

# Russian Ecclesiastical Policy in the Shida Kartli (19th C.)

(Transformation of Toponymic Vocabulary: how „Ossetia“and  
„South Ossetia“were forming in Georgia)

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## ABSTRACT

In the given work, we attempted to highlight some aspects of the ecclesiastical-missionary and religious policy of Tsarist Russia in the nineteenth century, which contributed to the formation of Georgian-Ossetian relations, the creation of new administrative borders, and the transformation of toponyms. Between 1814 and 1818, the Russian authorities established the ecclesiastical-administrative unit “Eparchy of Ossetia” on the territory of the Shida Kartli Highlands. At the same time, a missionary society – the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” – was founded. The establishment of the “Eparchy of Ossetia” marked the territory where the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” was to carry out its missionary activity. Additionally, the term “South Ossetia” first appeared in the 1860s in the reports of the missionary organization, the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus.” Thus, Russian religious policy laid the groundwork for the establishment of the terms “Ossetia,” “Eparchy of Ossetia,” and “South Ossetia,” which were later solidified by administrative policy.

**Keywords:** *History of the Church of Georgia, Russian Ecclesiastical Policy, Toponymy, Georgian-Ossetian Relations, Shida Kartli*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Shida Kartli is a historical geographical district of eastern Georgia, comprising the northern part of Kartli (the central region of Georgia). The Shida Kartli Highland (Shida Kartli mountainous area) includes the territory of the mountains and foothills of the Main Caucasian Range. Historically, it has always been an integral part of the Georgian political and cultural sphere.

The Shida Kartli Highlands shared borders with the realms of the North Caucasian mountain people; it was a frontier or border zone, which, on the one hand, protected South Caucasia and the Georgian state and, on the other, connected them with Northern Caucasian peoples.

Due to geographic, political, and migration processes, the mountainous area of Shida Kartli developed into a meeting place for various confessions and ethnicities, particularly influencing Georgian-Ossetian relations.

The Russian Empire's colonial policy in the 19th century created a political, administrative, and demographic situation in the Shida Kartli Highlands, contributing to the alienation of the people living there and the Georgian-Ossetian confrontation.

Following the conquest of the Georgian states – Kingdoms of Kartli-Kakheti (1801) and Imereti (1810) – by Russia, the Georgian Orthodox Church lost its independence. In 1811, the Russian authorities annulled the autocephaly of the Georgian Church in eastern Georgia, and in 1814, it was also abolished in western Georgia. The institution of the Georgian Catholicos-Patriarch was dissolved, and a Georgian exarchate was created, which was subordinated to the Russian Synod. The Church government was thus changed to follow the Russian model (Pavliashvili, 2008, pp. 21-79; Kokrashvili, 2014, pp. 63-83). The Russian Church became a means of implementing state policy, an instrument of assimilating the annexed territories and carrying out colonial policy (Kokrashvili, 2014, p. 63).

## **METHOD**

The intensive expansion of Russia in the Caucasus, particularly in the territories of Georgia, created new borders and a new political and ecclesiastical condition. The ecclesiastical policy was assigned an important role in the ethnically and confessionally diverse border region of Georgia, in the Shida Kartli Highland; being a form of “soft power,” the ecclesiastical policy was intended to prepare the ideological basis for conducting the political processes and developing new strategies desired by the Russian state. Consequently, we employed theories of “soft power”

and “border studies” in this work.

The research is based on published sources and materials about religious and ethnic processes in Georgia in the 19th century. The ethnopolitical aspects of Georgian-Ossetian relations and issues of the ecclesiastical policy of the Russian Empire carried out in the region are represented in the contemporary studies of scholars such as Totadze, Itonishvili, Lekishvili, Topchishvili, Gvasalia, Tkavashvili, Pavliashvili, Bubulashvili, Tsverava, Kokrashvili, Togoshvili, and others.

The research was conducted according to the principle of historicism. To analyze and evaluate 19th-century documentary sources, materials found in scientific literature, and historical conceptions, we used comparative historical research, as well as methods of analysis and synthesis.

## **RESULTS**

In the given work, we tried to show some aspects of the ecclesiastical-missionary and religious policy of the Tsar’s Russia, which had an essential contribution to the formation of Georgian-Ossetian relations, the creation of new administrative borders, and the modification of toponyms.

