

History 357: Case Studies in the Islamic World
**Fire and Sword in the Caucasus. A History of the
Muslim Highlanders of Chechnya**

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Office Hours MWF 11-12 and 2-3.

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This is the fourth case study course on Ottoman Muslim societies. Like the previous classes on Palestinians, Bosnians, and Turks, this semester we will engage in a study of a regional Muslim ethnic group, in this case, the Chechens.

Course Description: While Europe is largely a peaceful continent today, there is one war raging on the edge of this civilized land which pits the mighty Russian Federation against a small race of Muslim highlanders known as Chechens. This war has cost tens of thousands their lives, it has led post-Soviet Russia back down the path towards Soviet-style authoritarianism, and it has spilled over into neighboring regions with potentially dangerous implications for the USA. Most importantly it has become a potential theater for the war on terrorism against Al Qaeda and jihadism.

But for all of its geo-strategic importance for much of Eurasia and the USA, the Russo-Chechen War has received little coverage in the Western media. It is only when the Chechens engage in unprecedented mass-terrorism, such as the seizure of school children in a school in Russia in 2004, that the outside world is reminded of the horrors of Chechnya.

Sadly, the disjointed images of Chechen hostage-takers or terrorists that appear on ninety second CNN sound-bites are, however, lacking in **historical context** (as is most coverage of the Chechens). This leads to one-dimensional views of this ancient race. In the process, the Chechens' homeland, history, culture, and reasons for fighting against their Russia conquerors are usually described in simplistic ahistorical terms by the press which simplistically defines them as "Al Qaeda." Thus, Europe's only war remains largely misunderstood by outsiders who have little familiarity with the history of this Muslim region and have confused it with the 'war on terror.'

And it is this lack of familiarity with this distant *terra incognita* that is at the real root of the misunderstanding of the Chechens and their historic conflict with Russia. In simple terms, most outsiders know nothing about the homeland of the Chechens, the Caucasus Mountains, and even less about mystical Sufi-frontier Islam and the history of Russian conquests of this realm. The Caucasus is one of those blank spots on most American's 'mental maps', a region known only for separating Orthodox-Christian Europe from the Muslim-Middle East.

But for all the fact that the Caucasus is overlooked by Westerners, it is a land rich in Islamic history with perhaps more races and ethnic groups per square mile than any other place in the world. To know the Chechen highlander is to understand their reasons for going to war with the mighty Russian Federation. And to do this the student of history must make a necessary journey back in time to the Caucasus and surrounding regions.

This class aims to do just that by taking students through the history of the various religions, peoples, and empires that lapped up against this mountain barrier and created the conditions that led to today's war between the Russians and Chechens. We will trace the spread of Sufi Islam to this region under the Ottomans, the conquests of the Russian Tsars, the oppression of the Soviets, and the tragedy of the on-going, post-Soviet wars with the aim of providing a *historical context* for the disjointed CNN images of the 'Chechen race of terrorists.'

We will end with a discussion of Chechnya's role in the larger war against Al Qaeda and jihadism with the aim of understanding this mountain people's role in this global conflict. In the process students will be introduced to Ottoman, Middle Eastern, Russian, Soviet, and Caucasian history and come to know an important part of the Islamic world that has been largely overlooked by Western-centric history.

The course grade will be calculated as follows:

1. THREE TESTS WHICH COVER READINGS AND LECTURES.
EACH TEST IS WORTH 20% OF GRADE
2. RESEARCH PAPER (TOPIC TO BE DISCUSSED IN CLASS) worth 20% of grade.
3. UNANNOUNCED GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTIFICATION QUIZZES AND CLASS ROOM PARTICIPATION (20 %)

There are no excuses for missing any of the above course requirements or deadlines for tests. Students who miss more than three classes have their grade dropped a letter, those who miss more than six fail.

WARNING, DO NOT TRY TO EXPLAIN AWAY MISSED TESTS!!!!!!!!!!

Required Reading:

- Khassan Baiev. *The Oath. A Surgeon Under Fire.* (also available as *Grief of My Heart*).
- Sebastian Smith. *Allah's Mountains. The Battle for Chechnya.* .
- Brian Williams. *The Chechen Highlanders and Al Qaeda.* (book available in electronic version from professor).
- Leo Tolstoy. *A Prisoner of the Caucasus.*

Course Topics.

