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Looking at the Coloniser

ERGON VERLAG

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Looking at the Coloniser

Cross-Cultural Perceptions
in Central Asia and the Caucasus,
Bengal, and Related Areas

ERGON VERLAG

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Oliver Reisner

Grigol Orbeliani Discovering Russia: A Travel Account by a Member of the Georgian Upper Class from 1831-1832

Prince Grigol Orbeliani's (1804-1883) Georgian travel diary, *My Travel from Tbilisi to Petersburg*, written from June 1831 to August 1832, is remarkable both as a piece of literature and a document of intercultural perception. The author, a descendent of the upper Georgian nobility with a direct relationship to the former king of Eastern Georgia, Erekle II, was socialised within a vanishing feudal society. The upper stratum of Georgian nobility had been greatly estranged from the Tsarist empire after the annexation of 1801 due to the increasing insecurity of their status and the growing loss of heritable positions within regional administration. This led from ambivalence to discontent among leading parts of the upper nobility and members of the Bagratid dynastic family, and eventually found its outlet in an unsuccessful, romanticism-inspired conspiracy against the Russian military administration in December 1832.

Read against this background, Grigol Orbeliani's travel diary yields first hand impressions of the contemporary discovery and perception of Russia. Orbeliani travelled from the southern periphery of the Tsarist empire to its centre. He was a Georgian prince serving as an officer in the Tsarist army, and his position was thus highly ambivalent: on the one hand, as a member of the Georgian feudal élite, he was attached to the old order, while on the other, his position in the Tsarist army had brought with it an education in accordance with Russian and European standards.

The issues and details about Russia that Orbeliani remembers or emphasises for the purposes of discussion will help to illustrate his self-perception and that of his peer group during their discovery of Russia. Indications regarding changes in the common life style of Georgian nobles shall also be discussed. The travel notes are, in fact, a particularly trustworthy and valuable mirror of those days because Orbeliani could not rework them later on. After the failed conspiracy Grigol Orbeliani was arrested and his travel notes were confiscated for investigative purposes by the secret police. Almost ninety years later, a philologist discovered them in the Tsarist Caucasian Files of the St. Petersburg State Archives. However, the whole diary, including the parts dealing with Russia, was published no sooner than 1959 in Tbilisi as a part of Grigol Orbeliani's complete works.

Some Remarks on the Question of Identity Formation

Does Christian Georgia, as a substantial part of the Southern Caucasus, belong to Europe and European history, or rather to the Middle East? Situated on the geographical borderline between Europe and Asia, such affiliation remains a question of self-perception by the Georgian people, and thus of identity formation. Identities of this order are anything but stable and fixed entities. On the contrary, they change in form and function over time and differ in relation to historical and spatial environments. While individual identity is certainly something unique that never merges totally with that of others, it is nevertheless formed by interaction within the framework of a distinct community's social values, patterns of collective behaviour, and symbols. The individual as the unit of mobility moves within defined structures, with finite closures. Our concern here is to investigate how the dominant characteristics of individual identity change over time and within a community's shifting institutional settings.¹ Identity can be defined as a person's ability to experience and shape his or her life as a coherent whole or meaningful totality. It is actuated by contact with other persons or groups and ultimately defined by drawing distinctions between them. Crises of identity occur whenever a break in the continuity of someone's biography disrupts the perception of such a coherent totality, for example when entering a new environment with social aspirations, values and relations differing significantly from previous ones.²

Social transformations represent another extension of changing environments. They are not conceived of as undermining community life here, but rather in terms of how new elements are appropriated by a cultural system in place, and how people perceive the mutual diffusion of traditional and modern elements in their lives and develop new meanings for themselves or their communities. Collective identities, like those of a state, a nation or a special peer group, are seen as an expression of individuals or groups longing for community.

¹ Etienne Balibar: 'Die Nation-Form: Geschichte und Ideologie'. in: idem and Immanuel Wallerstein: *Rasse, Klasse, Nation. Ambivalente Identitäten*. Hamburg 1992 (Race, Nation, Classe. *Les identités ambiguës*. Paris 1988), p.116; Friedrich Heckmann: *Ethnische Minderheiten, Volk und Nation. Soziologie inter-ethnischer Beziehungen*. Stuttgart 1992; pp.196-200, and the famous introduction by Frederic Barth to his edited volume: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. London 1969.

² Urs Haerberlein and Eva Niklaus: *Identitätskrisen. Theorie und Anwendung am Beispiel des sozialen Aufstiegs durch Bildung*. Bern/Stuttgart 1978; p.13.