We tried to analyze missionary and ecclesiastical-administrative policy in the Shida Kartli in the 19th century, as well as the formation of new imaginary and real borders, the political transformation of ethnic terminology, and the role of church policy in it.

The available material allows us to assess how Ossetia and South Ossetia were created in Georgia, how the ethnopolitical context of the Russian ecclesiastical policy in Georgia, its influence on Georgian-

Ossetian relations, and the formation of new toponymic vocabulary in Shida Kartli. Analyzing the mentioned problem in Shida Kartli in the context of ecclesiastical policy is a novelty.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Migration of Ossetians to Shida Kartli**

Archaeological, architectural, and epigraphic monuments, as well as toponymical data, unanimously confirm that the inhabitants of Shida Kartli Highland have been Georgians since ancient times (Zakaraya, 1996, p. 125; Otkhmezuri, 1996, p. 156; Kharadze, 1996, p. 167). As a result of migratory, political, or historical processes,

Jews, Armenians, and Ossetians settled along with the Indigenous Georgian population in this region.

Based on documents, at the beginning of the 19th century, the resettlement of Jews and Armenians in Shida Kartli was primarily based on trade reconciliation (Acts, Vol. I, 1866, pp. 465–469). Georgians living here were mainly adherents of the Orthodox faith, Jews of Judaism, and Armenians were followers of Gregorian and Catholic denominations.

Regarding the resettlement of Ossetians in Shida Kartli territory, Georgian historians reject the view of the residency of Ossetians in Georgia since ancient times. The historic homeland of Ossetians was in the North Caucasus. As a result of invasions of external enemies in the 13th century, they began to settle in the mountainous valleys of the North Caucasus. This process continued until the 15th century.

At the end of the 13th century, a group of Ossetians invaded Shida Kartli with the support of the Mongols. For a while, they occupied Gori and Shida Kartli fortresses. However, in the 14th century, King Giorgi Brtskinvale expelled the Mongols and Ossetians from Kartli and closed the entrances from the North Caucasus valleys to Shida Kartli. In this way, the migration of Ossetians to the territories belonging to the Georgian kings was suspended for some time.

In the historical province of Georgia – Dvaleti – located on the northern slopes of the Caucasus Ridge, in the so-called Nar-Mamison between the Dariali Gorge and Mamison Pass, the Ossetian settlement began at the end of the 15th century. Historical Dvaleti consisted of Kasri Khevi, the valleys of Nara, Zgeli, Zrogo, Zakha, and Zramaga. The processes of Ossetian migration continued here throughout the 16th century and ended in the 17th century with the assimilation of the Dvals – the local Kartvelian tribes – by the Ossetians (Topchishvili, 1997, p. 218). Despite the ethnic and demographic changes, Dvaleti was an integral part of the domains of the Georgian kings. Even after the establishment of Russian rule in Georgia, this province was within the borders of Georgia until 1858, when Russia administratively subordinated it to the Tergi District, which was created in the North Caucasus.

The first Ossetians settlements in today's Georgia appeared in the Truso Valley (the source of the Tergi River) and Maghran-Dvaleti (across the Caucasus ridge, near the headwaters of the Great Liakhvi, also an area inhabited by the Dvals). According to specialists, the settlement of Ossetians from the valleys of the North Caucasus in these areas dates back to the first half of the 17th century (Gvasalia, 1997, p. 56; Topchishvili, 2007, p. 96).

In the Shida Kartli Highland, particularly near the headwaters of Big and Little Liakhvi, the migration of Ossetians began in the second half of the 17th century (Topchishvili, 1997, pp. 218–219). By the 1730s, they had settled in the mountain range of the Big and Little Liakhvi valleys, near the headwaters of the Mejudi, Jejori, Ksani, and Tergi rivers. In some mountain villages, Ossetians lived with the rest of the Georgian population. Scientist R. Topchishvili considers that by the end of the 18th century, Ossetians were mainly settled in the mountainous areas of Shida Kartli (Gvasalia, 1997, p. 57; Topchishvili, 2007, pp. 96–97).

