



Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi (OMAD), Cilt 5, Sayı 13, Kasım 2018, ss. 83-93.
Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies (JOLS), Volume 5, Issue 13, November 2018, pp. 83-93.
ISSN 2148-5704
DOI Number: 10.17822/omad.2018.112
Geliş Tarihi/Received: 18.09.2018 Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 21.11.2018

LANDSCAPES, CITYSCAPES AND MULTIPLE DWELLERS: SOUTHWESTERN GEORGIA AND NORTHEASTERN TURKEY IN THE LENS OF THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR AND PEACE*

Peyzaj, Şehir Manzaraları ve Çoklu Kent Sakinleri: Rus-Türk Savaş ve Barışının Gözünden Gürcistan'ın Güneydoğusu ve Türkiye'nin Kuzeydoğusu

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Abstract: In the article there is discussed the photographic material, depicting the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, as well as the periods before and after this major event of our interest. The base material for the key study is the "Ermakov Collection" kept at the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi, Georgia, consisting works of Ermakov himself and other photographers. Yet, this is the first attempt to contextualize the Collection in relation with the War and geopolitical situation between Russian and Ottoman Empires in the late nineteenth century. Photography is treated as a tool of military intelligence and with its later commercial and/or scientific meanings.

Keywords: Ermakov Collection (Tbilisi), Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), Post/Ottoman Visual History

Öz: Bu makalede 1877-1878 tarihleri arasında gerçekleşen Rus-Türk Savaşı'nı ve söz konusu dönemin öncesi ve sonrası betimleyen fotoğraflar tartışılmaktadır. Çalışmanın temeli, Ermakov ve diğer fotoğrafçıların eserlerini içeren ve Tiflis, Gürcistan Ulusal Müzesi'nde bulunan "Ermakov Koleksiyonu"ndaki görsel materyale dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışma söz konusu koleksiyonu, 19. yüzyılın sonlarında Rus ve Osmanlı İmparatorlukları arasında gerçekleşen savaş ve jeopolitik durum bağlamında incelemeye girişen ilk araştırmadır. Fotoğrafçılık, askerî istihbaratın bir aracı olarak ve daha sonraları ticari ve / veya bilimsel anlamlarıyla ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermakov Koleksiyonu (Tiflis), Rus-Türk Savaşı (1877-1878), Osmanlı Dönemi/Sonrası Görsel Tarihi

War photography is a branch of photographic practice and a significant source for gaining a visual history of past times. Soon after its invention, photography began to be used beneficially to depict the various regions of the world where military operations were taking place. While wartime photography was widely discussed during the late nineteenth century, and despite the special attention given to the Crimean War of 1853-1856, in photography reference books there is no mention of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. A significant event in modern history and a conflict between two empires, it took place in the region of the Black Sea basin. The reason the event, region and times went unstudied in visual terms may well result from the fact that the Western European states were not involved in the War. Accordingly, very few materials have been preserved in the depositories of the West and the event failed to grab the attention of the western historians of photography.¹

* This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSFG). Grant no 217208 FR/11/12/16. Project title: "Urban Planning and Architectural Design in the Cities of Georgia (1801-1918)."

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¹ Robin Lenman, Constance B. Schulz, "War Photography", *Oxford Companion to Photograph*, ed. Robin Lenman (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 659-672.

The majority of the photographic material to be discussed below is kept at the National Museum of Georgia, with smaller collections of similar content available in other institutions in Georgia and worldwide. The “Ermakov Collection,” named for its last private owner, includes thousands of negative plates and is one of the most renowned photographic collections. Yet it remains uncontextualized. Despite the full cataloguing of the plates, based on inscriptions by Dmitri Ermakov (at the bottom of most photos), much about the collection is unclear and needs the work of the generations of scholars to reveal precise information about each image, the subject, date and location.² Our attention is at present focused on the activity within the photographs depicting the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and the wider geographic region in which the war was played out; images that show life before, during and after this geopolitical event.

