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BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: 19TH C. FRENCH PERCEPTION OF GEORGIA

The 19th century is a turning point in the history of Georgia. After its incorporation into the Russian Empire radical changes took place in the country. Europeans have taken an ever increasing interest in Georgia, specifically in its capital Tbilisi.

This article discusses a change in France's perception of Georgia and its capital during the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century French memoirs and records on Georgia can be divided into three basic groups. These groups reflect changes in the political and economic situation in the East-West relations which had immediate implications for Georgia. The first period coincides with the "Great Game" during the Napoleonic wars when Georgia inadvertently became part of France's Eastern policy. The French sources on Georgia are comprised of so-called Treaty of Finkenshtein between France and Persia, French newspapers (*Le moniteur*, *Journal de l'Empire*, *Nouvelles étrangères...*) reporting, and data on Georgia by French envoys in Persia (General Ange de Gardane (1766–1818), Amadée Jaubert (1779-1847), Joseph Rousseau (1780-1831), Camille Alphonse Trézel (1880-1860)...). The second period was a time of taking interest economically in Georgia and its capital Tbilisi, which by then (especially under the so-called preferential tariff policy) had become a transit trade route for European goods going East, Iran in particular. In this regard an invaluable source is the work by the first French consul in Tbilisi Chevalier Jacques François Gamba (1763-1833). Although the economic activity of France in the Caucasus relatively slowed after the preferential tariff was revoked (1831), many French still traveled to Georgia. Descriptions of Georgia's history, everyday life of the country's population, its ethnic and religious composition, and a fusion of elements of eastern and western cultures are the main focus of interest of the French writing of the second half of the nineteenth century (Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), Le Baron de Baye (1853-1931), Ernest Orsolle, Jane Dieulafoy (1851-1916), also Chevalier Lyclama a Nijeholt (1836-1900), who was of Dutch decent - the reason he is included in this group is that his work is written in French and at the same time it doesn't record any European country's political or economic interest in the region). Therefore the third period is more general description of the country and it focuses less on carrying out in practice France's political and economic interests (by then Russia had consolidated its position in the Caucasus).

First contacts

By his localization between Asia and Europe and old and original culture Georgia represented a sort of the bridge between East and West from the antiquity.

References to Georgia became especially frequent after the beginning of the Crusades, a period in which Europeans had an opportunity to gather first-hand information on the Middle East, and in which it became apparent that the kingdom of Georgia was a power of international status.

According to the European chronicles there were European crusaders in the army of King David the Builder of Georgia during the battle of Didgori which was fought against the Seljuqs in 1118. Kings of Georgia later wrote letters to the Pope expressing their willingness to participate in the crusades.¹

However, it is worth noting that the medieval European sources on Georgia per se are generally semi-legendary.

¹ About Georgia's relations with Crusaders see, for example, Salia, 1971; Avalishvili, 1929/1989.

The Mongol invasions had isolated Georgia from the Silk Road. After, when the Ottoman Turks took Constantinople in 1453, Georgia was deprived of all means of contact with Western Europe. The Georgian princes, aware of the threat to their country, responded unanimously to the Pope's appeal in the cause of organizing a common campaign against the Turks. The Georgian ambassadors Nicholas Tbileli and Khardan Karchhikan, accompanied by envoys from Armenia, Persia and Trebizond, left for Europe under the leadership of Ludovic of Bologna, Papal envoy of Pius II. Pius II expressed the hope that the decision of the Georgian and Caucasian princes to attack Turkey would lead the European powers to follow suit. However, Europe had no desire to make war on the Turks and neither the Pope nor the embassy from Georgia was able to persuade the western powers to undertake a Crusade. (Salia, 1980:245).²

The conclusion of the Truce of Amasia in 1555 by which Turkey and Persia divided the country in two, marked a major development in the history of Georgia. Interestingly the conclusion of the truce at Amasia was attended by French representatives, including Ambassador Henri de Codignac. According to Charrière the conclusion of the Truce of Amasia was facilitated by France. (Charrière, II, 1849: 285; Svanidze, 2009: 45). Therefore France inadvertently became accomplice to the partition of Georgia, while the reunification of the country became possible only upon its incorporation into the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, the Age of Discovery had revealed new routes to the Far East to Europeans, and the most ancient trade routes across Anatolia and Caucasia lost their significance.

