

A doctor in the Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century

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information on doctors who served in the Caucasus region (1802–1822 – the Caucasus province, from 1847 – the Stavropol province) is analyzed. The nature of the lives and activities of Russian doctors in the North Caucasus was dependent on their proximity to the theater of military operations. Due to these circumstances, many doctors from the civil department had experience with army service. The region was insufficiently inhabited, it had not yet been completely settled, and there were no representatives of the local population among its doctors. Graduates of the Saint Petersburg and Moscow medical and surgical academies were predominant among doctors. People of foreign origin often served on the Caucasus medical board. They were most common among the doctors of the Caucasus' Mineralniye Vody. In society, doctors were noted not only for their professional knowledge, but also for their broad education. For example, Dr. F.P. Conradi helped military topographers to determine the exact height of Elbrus using a barometer. Representatives of the medical profession could be considered the cultural elite. Doctors' work in the Caucasus was dangerous, but prestigious (the pay was higher than in other regions of the Russian Empire; in the Caucasus the assigning of extraordinary ranks was practiced). The doctors who worked in the Caucasus distinguished themselves with their attitude towards their service, the way they fulfilled their professional duty, and their patriotism. The authors used extensive materials from the archives of the Caucasus Medical Board, the Order of Public Charity of the Caucasus Region, the General Administration of the Caucasus Region, the Administration of the Caucasus Mineralniye Vody, State Archives of the Stavropol Territory.

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The history of the integration of the North Caucasus into the territory of the Russian Empire is one of the complicated and controversial problems of contemporary Russian historiography. At different times this topic has been viewed from different angles; what was termed the “conquest” of the Caucasus in the 19th-century historiography was regarded as the voluntary joining of peoples during the Soviet period. The overwhelming majority of contemporary historians lean towards

the view of a violent conquest of the territory where the hill people were settled [1–3]. Concerning the geopolitical interests of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus region, researchers agree that Russia provided these nations protection from foreign enemies and ensured their overall social progress. Much has been written about the Russian military men who were the conduits of these blessings of civilization [1–3]. Officers and generals of the Russian army, the elite of Russian society who came to the Caucasus, not only took up arms against recalcitrant Highlanders but also participated in provisioning the necessary facilities to this previously wild territory,

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examined the surroundings and customs of the local community, and appreciated the beauty of the Caucasus.

Russian doctors representing the Russian intelligentsia¹ came to the Caucasus with the military. Apart from providing medical assistance to military personnel, they helped the locals, engaged in taking medical and topographic notes, studied the curative properties of Caucasian mineral spas as well as folk medical treatment techniques, assisted in the dissemination of scientific knowledge, participated in local governance, and promoted the cultural and social development of the region.

The role of Russian doctors in the development of the medical infrastructure, public health, surgery, obstetrics, and other areas of medicine in the Caucasus region was the subject of numerous scientific studies [4–6]. However, their activities were either completely beyond the scope of the studies or were addressed superficially, with regard to certain individuals.

The examination of this topic will make it possible to retrospectively reconstruct the image of a doctor in the Caucasus region in more detail: as an expert, the “Tsar’s servant”, and a public figure.

The first professional medical practitioners came to the North Caucasus with the Russian army during the Persian campaign of Peter the Great in the year 1722 [6, pp. 3–4]. One may say that the origin of medical service in the Stavropol region dates back to the last quarter of the 18th century as the Russian Empire started to conquer this territory [4, p. 4]. Regimental doctors were a part of the regular army, which erected defense perimeters in the south of Russia. Medical professionals started to present themselves as a distinct social group from the beginning of the building of the public health system in the region.

