

HISTORICAL SCIENCES

Leyla Aliyeva Elkhan

*Philosophy doctor on history sciences, senior teacher of Sumgayit State University,
Azerbaijan Republic, Sumgayit City*

Orcid: 0000-0002-8195-6092

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BASHKIRDS AND CHUVASHES IN THE XVII-XIX CENTURIES

Abstract.

This article analyzes the social, economic, and political transformations experienced by the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples under the influence of the Russian Empire between the XVII and XIX centuries. During this period, both groups underwent a transition from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle, largely as a result of policies implemented by the Russian government to consolidate its authority. The Russian Empire pursued a strategy of settlement in Bashkir and Chuvash territories, establishing new administrative structures and exerting significant influence over the socio-political organization of these populations. In response, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples engaged in various uprisings to defend their autonomy; however, these rebellions were systematically suppressed by the imperial authorities. Additionally, class divisions within their social structures became more pronounced, leading to heightened tensions between the feudal elite and community members. Economic development was evident, particularly in the expansion of livestock breeding and agricultural practices. Despite the political and social pressures imposed by the Russian Empire, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples actively resisted in an effort to preserve their national identity and cultural heritage.

Аннотация.

В статье анализируются социальные, экономические и политические преобразования, которые пережили башкирский и чувашский народы под влиянием Российской империи между XVII и XIX веками. В этот период обе группы перешли от кочевого к оседлому образу жизни, во многом в результате политики, проводимой российским правительством для укрепления своей власти. Российская империя проводила стратегию расселения на башкирских и чувашских территориях, создавая новые административные структуры и оказывая значительное влияние на социально-политическую организацию этих групп населения. В ответ на это башкирский и чувашский народы участвовали в различных восстаниях, чтобы защитить свою автономию; однако эти восстания систематически подавлялись имперскими властями. Кроме того, классовые различия в их социальных структурах стали более выраженными, что привело к усилению напряженности между феодальной элитой и членами общины. Экономическое развитие было очевидным, особенно в расширении животноводства и сельскохозяйственных практик. Несмотря на политическое и социальное давление со стороны Российской империи, башкирский и чувашский народы активно сопротивлялись, стремясь сохранить свою национальную идентичность и культурное наследие.

Keywords: *Bashkirs, Chuvash, Russian Empire, uprisings, nomadic life.*

Ключевые слова: *башкиры, чувашы, Российская империя, восстания, кочевой образ жизни.*

Introduction: This article provides a foundational analysis of the social, economic, and political conditions of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples, as well as their role in broader historical processes. The period spanning the XVII-XIX centuries was marked by significant challenges for these communities, as they struggled to preserve their identity and resist external pressures. The expansion of the Russian Empire and its efforts to consolidate control over these territories profoundly impacted the traditional way of life of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples. Despite their attempts to maintain their presence on their ancestral lands, they experienced substantial economic, social, and administrative transformations under the influence of Russian imperial policies. The implementation of a centralized administration and administrative reforms led to significant shifts in their traditional societal structures and modes of existence [3].

From the late XVII century onward, the Russian Empire implemented a series of military and administrative measures to strengthen its position in the Ural

and Volga regions. During this period, the settlement of Russian families and the construction of military fortress cities in Bashkir and Chuvash territories became increasingly widespread. In an effort to consolidate control over these regions, the Russian government established cities and administrative structures of strategic and military importance. One such city was Ufa, where Russian authority was reinforced through the presence of Russian voivodes. This new system of governance not only introduced additional taxes and compulsory labor for the Bashkir and Chuvash populations but also had a profound impact on their traditional way of life.

The imposition of a centralized administrative structure led to the emergence of pronounced class distinctions within Bashkir and Chuvash communities. Social groups such as feudal lords, murzas, and tarkhans gained significant power and exerted considerable influence over community members. Tarkhans, who were granted special privileges including exemption from state taxes and compulsory services, played a

particularly dominant role in the social hierarchy. As a result, tensions intensified between the general population and the ruling elite, leading to increased social unrest. These structural transformations significantly restricted the autonomy and self-governance of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples within their own lands.

