



Imam Shamil

Imam Shamil of Dagestan

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Imam Shamil, (also spelled ShamyI, Schamil, or SchamyI) was born in 1797? in Gimry, Dagestan [now in Russia]. He was the leader of the Dagestani and Chechen Muslim mountaineers whose fierce resistance delayed Russia's conquest of the Caucasus for some 25 years.

The son of a free landlord, Shamil studied grammar, logic, rhetoric, and Arabic, acquired prestige as a learned man and, in 1830, joined the Muridis, a Sufi (Islamic mystical) brotherhood in the region. Under the leadership of Ghazi Muhammad, the brotherhood had become involved in a holy war against the Russians who, in 1813, had wrested the control of Dagestan from the Persians. After Ghazi Muhammad is killed by the Russians (1832) and his successor, Gamzat Bek, is assassinated by his own followers (1834), Shamil is elected to serve as the third imam (political-religious leader) of Dagestan and the leader of the so-called [Murid Wars](#).

In order to establish an independent state in Dagestan (1834), Shamil reorganized and enlarged his Chechen and Dagestan forces and led them in extensive raids against the Russian positions in the Caucasus region. In response, in 1838, the Russians sent a fresh expedition against Shamil. The expedition captured Ahulgo, the mountaineers' main stronghold, but not Shamil who escaped. In fact, despite triumphant conquests of the forts and towns of the region, neither that expedition nor subsequent expeditions succeeded to defeat Shamil.

Eventually, in 1857, the Russians concluded that they must suppress Imam Shamil once and for all; his reputation had spread not only among the peoples of the Cacausus but throughout western Europe as well. Dispatching large, well-equipped forces under

generals N. I. Evdokimov and A. I. Baryatinsky, the Russians surrounded Shamil from all sides. Shamil fought back. The Russians, however, doubled their efforts making the situation untenable not only for Shamil but for his followers and supporters in the villages. The latter began to gradually give in. Capitalizing on this situation then, the Russians stormed Shamil's fortress at Vedeno (April 1859) with the hope of capturing him alive. Shamil, however, was nowhere to be found. Recognizing the trap that the Russians had prepared for them, he and several hundred of his adherents had already withdrawn to Mount Gunib. Eventually, however, on August 25 (September 6, New Style), 1859, recognizing the futility of his resistance in the face of overwhelming odds, Shamil surrounded to the Russians himself and, indirectly, the independence and freedom of the peoples of the Caucasus. He was taken to St. Petersburg.

From St. Petersburg, Shamil was exiled to Kaluga, south of Moscow. In 1870, with the Russian tsar's permission, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Shamil died in March 1871, at Medina?, Saudi Arabia.

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