1. January 26. Introduction to Class.

Chechnya, Europe's Heart of Darkness and the Spread of Islam to the Caucasus.

Reading: *The Oath.* 'Prologue' 'Introduction' and 'About Chechnya.'

Key Notions: 5 Pillars of Islam, jihad, Arabs first people of Islam, Mecca, People of the Book.

2. January 28. Sultans.

The Expansion of the Ottoman Empire in and Around the Caucasus.

Reading: Handout.

Key Notions: Sufi mystical-frontier Islam, Dagestan's conversion to Islam.

3. January 30. Slavs.

Introduction to the Russians.

Reading: Smith. pages 32-35.

Key Notions: Orthodox Christianity, Muscovy (Moscow Principality), Slavic races, growth of Russia.

4. February 2. Unification. The Rise of Russia.

The Creation of Moscow's Empire.

Reading: Smith pages 36-41.

Key Notions: Unification of Russia and beginning of expansion, concept of Tsar-Caesar.

5. February 4. A Tsar is Born.

The Reign of Ivan the Terrible.

Key Notions: Russian imperial expansion, birth of an empire, forced conversions.

Reading: Leo Tolstoy. *A Prisoner of the Caucasus.* Available on line at:

<http://www.online-literature.com/tolstoy/2888/>

6. February 6. Cossacks.

The Russian Settlement of the North Caucasus.

Key Notions: Cossacks-Russia's frontiersmen ('Ivan Boones'), expansion towards Caucasus Mountains, Slavic interaction with indigenous tribes of Mountains.

7. February 9. Highlanders.

The Tribes of the North Caucasus.

Reading: The Chechen Highlander and Al Qaeda. Section One and Two (pages 1-15).

Key Notions. Abreks, auls.

Movie "Prisoner of the Mountains."

8. February 11. Chechens.

Introduction to Vaniakhs (The Chechens and Ingush).

9. February 13. Scorched Earth.

The Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus.

Reading: Chechen Highlander and AL Qaeda Section Three and Four pages 15-21.

Key Notions: General Yermolov's total war against the highlanders, the Chechen migration to the Ottoman Empire (province of Jordan).

10. February 16. No Class.

11. February 18. The Imam.

Shamil's Rebellion Against Russia.

Reading: SMITH pages 41-51. Chechen Highlander and AL Qaeda Chapter pages 21-37.

Key Notions: Murids (Disciples of Shamil, jihad-gazavat)

12. February 20. Pacification.

The Suppression of Shamil.

Key Notions: collective punishment, reactive jihad, capture of Shamil.

13. February 23. TEST ONE (READING AND LECTURES!). Essay and IDs.

14. February 25 Empire.

The Chechens in Russia.

Reading: Chechen Highlanders and AL Qaeda. Pages 38-42.

Key Notions: Inorodtsy ('internal aliens', Russification, rebellions, cheorny-'blacks')

15. February 27. Lenin.

Overthrow of the Tsar and Creation of the USSR.

Reading: Smith pages 54-58. Reading: Chechen Highlanders and AL Qaeda. Pages 42-52.

16. March 2. The “Union” of Soviet Ethnic Republics.

Soviet Nationality Policies.

Reading: Chechen Highlanders and Al Qaeda. Pages 52-66. Smith pages 58-68.

17. March 4. Exile.

The Deportation of the Chechens and Ingush.

Readings: Chechen Highlanders and Al Qaeda. Pages 67-82

Key Notions: ethnic cleansing, collective memory, genocide, ‘chosen trauma’

18. March 6. Return.

The Struggle to Return Home.

Reading: Chechen Highlanders and Al Qaeda. Pages 82-Finish.

Key Notions: the death of Stalin, Krushchev’s thaw, return of exiles to homeland.

19. March 9. Mafia Nation?

The Chechens from 1960s-80s.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapter 1-2.

Key Notions: Sovietization of highlanders, Chechen guest-worker diaspora, KGB.

20. March 13. Gorbachev.

The Fall of the USSR.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapter 3-5.

Key Notions: Glasnost, perestroika, 1991 coup, national fronts, Boris Yeltsin

March 16-20. Spring Break.