Moreover, military conscription and forced labor expanded in Bashkir and Chuvash territories during this period. The government's imposition of increased taxes and additional obligations further exacerbated the hardships faced by the peasant population. Although livestock breeding and agriculture remained fundamental to the social and economic life of these communities, Russian imperial policies placed significant constraints on their economic activities. While agricultural production expanded as a consequence of Russian influence, these developments came at the cost of diminished economic freedoms for the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples [8]. The uprisings and protest movements that emerged during this period illustrate the resistance of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples against Russian imperial oppression. These revolts constituted part of broader resistance efforts aimed at defending their national and social rights. Although the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples actively sought to preserve their traditional way of life and cultural identity, their efforts were frequently met with suppression by imperial forces. Nevertheless, their continued resistance underscored a persistent struggle to maintain their cultural heritage and autonomy.

In conclusion, the 17th to 19th centuries represented a period of profound transformation for the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples. Under the expanding influence of the Russian Empire, these communities experienced significant social, economic, and political changes that reshaped their historical trajectory.

Historical Overview of the Bashkir and Chuvash Peoples

The Bashkir and Chuvash peoples have historically inhabited regions influenced by the Russian Empire and possess a rich cultural heritage and complex social structures. The earliest known historical records of the Bashkirs appear in Arabic sources from the 9th and 10th centuries, where they are referred to as "Bashkorts" or "Bashkirs." During this period, the Bashkirs maintained close contact with the Volga Bulgar state and, by the 13th century, became subordinate to the Golden Horde. This subjugation contributed to the emergence of local feudal structures, leading to the rise of a class of large landowners, including feudal elites such as the "tarkhans."

The Chuvash people, as descendants of the ancient Bulgar-Turkic groups, settled in the Volga region, where they intermingled with the Bulgars and Finno-Ugric populations, gradually forming a distinct ethnic identity. Their culture evolved through interactions with both Turkic and non-Turkic groups, reflecting a synthesis of diverse cultural influences [14].

Following the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by the Russian Empire in 1552, the Bashkirs came under Russian rule and experienced intensified colonial control. In the aftermath of this conquest, Russian authorities initiated the settlement of Russian populations in

Bashkir lands and established military fortresses to consolidate control. In response, the Bashkirs actively resisted foreign encroachment through multiple uprisings. Similarly, the Chuvash population faced policies of Russification and Christianization upon their incorporation into the Russian Empire. Despite these pressures, they sought to preserve their cultural traditions. Throughout the 18th century, the Bashkirs frequently revolted against Russian rule, but these uprisings were systematically suppressed by military force. Meanwhile, the Chuvash endured coerced Christianization, with some segments of the population adopting Christianity while others maintained their traditional beliefs. As inheritors of the Volga Bulgar state, the Chuvash developed a unique cultural identity shaped by both Turkic and Finno-Ugric influences. Although both groups remained under Russian influence by the early 19th century, they actively endeavored to safeguard their cultural heritage and national identity.

During the XVII-XIX centuries, the Bashkirs engaged in both agriculture and cattle breeding, contributing to the economic development of their region. The Chuvash similarly advanced agricultural and pastoral practices, playing a significant role in the economic and social fabric of the Volga-Ural region. However, the Russian Empire's imposition of increased taxation and additional economic obligations exacerbated their hardships. Despite growing cultural and religious influences from Russian authorities, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples continued to resist assimilation and sought to preserve their traditional values and customs. By the late XIX century, these efforts persisted in the face of ongoing Russification policies.

The Expansion of Russian Imperial Influence

Between the XVII-XIX centuries, the influence of the Russian Empire expanded significantly in the Volga-Ural region, bringing profound transformations to the lives of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples. During this period, the Russian government pursued an expansionist agenda aimed at achieving administrative and military consolidation in the region. The conquest of the Kazan Khanate in 1552 marked a decisive moment in this process, as it enabled Russia to assert full control over the Volga region. Consequently, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples were integrated into the Russian imperial system and subjected to colonial rule.

Russia's governance strategy in these territories primarily relied on the construction of military fortresses and the settlement of Russian populations. These measures were intended to reinforce imperial authority and facilitate the administrative integration of the region into the broader Russian state apparatus [10]. Over time, these policies resulted in significant social, economic, and political changes, fundamentally altering the traditional ways of life of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples.