In 1802, the separation of the Caucasian province (*guberniya*) from the Astrakhan province took place, and in 1822 it was transformed into the Caucasian region (*oblast'*). This period was marked by the establishment of the Caucasian Province Medical Council, which was later

renamed as a regional one. It was headed by an inspector who represented it in the local government. In addition to him, the council included an obstetrician, “operator” (surgeon), veterinarian, and secretary. The territory of the region was divided into four medical districts, Stavropol, Pyatigorsk, Kizlyar, and Mozdok. The four district doctors were subordinate to the medical council, which was located in Georgievsk until 1824, and later on in Stavropol. The council also comprised a head doctor and his assistants at the Caucasian Mineral Spas.² In the first half of the 19th century, the civilian doctor community in the Stavropol area was represented by a small group of people with higher medical degrees. In the eyes of the locals, every one of them was a demigod who held the lives of other people in his hands.

This period was characterized by a system of awarding scientific medical degrees and ranks that followed the European standards. The first stage of the highest medical education was the rank of physician, which was awarded as an academic degree until 1838. Later it was awarded as a qualification to all graduates of medical-surgical academies and medical faculties. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, those who held physicians’ diplomas were not entitled to perform complicated surgery independently. This privilege was granted to persons who had the rank of “medico-surgeon”; the latter was abolished in 1845. This degree conferred on the academic rank with the 8th class rights under the Table of Ranks³ (collegiate assessor), “granted to skillful operators”. There were other degrees or ranks awarded to medical practitioners who had a relevant background or passed the exams: an obstetrician and a medical council inspector. These titles enabled the holders to take a relevant office.

“Doctor of Medicine” and “Doctor of Medicine and Surgery” were the highest medical ranks, which could be awarded only by the

² State Stavropol Archive (SSA). F. 65, opis' fonda.

³ Table of Ranks (*Tabel o Rangakh*); (Jan. 24, 1722), classification of grades in the Russian military, naval, and civil services into a hierarchy of 14 categories and the foundation of a system of promotion based on personal ability and performance rather than on birth and genealogy. This system, introduced by Peter I the Great, granted anyone who attained the eighth rank the status of a hereditary noble. — *Translator's note*

¹ In pre-revolutionary Russia, the intelligentsia meant a professional part of the population such as writers, academicians, philosophers, sociologists, academicians and educated people in general.

universities. To earn a doctor's degree, apart from having the practical medical knowledge, one had to present the "indisputable evidence of one's scholarship": an unprinted and publicly defended doctoral thesis. To gain the degree of Doctor of Medicine and Surgery one had to additionally prove his "special theoretical and practical knowledge of surgery" by showing the results of operations he had performed [7].

There were very few who held the Doctor of Medicine degree in the Caucasian region. At different times, we find head doctors of the Caucasian Mineral Spas A.B. Zeeh, F.P. Conradi, council inspectors F.A. Heft, F.M. Meandrov, junior doctors of the Caucasian Mineral Spas F.F. Karger and K.B. Norman, division surgeon of the 20th Infantry division N.F. Zemsky, senior registrar of Stavropol military hospital S.V. Pleshkovky, and, probably, several others.

Medical ranks and degrees allowed people to hold senior positions and be awarded higher ranks in accordance with the Table of Ranks. Under the law on conditions of civil service, doctors engaged in the medical council were awarded their ranks depending on their length of service. For a novice doctor, the first rank was that of a titular councilor; this corresponded to army captains, and the preceding ranks were skipped. Then a doctor could be promoted to a collegiate assessor, court councilor, and collegiate councilor. As a rule, an inspector of a medical council held the collegiate councilor rank, which corresponded to an army colonel. Thus, the first inspector of the Caucasian medical council A.D. Krushnevich, being a military medic, held the rank of a headquarters physician, while a civilian was raised to a collegiate counselor. This rank was awarded to all those who had not previously left the office of inspector of a medical council.

On occasions, a doctor could become a state councilor. This rank fell between the titles of colonel and major general in the army. The title was awarded to Head Doctor of the Caucasian Mineral Spas F.P. Conradi and inspector of the Stavropol medical council N.A. Vvedensky. During the Caucasian War, to attract civil servants to public institutions of the Caucasian region, the practice of exceptionally granting the title of collegiate assessor without the established procedure became common – i.e. disregarding the necessary length of service, bypassing exams, and

jumping over one rank or several ranks. Society jokingly dubbed such young civil servants who got their rank and hereditary nobility as "Caucasian assessors" [8, pp. 8–12, 24–26].