*Background I:
Traditional Structures and Identities in Georgian Society*

Up to the eighteenth century Georgian agrarian society had been extremely segmented, in the sense that its separate elements, like villages or regions, represented some kind of viable small 'nuclear societies'. This helped the population to survive numerous raids in distant and remote valleys.³ These 'nuclear societies', the Georgian *temi*, were ruled by princes (*tavadni*) who possessed legitimate, sovereign power and influenced and controlled local values. Noble knights, peasants, Armenian traders and merchants, as well as Orthodox clergymen were their subdued serfs. These dispersed sources of power have been termed 'polygenetical dynasticism' by the outstanding historian of ancient and medieval Christian Caucasia, Cyrill Toumanoff.⁴

Even with the help of a Christian-Orthodox clergy and monks, the monarchical power failed to establish a long-lasting, more or less centralised empire. Only from the late tenth up to the twelfth centuries was the Bagratid dynasty able to unify the country as an independent entity vis-à-vis neighbouring powers. It was at that time that the designation 'sakartvelo' for Georgia was first used in the chronicles. This period was later referred to as the 'Golden Age' under Queen Tamar. Following this, Mongol raids under Timur Lenk destroyed the empire. Eastern Georgia was divided into two kingdoms and fell under the influence of Persia. Western Georgia broke up into one kingdom and several principalities that sometimes fought against each other as vassals of Ottoman suzerains. The former kingdom became more and more controlled by Near Eastern powers up to the eighteenth century. Even inside the Bagratid dynasty unity was missing. Several dynastic branches fought for succession to the throne. This dispersion of power, as well as the permanent competition for supremacy in Caucasia between the Ottoman and Persian empires, prevented Georgia from becoming a politically unified Christian Orthodox country again.⁵

³ W.E.D. Allen: *A History of the Georgian People. From the Beginning Down to the Russian Conquest in the 19th Century*. London 1932; Alexander Grigolia: *Custom and Justice in Caucasia. The Georgian Highlanders*. Princeton 1939.

⁴ Cyrill Toumanoff: *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*. Washington D.C. 1963.

⁵ Ronald G. Suny: *The Making of the Georgian Nation*. Stanford Cal. 1994; pp.3-55; Charles Burney/David Marshall Lang: *The Peoples of the Hills. Ancient Ararat and Caucasus*. London 1971; for a synopsis of Georgian historiography about the political developments and events see Kalistrat Salia: *History of the Georgian Nation*. Translated from the French by Katherine Vivian. Paris 1983; and Heinz Fähnrich: *Geschichte Georgiens von den Anfängen bis zur Mongolenherrschaft*. Aachen 1993.

At last, in the eighteenth century, the kings Vakhtang VI and Erekle II succeeded in unifying both East Georgian kingdoms, Kartli and Kakhetia, but failed to modernise and unite all of the country. Therefore, Erekle II turned northwards to the expanding Christian Russian empire to secure military protection against his external and internal enemies. After the expansion to the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea under Peter the Great and Catherine II, Russia, as a European power, attempted to gain more influence in the Middle East. In return, Erekle II promised to put Eastern Georgia under Tsarist protection in foreign affairs as codified in the treaty of Georgievsk in 1783.⁶ Catherine the Great accepted Erekle's proposition, but refused to send troops when Persia and the Ottoman empire reacted to the shift of the regional balance of power in their 'backyards' with devastating attacks on Georgia. In 1795 Tbilisi was captured and burned by Agha Mohammed Khan, and the whole country was plundered. In the resulting state of economic and social collapse the last East Georgian king Giorgi XII had no choice other than to offer the incorporation of his kingdom into the Tsarist empire in return for military protection. His only desire was to retain internal autonomy within the traditional relationship of vassal to his suzerain. But Tsar Paul I decided to annex Eastern Georgia in 1801 after Giorgi XII's death. Western Georgia was to follow this course of events within the next ten years.⁷

The incorporation, apart from its political consequences, also had deep social repercussions on Georgia's feudal social structure. Georgia's oligarchic traditions of power divided among a small group of ruling families did not fit in with Russian autocracy, which had the Tsar as the only legitimate holder of power. As a result, the Bagratid monarchy was abolished and most of its members were exiled to Moscow and Petersburg. There they were compensated with subsidies and high aristocratic ranks at court. The Georgian Orthodox Church was incorporated into the Russian Orthodox system of church administration, the Holy Synod.⁸ With a strengthening of military control over the Southern Caucasus, a bureaucratic form of administration run by Tsarist officers was introduced into Georgian society for

⁶ There is an English translation of the Treaty of Georgievsk in Constantin Kandelaki (ed.): *The Georgian Question Before the Free World (Acts – Documents – Evidence)*. Paris 1953.