From the end of the 18th century, Ossetians began to settle in the villages of the foothills, plains, and ancient settlements. They began to relocate from the mountains of Shida Kartli. For this period, they occupied the territories of the foothills of the Little Liakhvi, Lekhuri, Mejudi, and Frone valleys. Here, they often lived mixed with the Georgian population.

Georgian scientists substantiate that in the first half of the 19th century, the settlement process from Shida Kartli Highland to the foothills and plains was not intense. Active settlement in the villages of Ossetians in Shida Kartli plains dates from the middle of the 19th century (Gvasalia, 1997, p. 58; Topchishvili, 1997, p. 220).

It should be noted that in many cases, the Ossetian resettlement process was not peaceful. Many sources testify to the facts of Ossetians raiding the villages of Kartli, abducting people, and robbing them. They also occupied Kartli's populated villages through attacks (Sakartvelos Istoriis Nark'vevebi, Vol. IV, 1973, p. 431).

Information about the number of Ossetians living in the Tskhinvali region at the beginning of the 19th century and the conclusions expressed by scientists is interesting. Historian G. Togoshvili concludes that in the 18th century, 6,000 Ossetian families settled in Georgia (Togoshvili, 1969, p. 165).

Georgian scientists reject this point of view and believe that in the first half of the 19th century, the number of Ossetians in Georgia was insignificant. According to R. Topchishvili's calculations, at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the number of Ossetians living in the territory of Georgia (excluding Dvaleti, a historical province of Georgia) was 2,130 households, that is, about 15,000 souls (Topchishvili, 2007, p. 100). According to demographer A. Totadze, the number of Ossetians in Georgia in 1833 should have been 14,000 souls. From the middle of the 19th century to the 1880s–1890s, the number of Ossetians in Georgia increased dramatically. By the end of the 19th century, it exceeded 70,000 (Totadze, 2006, p. 19).

Demographic data about Tskhinvali is also interesting. It should be noted that, according to data from Russian sources and censuses conducted by Russian officials,

Ossetian families were not recorded in Tskhinvali during the entire 19th century.

Valuable information about the settlement area of the Ossetian population in Shida Kartli's Mtianeti valleys is contained in the description compiled by Archimandrite Nikiphores, preacher of the "Ossetian Theological Commission" in 1817–1818, assembled by the order of Theophylactes, Exarch of Georgia. The report cards contain information about the settlement and number of Ossetians in the villages of 19 valleys of the mentioned region in the 1810s (Kokrashvili, 2010a, pp. 448–462).

Data from church sources, documents compiled by clerics, and their reports provide valuable material to restore the historical reality because the church officials had direct contact with the local population and were aware of the current situation. In the document prepared by Archimandrite Nicephorus, the data on the city of Tskhinvali is not included (Kokrashvili, 2010a, pp. 455–460). This source, together with other data, once again confirms that by the beginning of the 19th century, the Ossetian population was not recorded in Tskhinvali.

### **Anti-Russian Uprisings of Ossetians in Shida Kartli at the Beginning of the 19th Century**

The areas of Shida Kartli Highland have always been the domain of Georgian seigneurs: Machabels, Amilakhvars, Palavandishvilis, and Ksani nobles. Part of these territories was owned by the royal family of Kartl-Kakheti and given to princes. The historical region Dvaleti, located behind the Caucasus ridge, was considered to belong to the Georgian kings. After Russia's conquest of the Kartl-Kakheti kingdom in 1801, the new government confiscated the lands belonging to the king and his family.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the establishment of Russian rule in Kartli-Kakheti was followed by anti-Russian uprisings and demonstrations led by the representatives of the royal Bagration dynasty. It should be noted that the Ossetians settled in Shida Kartli Highland, which provided special support to the Georgian princes. After settling in these territories, they were considered subjects of the Georgian kings and were ready to fight against the Russians on the side of the Georgian princes.

Ossetian protests against the Russians began as early as 1801. In 1802, the Georgian noblemen Iulon, Parnaoz, and Leon Iulon's son established friendly relations with the Ossetians living in the mountains of Shida Kartli. As a result, in 1802, the anti-Russian uprisings of the Ossetians acquired a more intense character. The Russian authorities even sent an expedition of Lt. Col. Simonovich to the valley to quell the unrest of the Ossetians. He managed to pacify the Ossetians of the mountains and foothills

of Shida Kartli and made them swear allegiance to Russia.