Dmitri Ermakov was born to an architect of Italian origin and a Molokan (Russian) mother in Nakhchivan, and later moved to Tiflis (Tbilisi). He was based there for the remainder of his life, while travelling a lot around the Middle East. In the early 1860s, he attended a one-year course for military topographers at the Military-Topographic Depot in Ananuri (a historical fortress and settlement 102 kilometers north of Tiflis, on the Georgian Military Highway), operated by the Caucasian Staff of the Russian Army. The depot was open on January 8, 1863 and was the first Photographic Unit of the Caucasian Army of the Russian Empire. It aimed to build up a strategic visuality of the Caucasus and its bordering regions; to record military personnel during training; and to capture the path of military operations and the daily lives of the troops. Noteworthy for us is the fact the unit also made use of photography for topographical, archeological and ethnographic studies; in short, recording every field of social life for which this new tool of recording could be beneficial. It was there that Ermakov, along with his fellow photographers, studied and mastered photography, determining the further thematic scope and approach of photographers to tools of recording.

We should first settle on a few known biographical facts of Dmitri Ermakov (1846-1916) and other photographers, connected to their activities in Turkey.³

Ermakov, who travelled often, also tracked the Turkish Black Sea coast in the prewar period, shooting both the area and the lands of historic western Armenia (today northeastern Turkey). In 1870, he produced a collection of photographs depicting the northeastern area of the Turkish city Erzurum, with its ancient architecture and roads. In 1872, Ermakov took part in the long-lasting archaeological expedition to the Asiatic and European towns of Turkey, all the way through to the city of Varna. The photographer's duties included photographic recording of the architectural monuments and general views of various sites. It is most likely he was also charged with conducting preliminarily planned military intelligence, capturing topographic shots for the high command of the General Staff of the Russian Imperial Army. In the early 1870s, soon after the expedition, Ermakov sent the shots of Turkish (historical) Armenia to the Russian Geographic Society.

In 1874, Ermakov participated in the anniversary exhibition of the Société Française de Photographie, presenting 17 photographic views of the Turkish city of Amasya. The photographer, at the age of 28, was awarded a medal for this collection and gained international recognition. Thus, by the time the aforementioned war came about, Ermakov already had a well-established reputation as a master of photography. In 1877-1878, Ermakov was commissioned as a military photographer at the Russo-Turkish War and went on to depict the Caucasian Frontline and beyond. Some shots, between numbers 2093-2198 in his catalogue of 1896, prove that the photographer was present in the regular army; without doubt in the

² Herman Maes, "Safeguarding Georgia's 19th century Photographic Treasure", *Dimitri Ermakov. Photographer and Collector* (Tbilisi: Georgian National Museum, 2014), pp. 42-49.

³ The Ottoman Empire was then referred to as "Turkey" in Russian tradition, and the use of this country name in the present article is interchangeable; moreover, Ermakov himself uses only this name.

dislocation area of the 41st Infantry Division.⁴ He also depicted the ethnographic “types” of both the Russian and Ottoman sides: soldiers and civilians.⁵

Other photographers based in or associated with Tiflis, the capital of the Russian Viceroyalty of the Caucasus at the time, were also witnesses to the fateful geopolitical power games in the region. Worthy of special mention are Vladimir Barkanov and Dmitry Nikitin, who were actively involved in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 as field photographers, and whose work is mixed in with the “Ermakov Collection.” It was during this period, throughout the 1870s and 80s, that the genre of military reportage was established, and its representatives produced thousands of images; many of which were left unidentified due to the lack of copyright.⁶

Barkanov served as a photo-reporter on the Caucasian front between 1877 and 1878, creating a unique series of photographs taken on the frontline. In 1881, at the Toulouse Photography Exhibition, he was awarded a diploma for his contribution to the development of photography.

Nikitin spent 20 years living and working in Georgia. In 1863, he is known to have been working in Tiflis as an assistant doctor, in his spare time pursuing his interest in photography. Nikitin served as a photo-reporter on the battlefields of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and he too made a great contribution to the field. He was particularly well-known for his military photographs, widely published in magazines and newspapers.

