farming, brave deeds of their ancestors. Young men were first listening attentively to such tales, and then they would begin to sing songs praising well-known heroes, describing their life and deeds. Such meetings often ended with common singing.

Visit of relatives and friends were paid only in the masculine part of the house. During such visits, the time was spent on talks about hunting expeditions and plundering raids, movements of Russian troops and their plans. Zieliński claimed that news was spreading among the mountain tribes with amazing speed. He was also amazed by „common

²² *Ibidem*, p. 14–17.

sense and good memory", with which the nature had gifted this people²³.

All the Muslim Caucasian peoples were of Sunnite denomination. Only some of them are described by Zieliński as idolatrous²⁴. For example, to cure themselves from various diseases, they were hanging on chosen trees various sick parts of the body made of metal such as heads, hands, legs, etc. Colourful rags hanging on holy trees were to protect them against fever and other illnesses. All happy or sad events in the family were commemorated in holy groves or by a cavern in which the remnants of some saint were lying. These tribes were described by Zieliński as coming from „the Mongolian nation". Apart from their different religion, they had different household appliances, beliefs in evil and good spirits, different weapons i.e. besides commonly possessed rifles, pistols and daggers, they also had long spears and clubs made of hard wood with a steel ball at the top. A strike with this ball, which was, moreover, studded with thick nails, was always mortal. Women knew how to fight just like men.

Some of the Transkuban tribes, before they adopted Islam, had been of Christian belief, which could date back to the reign of Tamara — the Queen of Georgia, or to even earlier times. The testimony of it were stone crosses placed on hills, certain preserved Christian ceremonies, or a few remaining monasteries²⁵.

Education of children or more precisely education of boys from wealthy families looked very specifically among the Caucasian peoples. When a child reached four years, he (very seldom she) was sent to the house of a chosen guardian (atalyk) to be educated there, taught martial arts, dexterity, craftiness, and even hatred for heretics — *giaours*. The education had to be hard and from our point of view very improper. A young boy became raw, insincere, sly, avaricious, unreliable, fanatical, and he was taught how to make his livelihood by means of plunder and robbery. Once his education was completed he would return to his parents' home.

Children of princes and *bekas* were sent away from their homes as far as it was possible when they were infants. Sons of a little prince's foster-mother, called his foster-brothers, felt to be strongly attached to him and they were ready for any sacrifice for their prince. Gamzat Beka was killed by the foster-brothers of one of the sons of the Avars khan to revenge his death and that although they were fanatical *Miurids*. In this case, the foster kinship and a duty of revenge

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

proved to be stronger²⁶. When a boy reached seven years of age, his foster-mother would pass him over to her husband, who next educated the boy according to the principles presented above. After returning home, the young man could begin as an adult person his independent life, in which a significant role was played by plundering raids²⁷.

Girls were educated at home where they were taught to perform all kinds of jobs necessary in their adult life. Zieliński admitted that the young girls and women living in the Caucasus took a great care about their beauty and they were characterized with a great deal of coquetry. A firmly tightened and sewn in leather corset was put on a seven-year-old girl so that she would have a slim and shapely figure. This corset was to be removed and more precisely cut open with a dagger by her husband during his first visit to his wife²⁸.

Councils were held whenever important matters concerning the whole country had to be discussed. They were attended by princes and uzdens together with their vassals, clergymen and elders. Each council began with fortune-telling. Meat from animal offerings was used for common meals. If the fortune-telling gave good results, a prayer was said and a council could begin. Clergymen, uzdens and elders would rise to speak in such an order. Young people were not allowed to express their opinions. Once the council finished, merry-making would begin especially if the fortune-telling had produced favourable results. If the council concerned issues connected with the war with Russia, a commander was chosen from each tribe and it was established when and when armed forces were to meet and where they should go. In order to mislead the enemy, there was spread false information and troops were removed from the place which was to become an object of attack. It was only then that a swift attack was made. In the case of pursuit, those escaping would split and run in various directions in order to weaken the strength of the Cossacks and draw them away from the infantry. When this aim was achieved, hearing the cry „giaour” they would turn back and become the attacking side. After such battles they would retreat into the mountains to rest, and if an expedition had a plundering character — also to divide their loot. Next, they would divide themselves into particular tribes and return to their auls announcing their return with volleys and joyful shouting. On the other hand, when the expedition ended with a failure, they would be returning home at night. On the tomb-stone of a killed mountaineer

²⁶ M. Butowt-Andrzejkiewicz, *Szkice Kaukazu* [Sketches of the Caucasus], vol. 1, Warszawa 1853, p. 81—85.