The connection of Ossetians with the liberation movement of Georgians was revealed in 1804 during the Kartli Mtianeti rebellion. Mountaineers, Mokheves, Khevsuris, Pshavles, and Ossetians of Truso Valley participated in this rebellion. Akhmet Dudarov (Dudaruk), the leader of Ossetians from Tagauri (an Ossetian community in the North Caucasus), also joined their rebellion with a squad of 300 Ossetians and Kists. Together, they could close the entrance to the South Caucasus – the “Daryal Gate” – for the Russian army. After closing the Darial valley, only one way was left for the Russian army – the Rock crossing. A Russian regiment entered from the North Caucasus, caught and captured by the Ossetians between Java and Rock (Kokrashvili, 2020, p. 4). Although the Ossetians of Java agreed to obey the government, General Tsitsianov burned down the village of Krozha and destroyed the towers.

In 1807, the anti-Russian protests of the Georgian and Ossetian populations also took place in the Ksani and Lekhuri valleys. The Russian government expedition led by Major Zaitsev calmed the excitement (Togoshvili, 1969, p. 9).

In 1810–1811, Ossetians of Samachablo rebelled in support of Leon Batonishvili. He attacked Tskhinvali with 2,000 Ossetians but could not take it. The Russians brutally attacked the rebels, burned 20 villages, and destroyed the ancestral towers. Leon Batonishvili was forced to leave the mountains of Shida Kartli and go to Akhaltsikhe. Leks killed Leon Batonishvili on his way to Akhaltsikhe (Tkavashvili, 2012, p. 44).

The unrest of the Ossetians of Shida Kartli Highland also took place during the Kakheti rebellion (1812–1813). Alexandre Bagration, the son of King Erekle, appealed to the inhabitants of Liakhvi, Chvrivi, Geri, Aragvi, Mtianeti, Truso, and other valleys to revolt. Ossetian rebels tried to block communication routes on the main ridge of the Caucasus. A large part of the Ossetians supported Alexandre Erekle’s son, but due to the strong resistance of the Russian troops, they were forced to stop fighting (Kokrashvili, 2020, pp. 5–9).

Thus, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Georgian national liberation movement and the Bagration dynasty’s struggle to restore the throne were supported by the Ossetian population of Shida Kartli. With this, they confirmed their loyalty to the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti. This clearly shows that the Ossetian people settled in the territory of Shida Kartli and considered themselves an organic and indivisible part of the Georgian state and kingdom.



## **Transformation of Toponymy: The Establishing Terms “Ossetia” and “South Ossetia” for the Territory of Shida Kartli Highland**

From the 1820s, the Russian government attempted to change its policy towards the Ossetians and used new methods and techniques to regulate Russian-Ossetian relations, turning them from an opposing anti-Russian force into allies. The Russian government adopted a policy of inculcating pro-Russian sentiment among the Ossetians of Shida Kartli.

After Russia annexed the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, from the beginning of the 19th century, the term “Ossetia” was used quite actively to denote the territories inhabited by the Ossetian population of Shida Kartli. Russian state officials facilitated this process. Back in 1802, Lieutenant-General Karl Knoring, in a letter sent to the Russian Emperor, called the mountainous regions inhabited by Ossetians at the head of the Big and Little Liakhvi valleys “Ossetia” (Itonishvili, 1996, p. 38). Subsequently, various Russian officials used this term to refer to the areas inhabited by Ossetians in the upper reaches of the Ksani, Mejudi, Lekhuri, and Ptsi rivers. Until the 1830s, Russian documents referred to the territories inhabited by Ossetians of Shida Kartli by the following names: Ossetia of Georgia, Ossetia of Kartli, Ossetians of Georgia, Ossetians of Northern Kartli, Ossetians of Imereti, or Ossetians belonging to Imereti, etc. (Itonishvili, 1996, p. 39). The term was mentioned mainly in personal correspondence, letters, and unofficial announcements.

Establishing the term “Ossetia” in Georgia was mainly facilitated by Russia’s ecclesiastical-religious policy, which the Russian government conveniently used.