The duties of military photographers in the war of 1877-1878 included: the depiction of the military events, camps and frontline, portraits of the decorated soldiers and officers, and the activities of the rear, military hospitals, and prisoners. Strategic cities and suburbs in northeastern Turkey and southwestern parts of Georgia (disputed territories between two empires), were all captured in their lenses. As recording of the real battle (fast physical motion) was impossible due to the limited technical capabilities of the equipment of the times, the photographers often staged scenes; not only Ermakov, but also Nikiton, and/or Barkanov. After the war, each photographer continued with his prewar activities, adding more fascinating “exotic” imagery to their commercialized activities, as their photos came to be in high social demand.⁷

Ermakov would have been at work with his assistants, as was the usual practice. He would have needed at least physical help while dealing with heavy and unsteady cameras and the chemical processes of developing. It is also quite possible that he would send his co-workers to those places preliminarily identified as “smaller missions.” In addition, some of the photographic material in the albums also comes from other photographers, from whom he simply purchased negative plates. The result is an enormous informative wealth of photos which can be termed both extensive and multifaceted. The main visual feature of Ermakov's photography is the maximal capturing of the aerial space in his pictures, conditioned by the use of wide lenses and obviously linked with his background, knowledge, and needs in topography, as well as the overall goals – such as collecting data for cartographic and ethnographic purposes.

A number of these served as illustrative material for press, while the majority were the basis of military-topographic maps. Unfortunately, it is difficult to clearly define the links between the particular photographic images and maps, but the links (and preconditioned

⁴ Dmitry Ermakov, *Katalog fotograficheskikh vidov i tipov D. Ermakova* (Tiflis: 1896).

⁵ Svetopis' Dmitrija Ermakova. *Raboti Tiflisskogo fotografa kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka*, Katalog vystavki (Moscow: Gosudarstvennii Muzei Vostoka, 2017), pp. 6-7.

⁶ Anatoly Popov, "Rossijskoe zakonodatel'stvo XIX – nachala XX v. v oblasti fotografii" (Russian: Photographic Legislation in Russia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries), *Iz istorii Rossijskoj fotografii*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 2009), pp. 17-32.

⁷ Sergey Morozov, *Russkie puteshestvenniki fotografi* (Moscow: Geografiz, 1953), pp. 58-62.

strategic needs in them) did exist. This material stands as an invaluable documentation of history which is yet to be examined by representatives of social sciences and humanities studying Russian and Middle-Eastern History. The majority of photographs remain unidentified in terms of dates and location. The reason is that, on one hand, the "Ermakov Collection" includes the work of many other photographers and on the other, Ermakov himself visited various parts of Turkey repeatedly, produced many images and paying nearly no attention to precise annotations.

Ermakov, who widely practiced photography on his own, also ran commercial photographic studios, worked on official state commission, and was engaged in collecting. For this reason, much of his photography is subject to misunderstanding, opposing considerations and difficulties in identification. His photographs, and many of those of other authors, can nowadays be found in hundreds of Ermakov's commercial albums. They contain a vast amount of photographs of regions and peoples in the Caucasus itself, territories of the empires of Turkey, Russia, Persia and beyond, including today's Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russian provinces of the North Caucasus, countries of Central Asia, Crimea, Georgia, Northeast of Persia, and nearly half of Turkey.

Ermakov's legacy includes tens of thousands of positive prints, glass negatives, stereoscopic images and many albums, though roughly half of all these, as we stated above, were not made by him personally, having been, in different cases, inherited, purchased by or given for physical preservation and copying to Ermakov, who, according to the free attitude to copyright common in those times, incorporated them into his vast collection and printed them in two catalogues in 1896 and 1901, without indicating the authorship of other masters. A significant number of photographs from which Ermakov precisely erased signatures are included in the collection. The names of more than ten authors of these images are known, but this does not aid the identification of said images. Ermakov would label photographs with a bottom-line (seen on negatives as well as prints), indicating his catalogue number(s), image subject (often with orthographic mistakes), and, occasionally, a location.⁸

The vast amount of photographic material depicting the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, before and after, and the wider region of the front (from the Georgian town of Poti to Istanbul), can be conditionally organised into the following thematic groups:

1. The Views, cityscapes and landscapes of territories meriting the special attention of the strategic plans of the Russian Empire, such as Trabzon, Changry, Erzurum, Ordu, Gumush-Khane, Baiburt, Sinop, Unia, Angora, Marsovan and many others. Their urban and suburban areas were photographed repeatedly and from every possible angle.