⁷ Suny, *Making of the Georgian Nation*, pp.55-59; David M. Lang: *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy 1658-1832*. New York 1957; pp.158-266; Nikolas K. Gvosdev: *Imperial Policies and Perspectives Towards Georgia, 1760-1819*. Oxford 2000; pp.46-98.

⁸ Nikolas K. Gvosdev: 'The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church in the first decades of imperial rule, 1801-1830'. In: *Central Asian Survey* 14 (1995); pp.407-24.

the very first time. However, the Tsarist regime did not know how to behave towards the former ruling élite in Caucasia. Its attempts to replace feudal forms of administration with bureaucratic ones caused friction between nobles and the Russian civil administrators, the *chinovniki*, who were of low status and had travelled 3.000 verst from Russia for the sole purpose of establishing careers and making money.⁹ A vast number of complaints (*ditirambebi*) show this resentment against the Russian administrators' attitude towards the Georgian noble élite. The first bureaucratic administration in Georgia was introduced by Tsarist officers, becoming 'only an offspring of the original pre-reform Russia'¹⁰ imposed on Georgian feudal society. Orbeliani, like most nobles, did not fully realise the interests of the Tsarist autocracy in Caucasia and therefore could not properly adapt to the Russian bureaucratic regime. What this led to was cultural misunderstanding rather than cultural adjustment; instead of integration, it caused more friction and gave rise to a number of local conflicts between the Georgian nobility and the Tsarist military administration. The success of a policy of integration was dependent on the personality in charge of administering the Caucasus - the Governor-General. The nobility was, for the first three decades following annexation, kept in an uncertain position: the Tsarist forces did provide effective protection against Muslim empires, but they were simultaneously denied the full recognition of their traditional status and rights.

Background II: The Author and His Biography

Grigol Orbeliani was born three years after the Tsarist annexation of Georgia in 1804 (02./14.10.). He was a descendent of a high-ranking noble family with very close links to the East Georgian Kakhétian Bagratid line, especially to King Erekle II. His grandmother, Elene, was Erekle's daughter, who

⁹ Akaki Gatsserelia: Grigol Orbeliani. 'Kritikul-biograf'iuli narkvevi'. In: Orbeliani, T'khzulebat'a sruli krebuli, p.030.

¹⁰ Zurab Avalov: 'Gruziny'. In: A.I. Kastelianski: Formy natsional'nogo dvizheniia v sovremennykh gosudarstvakh. Avstro-Vengriia. Rossiia. Germaniia. St. Peterburg 1910, p. 482; St.F. Jones: 'Russian Imperial Administration and the Georgian Nobility. The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832'. In: Slavonic and East European Review 65 (1987), 1; pp.53-76; Laurens H. Rhineland: 'Russia's Imperial Policy. The Administration of the Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century'. In: Canadian Slavonic Papers 17 (1975); pp.218-235, and his in-depth study of Russian sources: The Incorporation of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire. The Case of Georgia, 1801 - 1854. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Columbia University 1972 (author's publication in 1975).

married Zakaria Andronik'ashvili. Their daughter, Khoreshan, has been married to Zurab (Dimit'ri) Orbeliani, a high rank-and-file family of the upper nobility, at the age of fifteen. Grigol was the oldest of three sons and one daughter.¹¹

A typical representative of the younger nobility, Grigol Orbeliani grew up in a Russian-dominated setting and underwent a fast acculturation to Russia. This more or less voluntary, unconscious and pragmatic Russianisation must be distinguished from a repressive, active and speedy process of Russification by Tsarist officials.¹² After finishing the Georgian Nobles and then Russian Artillery School at the age of 18, he started service in the Tsarist army. While participating in military operations against Lesgian tribes (1822, 1830), Qajar Iran (1826-27), and the Ottoman Empire (1828-29), he was promoted from a junker up to the rank of a general-lieutenant of the infantry.