The policy of establishing the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, the desire to expand the borders to the south, and the subjugation and Russification of the neighboring peoples required special activation of missionary work. Missions were sent to convert so-called “inorodtsy” (a term referring to all non-Slavic subjects of the Russian Empire) to Christianity. Conversion to Orthodoxy was the ideological lever that determined the Russian political orientation and course for other peoples (Kokrashvili, 2010b, p. 326).

Even in the 18th century, the Christianization of the Ossetians and the formation of a pro-Russian orientation became relevant for Russia. From 1745 to 1792, the organization “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” operated in the North Caucasus, with its center in Mozdok. The formation of a missionary society, which aimed to Christianize the Ossetians in this region, indicated that Russia chose these people to gain and establish influence in the North Caucasus. In the second half of the 18th century, the direction of the empire’s colonial exploitation of the Caucasus was planned from



the North Caucasus to the South. However, the work of this mission turned out to be unsuccessful, and the “Commission” was abolished at the end of the century.

After the conquest of Kartli-Kakheti and the annulment of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church, Russia tried to use Georgia to introduce Christianity to the Caucasus mountains. The project on the reorganization of the Church of Georgia drawn up by Dositheos Fitskhelauri, which Emperor Alexander I signed on August 30, 1814, included, among other things, the restoration of the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission.” On September 15, 1815, by the decree of the Synod, the mentioned missionary organization resumed its activities. This time, its center was Tiflis (Review of the Activities of the Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus for 1860-1910, p. 27; Tsverava, 2003, p. 54; Bubulashvili, 2007, p. 234). Based on the created political situation, the direction of Russia’s use of the Caucasus changed radically – from the South Caucasus to the North. This time, the government started the process of Christianization of Ossetians from Georgia.

At the initial stage, it was considered expedient to Christianize the Caucasian mountaineers, especially the Ossetians, with the help of Georgian clergymen. However, since the 1830s, the tendency to replace Georgian clergymen with Ossetian and Russian priests and missionaries in the activity of the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” operating in the territory of Shida Kartli was already evident.

The function of the mission included the Christianization of the Ossetians, initially in the territory of Shida Kartli and then on the northern slopes of the Caucasus. The name of the commission remained the same – “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission.” Its activities involved sending missions to preach Christianity among the mountain people, building churches, opening schools, and translating theological literature into local languages. Initially, the state allocated 14,750 Russian rubles, a company of Cossacks, and 30 escorts for the operation of the mission. The “Commission” was headed by Archbishop Dositheos Fitskhelauri and was subordinated directly to the Holy Synod of Russia (Istoriia Gruzinskoj Ierarhii, 1826, pp. 69–70).

Precisely, in parallel with this process, in the years 1814–1818, an ecclesiastical-administrative unit was created in the territory of Shida Kartli Highland, which was called the “Eparchy of Ossetia” (Istoriia Gruzinskoj Ierarhii, 1826, p. 24; E. K., 1901, pp. 53–54, 56). At the same time, the archbishop of Gori, Dositheos Fitskhelauri, was appointed as the head of the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission,” was put at its head.

Establishing the “Eparchy of Ossetia” marked the territory where the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” should operate. The newly restored “Commission” started

Christianizing the Ossetians from this eparchy. The term “Ossetia” was already established in the name of the official organization (“Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission”), as well as in the name of the ecclesiastical-administrative unit, to denote the indigenous territories of Shida Kartli Highland. The “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” operated until the 1860s. Along with the settlement of the Ossetian population from the mountainous region to the south, the area within which this organization had to operate expanded (Kokrashvili, 2010b, p. 328).

Thus, thanks to Russia’s ecclesiastical-administrative and religious policy from the 1810s to the 1820s, the term “Ossetia” was established and attached to the onomastic field of Georgia covertly but very effectively.

Soon, the name “Ossetia” was reflected in the political-administrative name of the northern part of the Shida Kartli territory as well. In 1843, the “Ossetian Okrug” was officially opened and divided into three districts – Java, Patara Liakhvi, and Nari (historical Dvaleti territory). In this way, the areas densely populated by Ossetians in the northern part of Shida Kartli were called “Ossetia.”