²⁷ Zieliński, *Opisanie o plemionach...*, p. 21—22.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

there was placed an inscription and image of the weapon with which he had been killed. The mountaineers surrounded by the enemy troops without any chance to escape would kill their horses making a kind of entrenchment from their dead bodies and defend themselves from behind it till the last one died „singing funeral songs”²⁹.

On the other hand, if some aul was threatened, preparations for its defence were carried out together with neighbours. On the roads leading to the village, there were dug deep ditches masked with wood behind which defenders would hide themselves. Next a small detachment was sent against the enemy to get involved in fighting and drew the enemy into an ambush. Bunches of sticks were placed at different points of the mountains and woods, which were put on fire by look-out men on duty in case of danger. That was a signal that the enemy was approaching and also it indicated the place in which aid was required.

On the plains, the mountaineers fighting on horse-back were scoring successes with the enemy cavalry but they would run before artillery and infantry, with which they did not wish to undertake fighting in the open field. Anyway, they fought most willingly on horse-back. They would leave their horses only when they had to defend their homesteads. At such times, women, children and cattle would be hidden in the mountains and men alone were defending doggedly each house. It could also happen that elderly men and women would remain in villages wishing neither to escape nor be caught alive³⁰. High in the mountains, the defence was easier, because houses were built of stone and being situated on rocks they resembled small fortresses. Passages from one house to another or even on roofs facilitated defence. The auls of Lezings were most strongly fortified.

Bravery and doggedness in fighting were quite unusual among the mountain tribes. When fire-arms failed them they would fight with their daggers no matter that the enemy outnumbered them considerably. Amazing dexterity was necessary to come out safe and sound from such fights. Zieliński evaluated highly the infantry of Lezings and cavalry of Cabardins. He found, however, that the warlike spirit was growing weaker and weaker among the Caucasian nations supporting his observations with examples taken from a century earlier³¹.

Quite a different characteristic trait of the Caucasian nations was their superstition. They were deeply convinced about existence of ghosts, believed in charming of their arms and in magics of various kinds. To protect themselves against charms, they used to wear pra-

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23—27.

vers from Koran written down by clergymen and sewn in leather of different colours and shapes. They were telling the future in different ways such as tangling threads between their fingers, observing evening glow, sun-set and sun-rise, clouds, etc. Different illnesses were cured by charming grasses, roots and waters. Wounds were treated with juice and ointments made from grasses, but before it they were cleaned using hot molten butter. That was done to prevent gangrene. Honeycombs found in bee hives and resembling dough were also used as ointments³². This may have been propolice. The most amazing thing about this treatment was the fact that, according to Zieliński, it was effective.

The success or failure of a planned plundering raid were read from bones of the right front shoulder of roe offering. If the fortune-telling augured unfavourably, a raid was postponed³³.

Zieliński described not quite clearly and without taking into consideration differences between tribes the class division and internal relations. According to him, each tribe was divided into four estates. The first two were composed of „higher order” and privileged nobility. The others had to secure their rank by their merits and services rendered for the ruling princes. All of them were dependent on the princes whose will was unlimited and who wielded complete power over their subjects. Uzdens were released from any obligatory services with the exception of their full readiness to report at the side of their liege lord when such a necessity arose. Liege subjects were passing an agreed part of their crops to their liege lords. Family conflicts and quarrels were judged by elders in the family and nobody had a right to interfere in these matters³⁴.

Two laws were obligatory in the daily life: adat — customary law, and shariat — Koran law. In the former case, the questions of guilt and penalty were decided upon by the elders, in the latter — by the clergy. Judgments could not be appealed. It often happened that the wronged party would pay the wrong-doer back in his own coin, and the latter as the guilty one could not seek legal defence. Civil laws included also religious duties i.e. prayer, alms, observing a holiday on Friday, Ramazan — 28 days of abstaining from drinking and food during the day, and next seven days of feasts and merry-making. Cash penalty had to be paid for all offences to the aul elderman to be utilized for common purposes.

The criminal law was very severe. Manslaughter was punished

³² *Ibidem*, p. 28.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

with a bloody revenge, which sometimes implied full extermination of the family up to the seventh generation. Mothers were telling their children about the necessity to revenge their family's harms from their infancy. Sometimes when a whole family had been destroyed, the revenge was taken over by friends. Severe punishment was also meted for fraud as an unbecoming act.

The mountaineers treated extremely seriously the question of hospitality fully remaining at the service of their guests. They would entertain them sincerely seeing to it that all their needs were satisfied and their security protected. Violation of this custom was hardly conceivable. If this happened all inhabitants of the aul felt obliged to commit a bloody revenge — the guilty one could not avoid death or contempt.