21 March 23. The Fall of the USSR.

22. March 25. Dudayev.

Chechen Separatism.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapters 6 and 7.

Key Notions: “Nothing is Forgotten, Nothing Will be Forgotten!”, ethnic entrepreneurs, nationalism, Chechen secularism.

23. March 27. Brinkmanship.

Reading: SMITH Part. 4. The Chechen Wolf.

Key Notions: Russian nationalism, a ‘Short Victorious War’, Chechen seizure of Soviet arms depots, collective trauma and mass mobilization.

24 March 30. Stealth War.

The Beginnings of the Conflict.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapters 8 and 9.

TEST TWO (READING AND LECTURES)

25. April 1. Intervention.

The First Russian Attempts to Remove Dudayev.

Reading: Smith pages 146-166.

Key Notions: Russian attempts to topple Dudayev.

26. April 3. Invasion.

Yeltsin Invades Chechnya.

Reading: Smith pages 166-210.

Key Notions: Frontal combat, lack of Western recognition of Chechnya.

27. April 6. Grozny.

The Fall of the Chechen Capital.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapters 10 and 11. SMITH pages 210-240.

Key Notions: The switch from frontal combat to guerilla tactics.

28. April 8. Terrorism.

Shamil Basayev's Attack on Budennovsk.

Reading: Smith pages 240-268.

Key Notions: political terrorism, Chechens as 'bandits' and 'rebels'

Movie: "Immortal Fortress"

29. April 10. Operation Jihad.

The Defeat of the Russians.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapters 12 and 13.

Key Notions: the killing of Dudayev, arrival of Khattab and foreign jihadis, defeat of Russians, Khasavyurt treaty.

30. April 13. 1996-99.

The Interwar Years.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapter 14 and 15.

Key Notions: Election of Mashkadov (moderate president of Chechnya).

31. April 15. Dagestan.

Fundamentalism in the Caucasus.

Reading: "The Russo-Chechen War. A Threat to Security in Eurasia."
brianglynwilliams.com (Scroll down "Publications")

Key Notions: Wahhabism (Saudi fundamentalism) arrives in Caucasus.

32. April 17. Jihadis Attack.

Basayev's Raid into Dagestan, Fall 1999.

Key Notions: Khattab and Basayev provide Russia with pretext for war.

33. April 20 No Class. (Holiday).

34. April 22. “Russia’s 9/11.”

The Fall 1999 Bombing Wave in Russia.

Reading: *The Oath*. chapter 16 and 17.

Key Notions: The Rise of Vladimir Putin, Ryazan FSB (KGB) plot.

35. April 24. Putin.

Russia’s Second Invasion of Chechnya.

Reading: *The Oath*. chapter 18

Key Notions: Russia’s version of ‘Homeland Security’, dismantling of democracy, rise of war party, total warfare against Chechen ‘terror race.’

36. April 27. The Defense of Grozny.

The Oath. Chapter 19.

Key Notions: War crimes at Chernokozovo (the Russian ‘Abu Ghraib’), Grozny as an ‘urban forest’, fuel air explosives.

37. April 29. Grozny II.

Russia’s Siege of the Chechen Capital.

Reading: *The Oath*. Chapter 20. Smith Go back and read “Introduction.”

Key Notions: the encirclement of Grozny, ‘no one gets out alive.’

38. May 1. Break Out.

The Chechen Withdrawal From Grozny.

Reading: *The Oath*. chapter 21.

Key Notions: Wounding of Basayev, switch to guerilla campaign.

39. May 4. Jihad Guerillas.

The Chechen Insurgency Commences.

Reading: *The Oath*. chapters 22 and 23.

Key Notions: Nord Ost Theater hostage drama, rise of Arab-led jihad platoons, radicalization of Chechen resistance, Russia’s self-fulfilling prophecy.

40. May 6. September 11th.

America Discovers the Chechens.

Reading: “From Secessionist Rebels to Al Qaeda Shock Brigades.”

(brianglynwilliams.com scroll down “Publications”)

Key Notions: Putin’s attempts to conflate Chechen conflict with US ‘war on terror.’

41. May 8. Chechens Invade Afghanistan?

42. May 11. TEST THREE (READING AND LECTURES)