Service in the Caucasus region during the Caucasian War (1817–1864) was complicated and perilous but prestigious, and not only for the military personnel. Civil servants of various governmental agencies, including doctors, physician's associates, and midwives, lodged their petitions concerning reassignment to the Caucasus.

As of 1846, the full-time salary of a medical council inspector was 672 rubles 48 kopecks, surgeons and obstetricians were paid 504 rubles 30 kopecks, veterinarians received 336 rubles 24 kopecks, and a district physician's salary was 350 rubles 25 kopecks per annum. For comparison, as of the year 1848, a horse was sold for 12 rubles in silver, a cow for 6 rubles, a sheep for 1.5 rubles, and a goat for 85 kopecks [9].

Doctors were paid extra for seniority. Doctors' monetary allowances were several times larger than the income of other health care professionals. The council secretary's salary was 168 rubles 15 kopecks, the senior apprentice physician and senior midwife received 113 rubles 25 kopecks, and junior apprentices and midwives received 84 rubles 90 kopecks per annum. Any civil servant, including a doctor who had served for 20 years, was entitled to receive half the fixed pension in addition to salary.⁴

However, some doctors served as an example of gratuitous discharge of duty. The government supported such attitudes toward service. Thus, at the request of the Caucasian governor, the medical council surgeon P.S. Artemovsky-Gulak was awarded the Order of Saint Anna, 3rd class, by His Majesty the Emperor for the free treatment of diseased students of the philanthropic boarding house at the Caucasian regional gymnasium for seven years, and the Mozdok district doctor V.M. Belkin received a golden tobacco box "for gratuitous treatment of civil servants and students".⁵ Of course, awards were given not only in such cases as these. The head doctor of the Caucasian Spas F.P. Conradi was presented with a diamond ring for his scientific labor by

⁴ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 342.

⁵ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 86–87.

the Emperor, and the inspector of the Caucasian medical council A.D. Krushnevich received a golden tobacco box with a portrait and monogram of Alexander the First for “putting an end to the disease which struck two squadrons of Kazinsky infantry regiment”.⁶

The salary of the military doctors in the Caucasus region was paid not in paper money as in other guberniyas but in silver. It was one of the ways to incentivize medical practitioners to serve in this remote area [10].⁷ Apart from the base salary, during the years of service in the Caucasian region, civil servants were awarded an additional (annual) allowance by His Grace the Caucasian Governor. For example, a titular councilor received 150 rubles for five years served in the Caucasus region, while the full-time salary was 600 per year. The lodging allowance paid to such civil servants was 180 rubles. Getting by horse to a new place of service was remunerated at a rate of 3 kopecks per verst from Tiflis to Vladikavkaz and 2.5 kopecks from Vladikavkaz to Stavropol.⁸

Additional salary was paid not only for the “wildness” of the location. In the first half of the 19th century, the life of a local doctor in the Caucasus region was full of challenges and perils. It was unsafe for a physician to visit different settlements in the Kizlyar district: robbery, injuries, murders, and kidnapping were frequent [4, p. 21]. Thus, despite all the benefits, many doctors left the Caucasian region for good after having served a particular term. However, there were those who stayed there for long periods of time. The former inspector of the Caucasian medical council D.S. Grielsky worked as a private practitioner in Stavropol after his retirement. F.P. Conradi also remained in Pyatigorsk after his service. The surgeon of the Caucasian medical council P.S. Artemovsky-Gulak served in the Caucasus region for about fourteen years, until his last days.

The majority of the doctors in the Caucasus region were Orthodox Russians, graduates of Russian medical-surgery academies. At the time such educational institutions trained doctors of medicine and veterinary science, as

well as pharmacy candidates. Children of the clergy were predominant among the Academy auditors. Children of noblemen, merchants, and soldiers could also be found among the students. Graduates who received a physician’s degree were mainly sent to the military service, after which they could switch to civil service.