In 1831 General Pankratov ordered him to transfer three hundred Georgian infantrymen to a regiment in Novgorod. On the way, and while staying in Novgorod, he visited the Georgian communities in Moscow and Petersburg as well. There he also learned about the failed conspiracy of high ranking Georgian nobles and members of the Bagratid dynasty in Tbilisi against the Russians there in late December 1832. Opposition was motivated by patriarchal loyalty to the Bagratid family. Almost all of the nobles participating in the conspiracy had close relations to their East Georgian branch. Thus it may seem that late feudal relations of loyalty found an expression here in the romantic form familiar from Europe and Russia.¹³ Some of the accused named Grigol Orbeliani as a member of the conspiracy. In March 1833 it became clear that Grigol Orbeliani had honoured Elizbar Eristavi's pledge to translate the romantic Decembrist, Kondratii Ryleev's unfinished poem '*Nalivaiko*' into Georgian. Ryleev was hanged after his participation in the December 1825 uprising against the new Tsar Nikolai I in Petersburg. Grigol Orbeliani presented his translation under the Georgianised title '*Givi Amilakhvari's Confession*'. So, in March 1833 he was arrested and sent from Novgorod to Tbilisi, where the investigative commission could not validate the charge of a direct involvement in the events and promptly convicted him for his 'intellectual contribution to the conspiracy' within the seventh category. He was sent to the North-

¹¹ Grigol's brothers were Zakaria and Ilia, his sister Epemia later became Nik'oloz Baratashvili's mother. Maksime Berdzenishvili: *Masalebi XIX saukunis pirveli nakhevis K'art'uli sazogadoebriobis istoriisast'vis. Tomi II* (Materials for the history of the Georgian society in the first half of the 19th century). T'bilisi 1983.

¹² Cf. Rhineland, *Incorporation of the Caucasus*, p.10f.

¹³ Lang, *Last Years*, pp.279-82.

Caucasian Line and then to the Baltic border guards in Vilna. In 1837 – like most of his fellow nobles exiled from leading families – he was permitted to return to Georgia. The failure of the conspiracy of 1832 brought about the final eclipse of monarchist hopes for a return to the status ante quo.¹⁴ After that, Orbeliani, like many others, became a loyal state servant to the Tsar, and participated in the expeditions against Shamil in the 1840s. From 1859 he served on the Civil Administrative Council as governor-general of the Tifis gubernia. In 1871 he was decorated with the 1st rank Andrei medal by Tsar Alexander II himself for 50 years of service. He died in 1883.¹⁵

The Genre of Travelogues in Georgian Literature

Besides his military service, Grigol Orbeliani was a significant romantic poet who started to write poems in 1824.¹⁶ Like his contemporaries Vakh tang Orbeliani and Aleksandre Chavchavadze¹⁷ he represented an ‘extraordinary oxymoron, a Romantic general’, whose ‘Romanticism was watered down by his defense of the *status quo* and by skill in traditional lyric composition’.¹⁸ While lyricism remained the dominant form of expression for Georgian Romantics, Grigol Orbeliani’s travelogue developed new standards for the documentary prosaic genre of Georgian travel writing in the 1830s. Continuing a long tradition of travelogues from the sixteenth century cleric Sulkhan-Saba, Orbeliani introduced a diary form in his *Journey to Europe* in the early eighteenth century. The objectives of travelogues began to shift from their previous religious, diplomatic or military character

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.281-2.

¹⁵ Berdzenishvili, Masalebi XIX saukunis, p.136.

¹⁶ Grigol Orbeliani: T’khzulebat’a sruli krebuli. 1804 – 1883. [‘Complete Collected Works’]. T’bilisi 1959; Gatserelia, Proza, p.5-93; Jumber Tchumburidze: Grigol Orbelianis proza, in: ibid., p.94-108; p.94-6; K’art’uli sabtchot’a entsiklopedia [‘Georgian Soviet Encyclopaedia’], Vol 7. T’bilisi 1984, p.556; Heinz Fähnrich: Georgische Schriftsteller A-Z. Aachen 1993; p.210; idem: Georgische Literatur. Aachen 1993; p.88f.

¹⁷ Aleksandre Tchavtchavadze: T’khzulebebi. Lek’sebi, narkvevebi, dramebis targmanebi, tserilebi [‘Works. Poems, Sketches, Dramatic Translations, Letters’]. T’bilisi 1986; pp.5-24.

¹⁸ Donald Rayfield: The Literature of Georgia. A History. Oxford 1994; pp.153-5. His most famous poem is ‘A Toast, or A Night Feast after War near Yerevan’ [‘Sadghegrdzelo anu omis shemdeg lkhini erevnis siakhloves’]. He finished a juvenile, patriotic first version in 1827, but it remained a work in progress reworked and diluted up to the 1870s as a nostalgic memory of former military glory. It was influenced by Zhukovsky’s ‘The Singer in the Host of Russian Warriors’ and masterly imitated Thomas Gray’s The Bard.

to elaborate literary reports for a reading public from the first half of the nineteenth century. These began to engender the perception of an expanded world in the small and segmented communities of the Caucasus.