Zieliński praised the mountaineers for their common sense, hospitality, bravery, but he also condemned them for their revengefulness, craftiness, robberies, merceriness, unreliability and secretiveness. In his opinion, they would not approach others but for profit. Making use of this characteristic trait of the mountaineers, the governor of the Caucasus — prince Michal Woroncow ordered to increase the number of trade exchange points in order to bring them closer to Russians and establish mutual relations. This was aimed at softening stern customs and restoring peace³⁵. In this way, there was begun a new stage in relations between Russians and the peoples of the Caucasus, which — in Zieliński's opinion — was bringing desirable effects.

Certain tribes living on the other side of the Kuban River were departing from this general picture. For instance, Bashlibayevts were less warlike and less hard-working but more joyful and less violent. Zieliński mentions their terrible custom of burying alive old parents by their children. This was supposed to be an expression of sons' care. Fortunately, this custom was given up, but old men were instead dressed in women's dresses and transferred to the feminine part of the house³⁶.

The tribes living in the mountains below the Elbrus enjoyed more peaceful existence than others. Poor agriculture was providing only a modest subsistence. These mountaineers were baking quite tasty but hard loaves of bread known as „czureki" made from barley flour in hot ashes or burrows dug in the ground.

Osetians were famous for their production of beer and cheese. They

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

possessed poor cattle, goats, a few horses and donkeys. Both men and women were extremely good-looking. In each aul, there could be found many beauties, whose delicate and piercing looks and coquetry, according to Zieliński, could melt the iciest hearts. Moreover, they enjoyed big freedom and respect of men, and could wield arms in a masterly way. They had their favourite games and knew rites that were supposed to ensure good crops. Women ruled at home and men hunted, robbed or idled their time away³⁷.

The Caucasian aristocracy led a comfortable life. Men had two or three wives and richly equipped houses. In Dagestan, almost all had orchards, and in them many flowers apart from fruit trees. The most favourite flowers were roses. The plant cover was very differentiated in the Caucasus. There were growing fruit trees and shrubs of all possible kinds beginning with apple-trees and ending with fig-trees and vine. Besides, there could be found an unusual number of various wildy growing but very beautiful trees.

While summing up his observations, Zieliński stated that no Caucasian tribe knew its origins and past reaching further back than grandfathers' memory. Exceptions here were Lezgins and Cabardins. The former considered themselves to be of Indian origin and the latter of Arab origin. It is no wonder Zieliński did not try to explain the origin of the Caucasian nations as he could use only own his own observations and perhaps very few source materials. His manuscript despite its many unclear statements and the fact that he adopted the same name of the Caucasian mountaineers for almost all nations inhabiting that region of the world represents a very rich source of knowledge about life in the Caucasus over 100 years ago. Till now, this source has not been utilized to any bigger degree. In recent years, Bohdan Baranowski³⁸ drew attention to it and took it into account in his work devoted to the Polish-Azerbaijani cultural relations in the first half of 19th century.

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³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

³⁸ Baranowski, *Polsko-azerbejdżańskie stosunki...*, p. 35-36.

Czesława Kulesza

ŻYCIE GÓRALI KAUKASKICH W POŁOWIE XIX W.

W pierwszej połowie XIX w. na Kaukazie przebywało wielu Polaków. Najczęściej byli to zesłańcy polityczni, jeńcy lub zawodowi żołnierze armii rosyjskiej narodowości polskiej. Wśród zesłańców politycznych było bardzo wielu ludzi wykształconych. Służąc w kaukaskich korpusach musieli uczestniczyć w walkach Rosji przeciw wolnym narodom Kaukazu. Ponieważ terenem walk był przeważnie Dagestan i północny Kaukaz, tam też najczęściej kierowano Polaków. Wielu z nich pisywało pamiętniki, listy do rodziny i znajomych, korespondencje do pism, wspomnienia, których tematem były geograficzne, historyczne i etnograficzne obserwacje autorów. Jednym z takich autorów był Florian Zieliński. W pracy, która dotychczas pozostawała w rękopisie, podał bardzo ciekawe materiały etnograficzne dotyczące głównie Dagestanu. Bardzo skomplikowane problemy etniczne narodów Kaukazu były jednak dla niego zbyt trudne. Dlatego prawie wszystkich mieszkańców Kaukazu objął nazwą „plemiona kaukaskich górali”. W swojej pracy pt. *Opisanie o plemionach kaukaskich górali, z ich obrzędami, obyczajami w cywilnym, wojennym, i domowym bycie* przedstawił warunki życia, wyposażenie domów, obrzędy ślubne i pogrzebowe, wychowywanie dzieci, życie publiczne, wierzenia, zabobony itd. Mimo pewnych braków rękopis Zielińskiego stanowi cenny materiał i źródło wiedzy o Kaukazie pierwszej połowy XIX w.