The inspector of the Caucasian medical council F.M. Meandrov, the son of a clergyman and a graduate of the Moscow Academy of Medicine and Surgery, was representative of this category of doctors. Just like A.D. Krushnevich and A.B. Zeeh, he commenced his service in the army [4, p. 22].

The district doctor of Pyatigorsk A.F. Lebedev⁹ and the district doctor of Kizlyar A.I. Gorlitsyn¹⁰ were also of the clerical order. Both of them graduated from the Moscow Medical-Surgical Academy. The Stavropol district doctor N.N. Saveliev, who graduated from the Imperial Saint Petersburg Academy of Medicine and Surgery and started out at the Nevinnomysk quarantine post, was a representative of merchants.¹¹ D.S. Grielsky and N.A. Vvedensky represented the nobility by birth among doctors in the Caucasian region.

Dokhturov was one of the doctors who served in the Caucasian region from 1842–1844. His ancestor, “of Greek belief,” left Tsargrad during the rule of the Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich, served as per the Moscow list, and was granted ancestral lands in the Kostroma county. It is not known whether he was a medical practitioner. Probably, the Kizlyar district doctor noble Mikhail Afanasievich Dokhturov¹² was the first doctor in his family.

The second type of doctors comprised representatives of the Baltic provinces including Courland, Livonia, and Estland, as well as immigrants from Europe. They were distinguished by their confession, belonging to Roman Catholic, Evangelical or Lutheran churches. As a rule, they studied medicine in their home provinces or in the European universities. The majority of this second group established themselves as doctors at the Caucasian Mineral Spas. Among them,

⁶ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 86–87.

⁷ According to Caucasian calendar of 1846, 1 ruble in bills was equal to 284/7 kopecks in silver.

⁸ SSA. F. 240. Op. 2. D. 666. L. 32.

⁹ SSA. F. 240. Op. 2. D. 666. L. 32.

¹⁰ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 5–6.

¹¹ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 216. L. 3–5.

¹² SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 216. L. 5.

we find H. Gennusch, A.B. Zeeh, F.P. Conradi, K.B. Norman, F.F. Karger, and I.Y. Duncan.

Franz Andreevich Heft, a native of Prussia, was a biologist, doctor, and obstetrician of the Imperial Court. He studied in the Prussian Medical-Surgical Academy. Upon graduation from Berlin University, he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine and Surgery. He took his doctor's degree later in Russia and was elected a member of the Imperial Moscow Society of Nature Analysts and Physical and Medical Association of the Moscow University.

The head doctor of the Caucasian Mineral Spas Andrey Bogdanovich (né Johann-Heinrich) Zeeh was born in Riga, the capital of Livonia. He graduated from the Saint Petersburg Medical Surgical Academy and defended his doctoral thesis *De Aqua Wissokoensi* at the University of Dorpat. Later he was appointed to the Olsufievsk mineral springs in the Tver guberniya, and then promoted and transferred to Caucasia [11].

Fyodor Petrovich (né Friedrich Otto) Conradi, another head doctor of the Caucasian Mineral Spas, was descended from an ancient Swiss family. He studied medicine at the University of Gottingen and attended the lectures of the best scientists and doctors in the universities of Jena and Halle-Wittenberg. He was invited to work in Russia and passed an examination for the title of Doctor of Medicine at Moscow University.¹³

A well-balanced education distinguished the doctors of medicine from the others of their trade. F.A. Heft was the author of the catalogue of wild plants of the Kursk guberniya (1826), guidance on obstetric art (1840), and other writings. A.B. Zeeh wrote the *Description of the Vysotsk Curative Spring* (1821) and the *Description of Caucasian Salutiferous Waters* (1817). He was a member of the Association for Competition in Medical and Physical Sciences.