During the XVII-XIX centuries, the Russian Empire established fortresses and administrative centers of military and strategic importance in the territories inhabited by the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples. A key example is the founding of the city of Ufa in 1574, which later evolved into an administrative center. Russian *voivodes* were appointed to govern the region, thereby

consolidating imperial control over the Bashkir and Chuvash populations. Additionally, Russian families were resettled in these areas, further increasing Russian influence and strengthening state authority.

The Russian government imposed various obligations on the Bashkir and Chuvash populations, including taxation and military conscription. These measures significantly impacted the local economy, restricting the ability of these communities to engage freely in agriculture and trade. In response, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples organized revolts against these policies. However, these uprisings were met with severe military suppression. The period was marked by considerable socio-economic hardship, as both groups experienced growing pressures under Russian rule.

As Russian influence expanded, policies were implemented to transition the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle. The Russian authorities sought to alter traditional ways of life, compelling these communities to adopt settled agricultural practices. This transformation had profound effects on their socio-economic structures. While many Bashkirs and Chuvash remained engaged in agriculture and livestock breeding, the shift toward a sedentary existence confined them to specific territories and introduced new social adaptations.

In the XVIII century, the Russian government intensified its military-administrative measures in the Bashkir and Chuvash lands, deploying additional military personnel and officials to consolidate power. Administrative reforms led to the creation of new territorial divisions, enforcing compliance with Russian legal frameworks and restricting local governance. In an effort to secure alliances with regional elites, the Russian administration granted privileges to certain feudal leaders, thereby strengthening their influence over the broader population.

Religious and Cultural Policies

In addition to administrative control, the Russian Empire pursued a policy of Christianization aimed at weakening the national identities of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples and assimilating them into Russian culture. The Chuvash, in particular, were targeted for conversion to Orthodox Christianity and subjected to significant religious influence from the Russian Orthodox Church. However, resistance persisted among segments of the Chuvash population who sought to preserve their traditional religious practices. While some communities converted under duress, others actively resisted religious assimilation, demonstrating the enduring strength of their cultural heritage.

The Bashkir population, on the other hand, was subjected to military conscription and various state-imposed obligations. Faced with the military dominance of the Russian Empire, the Bashkirs staged multiple uprisings throughout the XVIII century in an effort to protect their national identity and traditional way of life. The Russian government responded with extensive military campaigns to suppress these revolts, yet the Bashkirs continued to resist imperial control. These uprisings underscored their persistent struggle for autonomy and cultural preservation.

Social and Economic Transformations

Between the XVII-XIX centuries, the socio-economic conditions of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples underwent significant changes under Russian imperial rule. The expansionist policies and administrative restructuring of the Russian Empire fundamentally altered their traditional ways of life. Prior to Russian intervention, both groups primarily engaged in nomadic pastoralism and agriculture, relying on natural resources for subsistence. Their economic activities were largely self-sufficient and less constrained by external authorities.

The construction of military fortresses and the imposition of taxes disrupted the economic stability of these communities. The burden of new levies and compulsory labor led to financial hardship, particularly among the peasantry. Many Bashkir and Chuvash peasants struggled to sustain their livelihoods under the weight of heavy taxation, prompting waves of resistance and rebellion. The Russian authorities, in response, implemented harsh measures to quell dissent and maintain control [1].

The Russian administration also co-opted local feudal elites, particularly the Tarkhans, by granting them tax exemptions and other privileges. These feudal lords gained increased economic and political influence, exacerbating class divisions within Bashkir and Chuvash society [11]. The power imbalance between feudal elites and the peasantry contributed to growing tensions, as land ownership became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the privileged classes. This shift restricted peasants' access to land and curtailed their economic independence.

Despite these challenges, Bashkir and Chuvash communities continued to engage in traditional economic activities, including agriculture, cattle breeding, hunting, beekeeping, and leatherworking. Although agricultural production remained central to their economies, the expansion of Russian influence introduced new constraints on trade and commerce. State-imposed regulations and restrictions on independent economic activity further weakened the local economy.

The Russian government sought to integrate the Bashkir and Chuvash economies into the imperial administrative system, limiting their financial autonomy. Land previously designated for communal use was increasingly appropriated by feudal lords, compelling peasants to work under exploitative conditions. The administrative policies imposed by the Russian authorities reinforced economic dependency, restricting opportunities for self-sufficiency. Growing social stratification further contributed to tensions within Bashkir and Chuvash society. Peasants faced deteriorating working conditions and increased obligations to feudal lords, leading to widespread social unrest. Many individuals, burdened by debt and economic hardship, were forced into serfdom, exacerbating their dependence on landowners. Additionally, forced military conscription and compulsory labor requirements further eroded the standard of living among the lower classes [12].