2. Fortifications that at some point can be detached from populated sites. These are often historic fortresses which may be significant as strategic points for artillery and for seizing control over the surrounding lands. Kaladzhik, Sinop, Ardahan, Kaladib, and Veli were few of them.

3. Antiquities cannot be considered among the direct policies and strategic plans of the Russian Empire. There was much scientific interest in the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and later also Byzantine, located on the territory of Turkey, and it is not surprising to see various artefacts of architecture or minor arts in photographs.

4. Religion and Diaspora are two very much interlinked subjects in the photographs, and within them we can group the mosques, churches and monasteries of various confessions, and their graveyards, met on the military path of the Russian Army.

⁸ Hans de Herder, "Dmitri Ermakov, (c. 1845-c. 1916) Chronicler of the Caucasus", *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. J. Hannavy (New York and London: Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), pp. 494-496.

5. The Military are of course at the centre of the attention of war photographers, and as mentioned above, they were shown in every possible aspect of their service, as warriors, prisoners, and heroes of war. Further series depict church services, care for the wounded, the field kitchen, etc. Rifleman units or *militia*, along with the soldiers of the regular army, are also shown in the photos.

6. The Types is the last and largest group of photographs, as depiction of multiethnic civilians in the region at war by both sides of front was something of a norm for photographers. These are people of Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Kurdish, Lazi, Russian, and Turkish origin, of various occupations and confessional belonging, carefully sorted in terms of possible loyalty to or sentiments against the Russian Empire.

This was a vital part of collecting information, mostly for military and strategic purposes. The initial intelligence-gathering purpose of these photographs later became historical, ethnographic, and social. The studies of photography of the former Russian and Ottoman empires does not have a long history, as the world history of photography itself is a relatively new field of knowledge. However, a few facts known from Ermakov's biography, related to his presence in the abovementioned territories, and the overall scope of the "Ermakov Collection," should be analyzed properly in further studies. The photographs taken during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, before and after this long-lasting geopolitical event, are invaluable sources for the history of intelligence, topography, cartography, ethnography, and, generally, of visual history

It is not surprising that the final target of the Russian Imperial ambitions, the self-proclaimed "Third Rome," was Constantinople, referred to as *Tsargrad* (Russian for "Royal City"), this being preconditioned by the overall Russian political ideology toward the once-centre of the Christian world.⁹ All the visual recordings referred to above, as well as the military campaign as a whole, in fact, served to this major purpose.

Concluding Remark

With countless photographs taken in the region of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, the "Ermakov Collection" at the Georgian National Museum is undoubtedly the most important and most informative visual source for those studying the history of the confrontation between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, social history and material culture of the Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Kurd, and Lazi peoples. Yet, many photos should be examined in comparison to other photos in Turkish, Russian, and other collections worldwide.