*Georgian Travelogues – a Survey*¹⁹

Date	Author	Title (routes, places, countries)	Purpose	Publication
1565	Pilipe Shakarashvili	'Journey into the East' (Jerusalem)	Pilgrimage	--
1626-29/ 1642-43	Nikoloz Tcholoqashvili	Journey to Europe (Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland-Lithuania, Russia/Moscow, Jerusalem)	Diplomacy/ Pilgrimage	--
17 th cent.	Ioseb Tpilel-Saakadze			
1713-1716	Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani	'Travel to Europe' (France, Italy)	Diplomacy	1959-1966
1755-1759	Timote Gabashvili	'Journey' (Hl. Mountain/Sinai, Jerusalem)	Pilgrimage	1956
1782-1793	Iona Gedevanishvili- Ruisi	'Journey' (Constantinople, Greece, Jerusalem, Sinai, Egypt, Trieste, Venetia, Austria, Moravia, Poland, Moldova, Kiev, Moscow)	Pilgrimage	1852
1799-1815	Rapiel Danibegashvili	'Travel to India' (Bombay, Kashmir, Calcutta, Karakorum, Tibet, Russia)	Diplomacy	1815
1801-1802	Gabriel Ratishvili	'Small Report about Russia' (Moscow, Petersburg et al.)	Diplomacy ?	1863, 1945

¹⁹ Prepared by the author with the information from Nat'ela Saghirashvili: 'Mogzaurobani' XIX saukunis k'art'ul literaturashi ("Travelogues" in 19th Century Georgian Literature). T'bilisi 1989; Koba Kharadze: XVII-XIX saukuneebis k'art'veli mogzaurebi. Tbilisi 1987.

Date	Author	Title (routes, places, countries)	Purpose	Publication
1803-1804	Teimuraz Bagrationi	'Persian Diary or Thoughts written with Blood' (Persia, Russia)	Diplomacy	
1815	Grigol Bagrationi	'Trip from Petersburg to Vilna' (Petrograd to Vilna against Napoleon)	Military	
1819-1820	Giorgi Avalishvili	'Journey from Tbilisi to Jerusalem' (Tbilisi – Anatolia – Egypt – Jerusalem – Tbilisi)	Pilgrimage	1967
1831-1832	Grigol Orbeliani	'Travel from Tbilisi to Petersburg' (Tbilisi, Caucasus, New Russia, Moscow, Petersburg, Novgorod)	Military	1940
1836-1837	Teimuraz Bagrationi	'My Travel to Different Places' (Europe: Petersburg – Maribor – Karlsbad)	Health	1944
1857-1879	Ivane Kereselidze	'Travel Notes' (Georgia, Turkey/Anatolia)	Public	1857-1870
1862	Giorgi Eristavi	'My Travel to Europe' (Europe)		1936, 1966
1861	Ilia Tchatchavadze	'Travel Notes from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi' (Vladikavkaz – river Terek – Kazbek – Pasaunauri)	Public	
1863	Petre Nakashidze	'Travel Letters' (Petersburg – Warszawa – Germany – France – Italy – Ottoman Empire – Georgia)	Public	1863
1864, 1873	Giorgi Tsereteli	'Travel Diaries' (Georgia: Kutaisi – Mingrelia – Letchkhumi – Svanetia)	Public	1867-1873

Date	Author	Title (routes, places, countries)	Purpose	Publication
1869	Giorgi Tsereteli	'Travel to Russia' (Petersburg)	Public	1873
1869-1876	Journal 'Droeba'	Several travelogues into different regions of Georgia	Public	1869-1876
	Ivane Sulchanishvili	'Journey from Paris to Switzerland'		
	Davit Zurabishvili	'From Petersburg to Geneva' (Europe)	Public	1871
1872	Niko Nikoladze	'Among other Things' (Georgian Black Sea coast (Adjara, Batumi, Poti, Sokhumi, Russia/Odessa, Germany, Switzerland/Zürich))	Public	1873
?	Iason Natadze	'Travel Remarks' (life of East Georgian mountain dwellers)	Public	1872
?	Ingilo Janashvili	'Historic Remarks of a Journey to Saingilo' (Muslim part in Eastern Georgia)	Public	1872

While the Caucasus and Georgia were described by several European travelers of the eighteenth century as part of the exotic Orient, travelogues turned into a cultural tool in transforming the 'Oriental' objects into subjects of their own. Through their encounters with their own provincial sites and unknown parts of the world, these travel notes set new standards of nation building by their movement between the local and the global.²⁰ The aesthetic function of the travelogues also shifted from the transmission of dry facts about monasteries or churches to a subjective description of ethnographic details of everyday life, or the changes in the lives of people in previously unknown parts of the country or the world. In their individualising literary style, these travelogues offered a chance to present micro-sujets.