F.P. Conradi was a member of the Imperial Moscow Society of Nature Analysts and Physical and Medical Association at Moscow University. In 1824, he published his *Medicinische Annalen der Caucasischen Heilquellen* in German (*Medical Annals of the Caucasian Mineral Springs*). The activities of scientist-doctors were marked by an aspiration to self-perfection and a search for new things. F.P. Conradi found a new sulfur

spring near Kum Mountain. In 1831 his new book *Pondering on Artificial Mineral Waters and Providing the Newest Information about Caucasian Mineral Springs* was published in Russian.

It is known that Doctor F.P. Conradi participated in determining the height of Elbrus, the tallest mountain in the Caucasus region, with the help of a barometer. Apart from scientific and medical activities, he enjoyed playing the piano and reading the works of ancient Latin poets in the original language. His house was filled with paintings and sketchbooks presented by grateful patients. It has been said that a well-known Russian writer and a poet, M.Yu. Lermontov, interested in his collection of paintings, was a frequent guest in Conradi's house. The doctor became especially lively when guests showed up. He gladly took on the role of a local guide and showed the local attractions. The cultivation of grape varieties in his garden was also among his interests [12].

M.Yu. Lermontov was deeply impressed by Nikolay Vasilyevich (né Nicholas Wilhelm) Meier, who was a special missions doctor assisting the Governor of the Caucasian Region. He became a model for the character of Doctor Werner in Lermontov's novel "*A Hero of Our Time*": "a very talented man of extensive reading with hearty charm" [13]. It should be noted that M.Yu. Lermontov was not only acquainted with the foreign medical workers. Despite the significant age difference, he kept company with the former professor of Imperial Moscow University, Doctor of Medicine I.E. Dyadkovsky, who was thirty years older than he. According to one witness, their conversation on England, Byron, and Bacon continued long past midnight. After the poet had left, Justin Evdokimovich kept on repeating, "What a wise head!" [14].

In 1839, collegiate assessor Yulius Samsonovich Borkum, a Lutheran of Courland origin who had gotten a medical education in Berlin in 1820, was appointed as an obstetrician to the Caucasian medical council. After the exam at the Imperial St Petersburg Medical-Surgical Academy, he obtained the rank of a doctor and following the results of the obstetrics art test at Vilno Imperial Medical-Surgical Academy he was given the title of an obstetrician.¹⁴

¹³ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 78–81.

¹⁴ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 21–23.

Karl Bogdanovich Norman, a junior doctor of the Caucasian Mineral Spas, Evangelical church, received a doctor's degree from the Imperial University of Dorpat.¹⁵

Doctors who served in the Caucasian region (specifically in the Kizlyar district) treated local patients who did not speak Russian. At times the situation required that doctors know Georgian, Armenian, Nogai, and the other languages.

Military doctors who served as regimental, squadron, and head doctors and attending physicians at military hospitals should be regarded as a separate group. M. Yu. Lermontov emphasizes the difference between civil and military doctors who served on the Caucasian Line ("Caucasians") in his *Caucasian* ("Kavkazets"): "You can find the real Caucasians on the Line ... civilian Caucasians are rare: they are mostly an awkward imitation, and you can only meet a real one among the regimental medical workers" [15]. In his *Report of Caucasian Travel*, N.I. Pirogov demonstrates the difference between the military doctors who served in the large hospital in the capital and their fellow tradesmen in the Caucasus region: "The former finds all means for further education, and the latter, sharing all troubles and dangers of military life, spends his time in a remote and wild country, away from the society which could provide him with the necessary information and encourage his fervor for science by sympathy, example, and mutual communication. He moves to Caucasia and spends years with his battalion in mountain villages and fortresses of Dagestan. To him, failing to follow the science and society is to be in arrears and unlearn. But the activities of Caucasian doctors who do not serve on expeditions and in large hospitals are scarce and limited..." [16, p. 59].

Military doctors enjoyed a benefit — the position of a senior regimental doctor or senior registrar implied the headquarters physician title. The highest military medical civil servants had the title of headquarters doctor. At the same time, military doctors were granted civil titles.