The scarcity of land and limited economic resources among the Bashkir and Chuvash communities exacerbated existing economic hardships. The restricted availability of arable land made it increasingly

difficult for peasants to sustain themselves, while heavy taxation and compulsory labor obligations further diminished their standard of living. Although certain industrial sectors experienced growth during this period, the local population derived little benefit from these developments due to systemic restrictions and economic marginalization. The rigid administrative policies and economic constraints imposed by the Russian government further disrupted the social structures of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples, deepening socio-economic inequalities and fostering widespread discontent..

Uprisings and Resistance Movements

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples led numerous uprisings and resistance movements against the oppression of the Russian Empire. The oppressive taxation system, administrative pressures, and interference in traditional ways of life introduced by the Russian government instigated revolts among the Bashkirs and Chuvash, as they sought to preserve their autonomy. These uprisings were not only a protest against social injustices but also a manifestation of the desire to maintain their national identity.

From the mid-seventeenth century, the settlement of Russian families and the construction of military fortresses in Bashkir-inhabited territories fostered widespread discontent. The first significant Bashkir uprising, which occurred between 1662 and 1664, galvanized local resistance against Russian rule. In response, the Russian government deployed large military forces to quell the uprising; however, unrest persisted. Throughout the eighteenth century, various uprisings erupted among the Bashkirs nearly every decade [13].

The large-scale Bashkir uprisings of 1735-1740, in particular, were a direct reaction to the harsh tax policies imposed by the Russian Empire. During these uprisings, the Bashkirs mounted armed resistance against the Russian forces, posing a significant threat to imperial authority. The Russian government responded by deploying thousands of soldiers to suppress the uprisings, implementing severe measures against the local communities. Despite these efforts, the Bashkirs persisted in their struggle to safeguard their cultural and national values. The central goal of the Bashkir uprisings extended beyond opposition to taxes and included demands for the reform of the local governance system, which was heavily influenced by Russian authorities. Peasants, who were subjected to exploitation by local feudal lords and tarkhans, actively participated in these uprisings. The 1755 uprising, for instance, was specifically organized to protect religious and national traditions. During this period, the Bashkirs resisted not only the Russian state but also its policy of Christianization. The government's harsh measures during the suppression of these uprisings led to substantial losses among the local population. Nonetheless, the Bashkirs continued to fight for the preservation of their national identity. As a result of these uprisings, many Bashkirs were exiled to the steppe or to Siberia. Despite the weakening of their traditional social structures, the spirit of resistance persisted, reinforcing the commitment to preserving their cultural heritage.

The Chuvash people also resisted the oppression of the Russian Empire, particularly opposing the policy of Christianization in defense of their religious beliefs. In the nineteenth century, various movements arose within Chuvash communities to safeguard their religious and cultural traditions. The Chuvash passively resisted Russian efforts to assimilate them and strove to maintain their traditional customs and practices [4]. During these uprisings, both the Bashkirs and Chuvash sought to form alliances with other ethnic groups that were, at various points, in opposition to Russian rule. Notably, during the Pugachev Rebellion, the Bashkirs collaborated with Russian peasants and Cossacks. The Bashkir leader Salavat Yulayev played a prominent role in this movement, inspiring the local population with his resistance. Yulayev's heroism elevated him to the status of a national hero within the Bashkir community, marking his struggle as a significant chapter in the history of these peoples [2]. The uprisings of the Bashkirs and Chuvash were pivotal in their efforts to protect their social and national rights. As a result of these uprisings, the Russian Empire was forced to adjust its religious and cultural policies, making concessions to both the Bashkirs and Chuvash. By the end of the eighteenth century, some degree of religious and cultural freedom was granted to these peoples, allowing for the establishment of mosques and schools.