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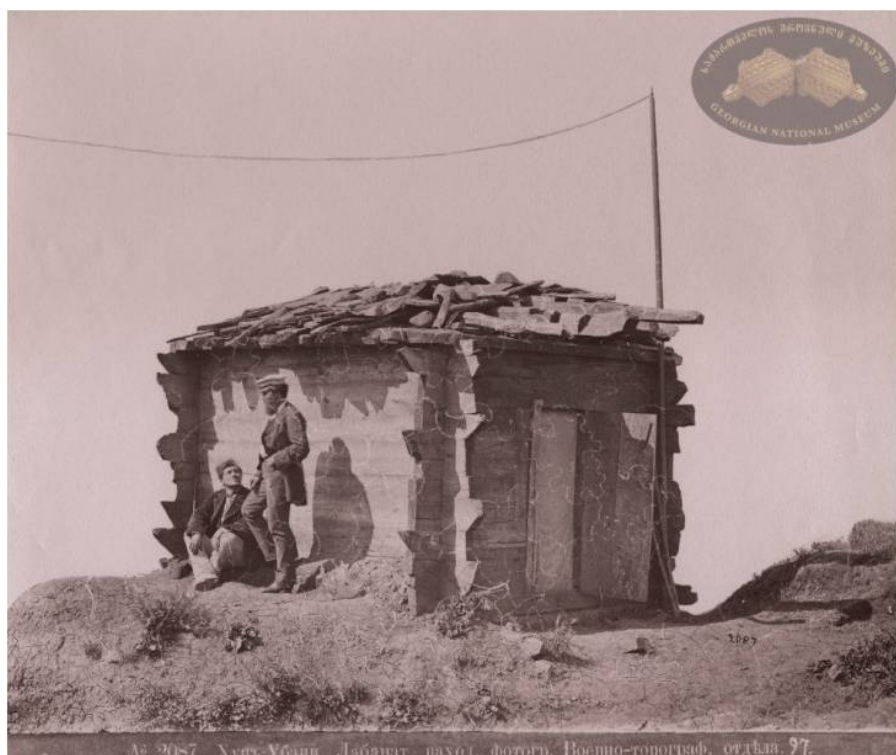
⁹ Mary Warner Marien, "Topographical Surveys and Photography", *Photography. A Cultural History* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall inc., and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2002), p.115.

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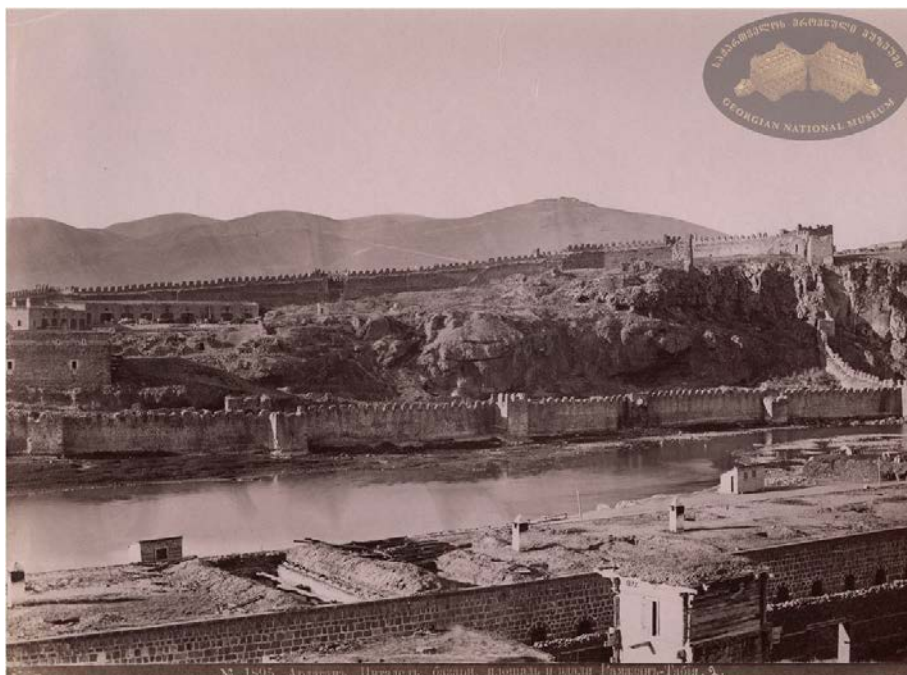
Plates:



Khutsubani. Photographic Field Laboratory of the Military-Topographic Department, GNM