²⁰ Jürgen Osterhammel: 'Distanzerfahrungen. Darstellungsweisen des Fremden im 18. Jahrhundert'. In: Hans-Joachim König (ed.): *Der europäische Beobachter außereuropäischer Kulturen. Zur Problematik der Wirklichkeitswahrnehmung*. Berlin 1989, pp.9-42.

The description of landscapes did not remain a feature of mere matter-of-fact background information but became a form of aesthetic pleasure for the authors, fully as much as the characterisation of individuals.²¹

This was also true for educated Georgians, who were beginning to realise and highlight their own cultural position within Tsarist imperial confines.²² Grigol Orbeliani's travel notes were written for semi-private use and are in this respect representative for a 'transition period' in Georgian society.²³ This period started in the mid-1820s when many Decembrists went into exile in Georgia, Russia's 'Southern Siberia'. This led to much direct interaction in such contexts as evening meetings in noble salons, involving cultural as well as personal matters.²⁴ Unfortunately, from 1825 to 1854, under the repressive regime of Nikolai I, open expression of opinion was heavily censored, giving rise to an Aesopian literary language. It is against the backdrop of these conditions that Georgian scholars often distinguish between a 'private and patriotic' and an 'official' life, arguing that the 'true Orbeliani' can be found only in his lyrics. Nevertheless, I doubt that his writings can in this way be dissociated from his vita and be taken to present a separate entity in themselves, as Soviet critics claim.²⁵

The Text and its History from Writing to Edition

On his journey through the Caucasus and Russia, Grigol Orbeliani put down all his impressions in a diary – all the way from his start in Tbilisi on June 9th, 1831 up to his arrival in Novgorod more than one year later, on August 31st, 1832. These travel notes were later given the title *My Travel from Tbilisi to Petersburg*, but neither did Orbeliani retain possession of them, nor

²¹ For the change of perspective involved in the perception of Europe by European and non-European travellers, cf. Eva-Maria Auch/Stig Förster (eds): 'Barbaren' und 'Weiße Teufel'. Kulturkonflikte und Imperialismus in Asien vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. Paderborn etc. 1997; regarding the demarcation of boundaries by cultural means, cf. Horst Türk/Brigitte Schultze/Roberto Simanowski (eds): Kulturelle Grenzziehungen im Spiegel der Literaturen. Nationalismus, Regionalismus, Fundamentalismus. Göttingen 1998.

²² Oliver Reisner: 'Integrationsversuche der muslimischen Adscharier in die georgische Nationalbewegung'. In: Raoul Motika/Michael Ursinus (eds): *Caucasia between the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1555-1914*. Wiesbaden 2000, pp. 207-22; Saghirashvili, 'Mogzaurobani', pp.23-32.

²³ Ichumburidze, Narkvevi, p.95; Gatsrelia, Proza, p.49.

²⁴ The most prominent case is Alexander Griboyedov's marriage to Alexandre Tchavtchavadze's daughter. Laurence Kelly: *Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran. Alexander Griboyedov and Imperial Russia's Mission to the Shah of Persia*. London/New York 2002; Lang, *Last Years*, p.277f.

²⁵ Gatsrelia, Proza, p.31f.

did they reach his contemporaries. After the failed conspiracy Grigol Orbeliani was arrested, and his travel notes were confiscated for investigation by the gendarmerie (secret police). Later he deemed them lost. In a conversation with Iona Meunargia, he confessed that this was the third time they were lost. The first time was when he fell into the river Don; the second time, he left them behind following a clash with Shamil's guerrillas in Eastern Georgia's Kakheti region, close to Tsinandali.

The first information about the existence of these notes reached the public in 1928 on the pages of the literary journal *Mnatobi*. The philologist Pavle Ingoroqva found them in the Tsarist Caucasian Archives in St. Petersburg, but it was only in 1940 that the journal published the reworked first part of this travelogue. This part covers the beginning of his journey (as far as Stavropol) up to August 9th, 1831. It is referred to as 'Journey', while the parts dealing with Russia remained in the shape of first hand notes and are referred to as the 'Moscow and Petersburg Period'. These parts in particular may convey an undiluted impression of how a member of the Georgian Upper nobility perceived his encounter with Russia. The full travelogue was not published before 1959 in Grigol Orbelianis' complete works.²⁶