From the point of view of Georgian historiography, the Russian authorities first introduced the toponym “Ossetia” into the territorial-administrative terminology of Georgia in the 1840s, when in 1843, they called the areas densely populated by Ossetians in the northern part of Shida Kartli “Ossetian Okrug” (Gvasalia, 1997, p. 58). However, it turns out that the term “Ossetia” appeared in the church territorial-administrative lexicon about three decades before the establishment of the political-administrative unit “Ossetian Okrug” in the territory of Shida Kartli (in 1843), when in 1814–1818 the “Eparchy of Ossetia” existed in the mountainous territory of Shida Kartli.

Thus, for the territories of Shida Kartli, the term “Ossetia” was officially used for the first time as the name of the Russian missionary organization and ecclesiastical-administrative unit, and then it appeared on the political-administrative map of Georgia. This was so-called toponymic sabotage, which was supposed to prepare the ground for the Ossetians’ territorial claims on Georgian land. This kind of policy continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

In 1859, the district of Nari was removed from the “Ossetian Okrug” of Tiflis Governorate and joined the “Military Okrug of Ossetia” created in the North Caucasus. Later, the district of Nari was transferred to the Tergi District, and in 1924, it entered the Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia. Thus, Georgia lost the historical territory of Dvaleti (Gvasalia, 1997, p. 58). At the same time, the names “Eparchy of Ossetia,” “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission,” and “Ossetian Okrug” already meant establishing in the self-consciousness of the Ossetians living in the territory belonging to

Georgia that these lands belonged to them.

Regarding the territories of Shida Kartli, the term “South Ossetia” was mentioned for the first time in 1830 by the newspaper *Tifliskie Vedomosti* (“Тифлисские ведомости”) (Itonishvili, 1996, p. 39; Totadze, 2009, p. 124). The correspondent used it on his own initiative. Officially, the term “South Ossetia” is found in the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus” report in the 1860s (Lekishvili, 1996, p. 272). This organization was created in 1860 when the “Ossetian Ecclesiastical Commission” was abolished, which had fulfilled its mission for that period. The funds at its disposal were transferred to the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus.” It is known that in the second half of the 19th century, the activation of missionary work in the Caucasus acquired state importance for the Russian Empire, which was connected with the final stage of the Caucasian Wars. Christianity had to play an essential role in the process of subduing the Caucasian mountaineers who were conquered by weapons and their Russification.

Viceroy of the Caucasus Baryatinsky (1856–1862), on whose initiative the “Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus” was created, in a letter sent to the Committee of the Caucasus in St. Petersburg, explained the necessity of establishing a particular society for the activation of missionary work in the Caucasus. He noted, “Orthodox faith is the most important people’s power of Russia ... Every Russian must do his best to glorify the motherland and contribute to the spread of Orthodoxy. We need a common effort. The whole of Russia will be able to do what one Russian cannot do” (E. K., 1901, p. 109). Thus, the introduction and establishment of the term “South Ossetia” began through the missionary-religious organization, which later was strengthened by the administrative-political changes carried out in the territory of the mentioned region.

According to the administrative policy of Russia, still in the 19th century, the establishment of the “Military Okrug of Ossetia” in the North Caucasus and the “Ossetian Okrug” in the South of the Caucasus prepared the ground for the emergence of the toponymic pair – “North Ossetia” and “South Ossetia” – which already in the 20th century was established by the Soviet government in the names of political-administrative units (Itonishvili, 1996, p. 16).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, during the 19th century, Russia’s domestic, religious, and ecclesiastical-administrative policy in the Shida Kartli mountains and foothills envisaged the artificial strengthening of Ossetian unity in the indigenous territory of Georgia, which

triggered the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The role of Russia's ecclesiastical policy is clearly defined in the official introduction of the terms "Ossetia" and "South Ossetia" to the territories of Shida Kartli. Initially, this terminology was officially announced through church-missionary and religious-administrative policies, which was strengthened by the process of political-administrative reorganization of these territories by Tsarist Russia during the 19th century.

By introducing the terms "Ossetia," "South Ossetia," "Eparchy of Ossetia," and "Ossetian Okrug" to the territories of Georgia, the Russian government contributed to the self-consciousness of Ossetians living in Shida Kartli, suggesting that these lands belonged to them. It was toponymic as well as mental sabotage. According to the Russian policy, as early as the 19th century, the ground was being prepared for the territorial claims of the Ossetians on the Georgian lands.

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