N.F. Zemsky, Doctor of Medicine, actual state councilor (rank of general in the army), and doctor of the 20th infantry division, was a generic representative of this social group. After graduation from the Moscow Academy

of Medicine and Surgery, he served as a regimental doctor, worked in the hospitals, and participated in the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829 and then in all significant military operations in the Caucasus region. He was well known as "one of the best and noblest representatives of the military medical corporation" [17]. N.I. Pirogov, writing about such doctors, states that they "are always ready to assist the wounded under fire, and never was a doctor in the Caucasus region accused of the disinclination to face the danger" [16, c. 60].

Multiple awards granted during the military actions against Shamil confirm the self-sacrificing attitude of Russian military doctors. The headquarters physician of the Dagestan mounted irregular regiment I.S. Kostemerovsky was an energetic and industrious man who did much to promote Russian culture among the mountain dwellers. He earned the respect not only of the soldiers but also of the local patients and their relatives. He established a Russian school for local children and made a significant contribution to establishing trust and respect for scientific medicine among the resident population [18, p. 11].

Regular campaigns against enemies were common for military doctors. Their participation in military development had a positive impact on their careers but did not facilitate their personal lives. Thus, the headquarters physician A.D. Ivanov, who superseded Conradi as the medical superintendent of the Caucasian Spas, went from Saint Petersburg to Bessarabia with his regiment in 1828, and then, crossing the Danube, made it to Turkey and participated in the siege of Varna. He was always under fire when he assisted and dressed the wounded on the battlefield. After the siege of Varna, he spent almost a year in the apartments in the Kamenets-Podolsky province. A.I. Ivanov returned to Saint Petersburg as late as January 1830, and in September 1831 he participated in the suppression of the Polish rebellion with his regiment, crossing all of Poland up to Prussia. This campaign ended in the end of February 1832. It is no coincidence that at the age of 43 collegiate councilor A.I. Ivanov, who came to Pyatigorsk in 1841, had no wife, children, nor estate.¹⁶

¹⁵ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 16. L. 168.

¹⁶ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 114. L. 3–10.

V.I. Atanazevich, the district headquarters physician of Kizlyar and later Mozdok, who participated in campaigns against the Turkish (1829) and Polish rebels (1831) in his young days, was not married at the age of 38.¹⁷ A.B. Zeeh became a father rather late, at the age of 39.

However, it cannot be claimed that no medical officers who served in the Caucasus region had families. F.P. Conradi was a loving husband and the attentive father of a large family. He had four children: three daughters and a son. He devoted considerable time to their homeschooling. He successfully married one of his daughters to his close acquaintance, architect G. Bernardazzi. He helped his son to become an officer, and the latter served in the Caucasus region as a military engineer afterward. After the death of his wife, F.P. Conradi's unmarried elder daughter took charge of caring for him. His younger daughter married a civil servant from Saint Petersburg. Doctor F.P. Conradi laid the foundation of the Russian offshoot of the Swiss Conradi house, which has now been living in Russia for more than 200 years.

The family of A.E. Belyaev, inspector of the Caucasian medical council, was also large. He

never was on active duty; at the age of 54, he was married to a mayor's widow and had two sons (12 and 5 years) and two daughters (14 and 9 years).¹⁸

An analysis of the history of the integration of the North Caucasus makes it possible to distinguish the typical features of doctors who served in the North Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century. Regardless of their religious confessions and ethnic backgrounds, these were highly educated people who were distinct from the Cossacks, soldiers, local population, and often even officers not only by their rank but also by their general level of culture and proclivity for self-development. These "state people", civilians and the military men alike, were dedicated to serving their Motherland and Caucasia. Doctors whose professional activities were related to Northern Caucasia made substantial contributions to the exploration and development of this region, contributions that ranged from the improvement of the quality of medical assistance to the creation of a general cultural environment in this newly acquired Russian territory.

¹⁷ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 110. L. 2–3.

¹⁸ SSA. F. 65. Op. 1. D. 156. L. 2–17, 23; D. 356. L. 186.

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