The structure of his notes follows the chronological logic of a diary, starting with his feelings before his departure from Tbilisi on June 9th, 1831 as he was leaving his unnamed friends and Georgia behind for the first time.²⁷ It took him ten days to cross the Caucasus mountain range along the Aragvi and Terek rivers to Vladikavkaz. This part of the journey along historic places and churches filled him with nostalgia for the lost grandeur of the former Georgia and its monarchy, as well as a longing for a renewal of this sense of historic importance. For the first time in Georgian literature, he provides a short description of the Caucasian mountain range and nature by moonlight in a reference to Romantic literature. In Vladikavkaz he talked to Prince Ivane Apkhazov (Apkhazi), commander of a Tsarist garrison there, about the fate of (Eastern) Georgia and its monarchy. This dialogue follows in his diary after an ethnographic description of the Kabardians.²⁸ Orbeliani argues for Georgia's restitution as an independent state, while Prince Apxazi holds the opposite view, according to which Georgia could not survive among Muslim countries without the protection of the

²⁶ Saghirashvili, 'Mogzaurobani', p.32; Orbeliani, T'khzulebat'a, pp.155-265; Shenshvnebi, pp.516-43.

²⁷ The intention of 'making his fortune abroad' was what motivated his travel to Russia (Orbeliani, Tkhzulebata, p.156).

²⁸ Tchumburidze, Narkvevi, p.97.

Tsarist empire, nor develop its potential, for example that of forming a regular standing army to defend itself. This discussion reflects the main pros and cons of the Tsarist annexation of Georgia and tries to convince its prospective readers of the necessity and feasibility of gaining independence for Georgia. Thus, this first part of his *Journey from Tbilisi to Petersburg* serves to discuss the Georgian nobility's relationship with Tsarist Russia. Orbeliani may have also intended to mobilise his fellow nobles for a form of resistance comparable to the insurrection in Poland in 1831. This key dialogue concludes the first part of Orbeliani's 'Journey'.

In the second part, also called the 'Moscow and Petersburg period', Orbeliani gives a description of historic places, towns, and peoples' customs and clothing along the way. Especially in Russia he notices orderly public spaces, dwelling places, instruments for communication, as well as places of cultural value, science and education, and gives a short history of the latter's introduction in Russia. He also writes about Russian peasant habits (*vecherinka*), while only seldom mentioning the three hundred Georgian soldiers accompanying him on his way through Russia with its cold wind, first snow and muddy roads.

Upon his arrival in Moscow he first of all sought to get in contact with members of the exiled Bagratid family and the Georgian community. Together they not only discussed Georgian affairs, but also the latest currents in music, the arts, theatre and Russian literature, as well as the role of culture in society. Russian life and culture already set the standard for a noble way of life, and much more so than Georgian feudal culture, as his enthusiasm for theatre performances and steamboats clearly demonstrates. Observing the richness of Tsarskoe Selo near Petersburg he asks himself how far Asia was falling back in comparison to enlightened Europe. Implicitly, this refers to Georgia's desire to see itself as belonging to Christian Europe.

In Novgorod (Nov. 24th, 1831) he thinks about the former glory of its *veche*, a kind of city gathering. Reminded that its bell was held to be a symbol of freedom, he ponders about the lost republican traditions within Russia. After its subjugation by the principdom of Muscovy in the fifteenth century, Novgorod had lost its self-administration and economic wealth. Orbeliani's reflections betray a highly idealised understanding of freedom that he had adopted from Russian romantics and Decembrists who had rebelled against the Tsar in 1825. In view of the repressive system under Tsar Nikolai I following the unsuccessful Russian Decembrists uprising in 1825, we have to assume some amount of self-censorship in political matters even in his personal diary. Orbeliani did not understand this Western idea of freedom as applicable to the people in general, but exclusively to the Bagratid mon-

archy. His interpretation of freedom relied mostly on the notion of independence as exemplified, to him, by the freedom-loving North Caucasian Kabardian nobles or the Cossack atamans. His treatment of Novgorod in the diary thus alludes to the situation of incorporated Georgia in the process of becoming no more than an internal province of the Tsarist empire.

The author's intent behind this detailed description was to show his fellow Georgians the power of the Tsarist state. We shall not discuss the question here of whether or not the opposition followed national lines. The predominant impulse, in any case, was patriarchal loyalty to the Bagratid family. Almost all of the nobles participating in the failed Georgian conspiracy of December 1832 had close relations to its East Georgian branch. So it may seem that Orbeliani tried to evoke late feudal relations of loyalty in a romantic form adopted from Europe and Russia. Just as the conspirators had no idea about the practical exigencies for getting rid of the Russian military in Georgia, Grigol Orbeliani, too, lacked a clear concept for the Georgians as a nation, tending to restrict whatever ideas he had to the noble upper class.