Transition to a Sedentary Lifestyle and the Development of Agriculture

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples underwent a forced transition from a traditional nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary one under the pressure of the Russian Empire. The Russian state encouraged this shift in order to enhance control over these territories and adapt them to the imperial administrative system. This transition led to profound changes in the economic activities and social structures of both the Bashkirs and Chuvash. For the Bashkirs, this transition occurred gradually, with a focus on the development of agricultural practices. Prior to this shift, the Bashkirs were primarily engaged in extensive nomadic cattle breeding. However, under the influence and pressure of the Russian government, they increasingly turned to agriculture and sedentary farming. With this transition, the Bashkirs began incorporating agricultural innovations, learning new farming techniques, and adapting their lands to support agriculture. Similarly, the Chuvash people shifted their focus to agriculture as part of the transition to a sedentary lifestyle. The fertile lands in their region facilitated the expansion of agricultural activities, including the cultivation of cereals, vegetables, and other crops. The Chuvash adopted modern agricultural methods and tools, contributing to the enhancement of their economy [7].

The move toward a sedentary lifestyle also spurred the development of crafts and trade activities. Among the Bashkirs, there was an increase in leatherworking, weaving, and other crafts, which were sold in local markets, thereby improving their economic situation. Likewise, the Chuvash developed their own craft industries, which led to innovations in their social and economic structures. The transition to a sedentary lifestyle had significant social consequences for both the Bashkirs

and Chuvash. Previously free and independent peasants, who had sustained themselves through nomadic pastoralism, became more reliant on the land as they adapted to a sedentary existence. Feudal lords and large landowners gained greater control over the peasants, resulting in reduced autonomy and increased economic dependence. This economic shift contributed to greater social stratification and tensions within local communities. The Russian Empire's agricultural reforms and policies of compulsory taxation further shaped the transition to a sedentary lifestyle. The government introduced new agricultural technologies and methods to increase productivity among the Bashkirs and Chuvash. These reforms led to higher crop yields, which positively impacted the local economy. However, the transition also created difficulties for peasants, who were burdened by heavy taxes and compulsory contributions [9].

In addition to agriculture, beekeeping, pottery, and other crafts emerged as significant components of the Bashkir and Chuvash economies. These activities provided new sources of income, as both groups sought to increase their economic independence by engaging in local trade. Under the regulatory framework imposed by the Russian government, they diversified their economic activities and participated more actively in the market economy. The transition to a sedentary lifestyle also brought about cultural and societal changes for the Bashkirs and Chuvash. The acquisition of new agricultural and craft-related skills opened the door to innovations in daily life. Moreover, the transition created conditions conducive to the establishment of educational and religious institutions, with schools, mosques, and churches being built in the communities of both peoples, further enriching their social fabric [5].

Conclusion

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples underwent profound social, economic, and cultural transformations under the influence of the Russian Empire. The administrative and military measures imposed by the Russian government, coupled with restrictions on the nomadic lifestyle, increased taxes and duties, and the policies of Christianization and Russification, significantly impacted the traditional ways of life of these communities. In response, the Bashkirs and Chuvash engaged in persistent uprisings and resistance movements, driven by the economic hardships they faced, the disruptions to their social structures, and the threats to their national identities. Through these uprisings, they fought to defend their social and national rights. The transition to a sedentary lifestyle and the development of agriculture brought significant changes to the economic activities of the Bashkirs and Chuvash. This shift created new opportunities for advancement in agriculture, cattle breeding, and crafts, while also fostering the growth of trade activities and the establishment of local markets. The implementation of new economic methods, modern agricultural technologies, and reforms aimed at increasing productivity by the Russian government had some positive effects on the local economy. However, these changes also led to increased economic dependence on

landowners and heightened social inequality due to the growing tax burden.

Despite the oppressive policies of the Russian Empire, both the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples succeeded in preserving their cultural values and national identities. Their uprisings and resistance movements expressed a strong desire for national freedom, and they worked tirelessly to pass on their cultural heritage to future generations in the face of adversity. Consequently, while the Bashkirs and Chuvash peoples underwent significant economic and social changes during this period, they also solidified their national identity and earned a distinguished place in history.

Ultimately, under the influence of the Russian Empire, both the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples navigated a period marked by complexity and hardship, emerging into a new era with notable social, economic, and cultural developments. By the end of this era, both peoples had managed to preserve their existence and national values, while adapting to a changing world and continuing to progress. These struggles and transformations laid a crucial foundation for the future development of the Bashkir and Chuvash peoples.

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