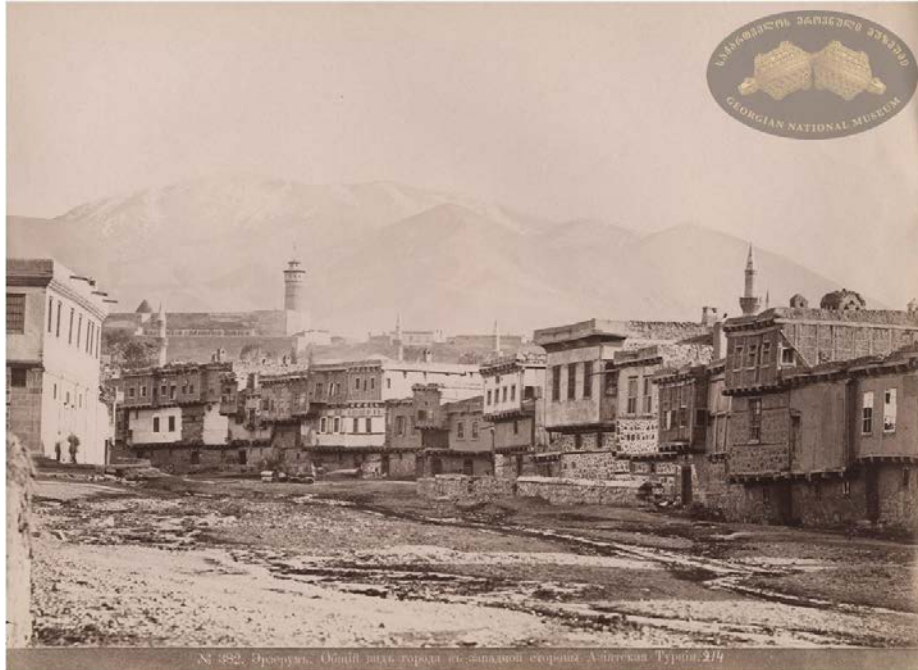
Eyuk-key. General view of bas-reliefs. Asian Turkey, GNM



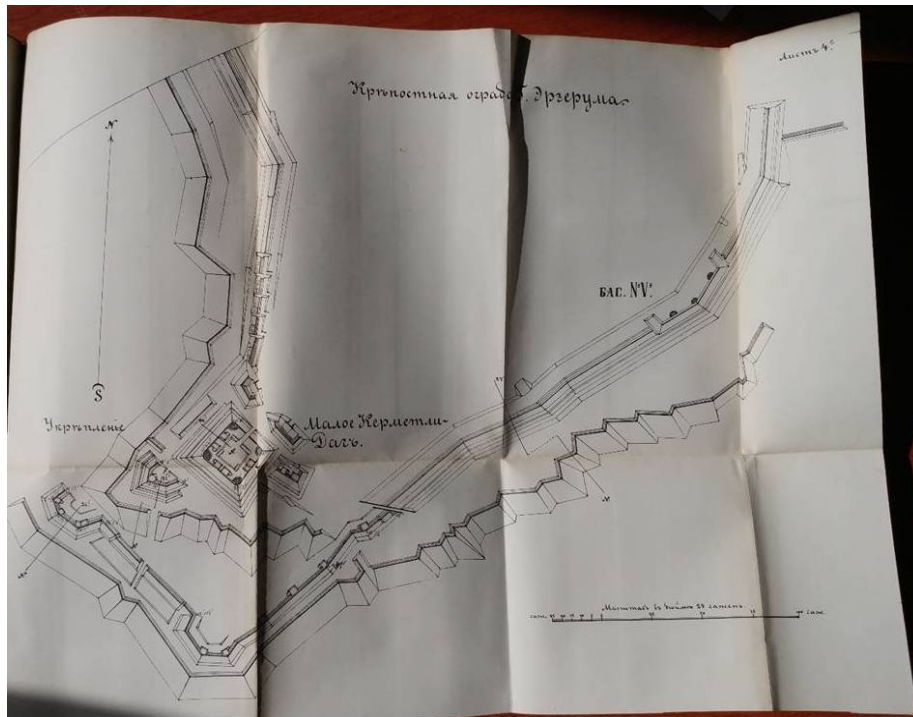
Ardahan. Fortress, market square and Ramazan-Tabia in the distance, GNM



Armenians from Anatolia, GNM



Erzerum. General view of the city from the west side. Asian Turkey, GNM



Fortress walls of Erzurum (Erzurum), from the Russian book of Report on Military-Engineering Activities, 1879, NPLG



Lazis, mountain dwellers from Batumi, GNM



Turks from Kars, GNM



№ 411. Трапезундъ. Византийскій орелъ, барельефъ на камнѣ. Азіатская Турція.

Trabzon. Byzantine eagle, bas-relief on the stone. Asian Turkey, GNM