I could not find any further implicit references in the text to the failed conspiracy of high-ranking Georgian nobles and members of the Bagratid dynasty in Tbilisi. It is not known if Orbeliani was aware of those plans in advance due to his close contacts to the exiled Bagratid circles in Moscow and Petersburg. It is probable that he also joined the Georgian secret society, but there is no evidence for this. Only a few of the 145 persons who were arrested and accused named Grigol Orbeliani as a member of the Georgian nobles' conspiracy. Nevertheless, if we take into account the scattered references in his travel notes, which we have discussed, he does indeed seem to be quite close to the conspirators, both mentally and politically.

Some short remarks on the linguistic and literary properties of Orbeliani's text remain to be added before I reach my conclusion. The travelogue is heavily interspersed with Russianisms and Russian loan words, thus hinting at an existing bilingualism among the educated élite. If in the salons of Petersburg French was the preferred idiom, Georgian nobles used Russian in comparable settings.²⁹ As regards literary orientation on the other hand, passages of the text that go beyond the documentation of factual data betray distinct elements of a Georgian form of romanticism featuring the love for the home country, patriotism, the romantic representations of the Caucasian mountains and the importance of Georgian history. In his references to the history of Russia, Orbeliani relied on Karamzin's voluminous *History*

²⁹ Cf. Major Apkhazi using the Georgianised Russian words for bottle (*butilka*) and glasses (*stak'nebi*): Orbeliani, Tkhzulebata, p.170f.

of the Russian State as well as contemporary Russian literature. If, then, Orbeliani was quite Russianised in cultural terms, his political ideas were still bound to the restitution of the Bagratid monarchy. The ambivalence of being part of an expanding empire that protected Georgia against its Muslim enemies, and the loss of political power over a devastated country on the part of Georgia's former noble *élite* is a constituent feature of his travel notes.

Concluding Remarks

The study of Grigol Orbeliani's travelogue yields some seminal indications of the ambivalent way in which the Russians and Russia were perceived by the Georgian *élite* during the early nineteenth century. Religion, to be sure, played hardly any role in distancing Georgia from Russia. Orbeliani, a Georgian Orthodox Christian, did attend Russian Orthodox services on his way through Russia. Religious fraternity was also one argument raised for a turn towards Russia for help. It was also a marker of differentiation in Russian policies towards the 'Asiatic' Caucasians: Christian nobles were much more privileged than members of the Muslim *élite*.

The cultural contact of the Georgian *élite* with Russian nobility, exiled literati and European forms of education was intense, and the resulting acculturation proportionately strong; it grew fast in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This process was too accelerated, in fact, for an incoherent Tsarist policy and a corrupted Russian bureaucracy to meet the rising expectations of a Georgian upper nobility that had been thoroughly exposed to Romantic ideas. Only after the failed conspiracy did Tsarist Russia try to resolve the problem of their status insecurity by integrating them into the system of local administration from the 1840s, as Grigol Orbeliani's further career exemplifies best.³⁰

The disruptions of the social structure caused by Tsarist Russia in the aftermath of annexation were inevitable because of the incompatibility of the social systems (monogenetical versus polygenetical forms of power). The Georgian *élite* was divided into factions, one accepting the new suzerain because of his power and progressive state organisation, the other favouring a restitution of the former feudal system. The latter ceased to be a convincing and practicable alternative after the failed conspiracy.

³⁰ Anthony Rhinelander: Prince Michael Vorontsov. Viceroy to the Tsar. Montreal/Kingston 1990.

A solution to this conflict has been provided by another traveller returning after university studies in St Petersburg during the reform period of the 1860s. In his travelogue *Journey from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi*, Ilia Tchavtchavadze exposed his project of a modern Georgian nation based mainly on ethnic and cultural traits. This concept of a Georgian nation responded to the needs of an intellectual élite afraid of total Russification and succeeded, in its cultural form, in Soviet policies after the end of the Tsarist empire. But this is another story.³¹

³¹ Oliver Reisner: 'The Tergdaleulebi. Founders of the Georgian National Identity'. In: Ladislaus Löb et al. (eds): *Forms of Identity. Definitions and Changes*. Szeged 1994, pp.125-137; idem: 'Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten. Identitätskonflikte und Nationalbewußtsein georgischer Studenten in St. Petersburg'. In: Trude Maurer/Eva-Maria Auch (eds): *Leben in zwei Kulturen. Akkulturation und Selbstbehauptung der Nicht-russen im Zarenreich*. Wiesbaden 2000, pp. 83-102.