It should be noted, however, that contact with Christian Europe was not broken off. Catholic missions operated in the country. A number of Europeans traveled in these parts. Jean Chardin (1643-1713) should be noted foremost among French travelers. His work *The Voyage in Persia* is of substantial length and a significant part of it is devoted to Georgia, a country he visited in the 1660s. Chardin pointed out that Georgia represented the best route for Europe to develop trade with the East. Here I shall present two excerpts from Chardin's work on Georgia and Tbilisi: "Georgians are courteous and benevolent, staid and reserved. Their customs is a mixture of morals and manners of the majority of people living around them. I think this must be a consequence of their trade relations with other people as well as the freedom, which is granted to all in Georgia: here you are entitled to live by your own faith and customs, discuss and protect them. Here you will come across Armenians, Greek, Jews, Turks, Persians, Indians, Tartars, Muscovites and Europeans." (Chardin: 1974: 297-8). "The town of Tbilisi is densely populated. One cannot find so many foreigners of different races anywhere else in the world. They are engaged in wholesale trade." (*Ibid*, 325).

Later, in the beginning of the eighteenth century the French traveler Tournefort wrote: "at the Georgia border no duties are imposed on foreigners. Merchants of our caravan would have us believe that French are not only treated respectfully here, but also looked at apprehensively and reverently as long as they are wearing their hats and doublets. In Turkey on the other hand, if anyone is walking with such attire, he is pelted with stones". (Tournefort, 1988: 57). The French author also emphasizes international trade links of Georgia: "Armenians [in Tbilisi] buy silk and send it to Smyrna or other Mediterranean ports, where it is bought by the French. From the Tbilisi suburbs and other places of Georgia over two thousand camel packs of plant root called Boia is sent to Erzurum annually. From Erzurum it travels to Diyarbakir to dye linen, which is manufactured there for Poland. Moreover, Georgia supplies large quantities of the plant root to Hindustan as well, where the best quality dyed linen is manufactured." (*Ibid*, 66).

Georgia on its part, being surrounded by Islamic countries, was trying to establish closer links with Europe. It is appropriate to recall the mission of a Georgian writer and diplomat Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani in Europe, and specifically at the court of Louis XIV.

During the 1710s Georgian King Vakhtang VI (At that time he was practically held hostage at the Persian court. According to the accepted practice he was to be enthroned on the royal

² It is worth noting that some researchers consider the mission a diplomatic one, while others consider the members of the mission to be adventurers. (See: Paichadze, 1983).

throne of Georgia by the Shah of Persia, but this would only happen if Vakhtang abjured the Orthodox Christian faith and converted to Islam) became active in diplomacy and made contact through French missionaries with the *compte des Alleurs*, the French ambassador in Constantinople. It was his aim to obtain the aid of Western countries to reestablish Georgia's independence. When Vakhtang received encouraging tidings from France and from the Vatican, he decided to send Sul Khan Saba Orbeliani, one of the most illustrious Georgian men of letters of the period and of the catholic faith, to Europe as his envoy. The Lazarist missionary Jean Richard, one of those closest to Vakhtang VI in Ispahan, was asked to deliver a letter from the Georgian King to Louis XIV and to escort Orbeliani to the court of France and Vatican.

A memorandum featuring conditions and prospects for the future relationship between Georgia and France was submitted to Louis XIV. The king of Georgia had been willing to facilitate the spreading of Catholicism to Georgia and beyond. The Georgians were also ready to establish trade, economic and political relations with France and other European countries.

The memorandum also dealt with the issue of overland trade route linking Asia and Europe that was supposed to go through Georgia. If merchants' personal security were ensured, this route would become the shortest and most profitable one.

According to the French archival materials the French became "more and more convinced of the true feelings and kind intentions of King Vakhtang VI both toward Roman Catholicism and trade, which is supposed to develop by his assistance, and by taking appropriate measures jointly with him in order to achieve success and to ensure it is conducted in such a manner that he be allowed to hold responsibility for shipments of silk to Constantinople." (*AMFAE*, CP/Perse, t. 3, f.145v.; Tabagoua, 1973: 145).

As is seen from the memorandum Orbeliani's mission was not only to bring Vakhtang back from Iran and dispatch catholic missionaries to Georgia, but also to establish economic, political, military and cultural relations with Western Europe, specifically with France.

But nothing came of the mission, and Vakhtang reluctantly converted to Islam in 1716. Almost immediately, however, Vakhtang made contact with the Russian Ambassador, Artemii Volinskii, and informed him of his true religious and political convictions. (Paichadze, 1970). Clearly, Kartli's leaders... calculated the continued decline of Iran and the expansion of Russia to the South. (Suni, 1994: 54).

So, the project of Orbeliani wasn't realized, although during the 18th century the French travelers came more than once to Georgia. Their notes always emphasized Georgia's significance as a trade and transit route.

In the 1750s, the French traveler, Peyssonnel (1727-1790), wrote: "Tbilisi indeed is the most convenient place for establishing trade with Persia." The same author went on to say: "at times there is a possibility in Tbilisi of purchasing Iranian goods of any kind. These goods are delivered from Ganja, Shemakh, Tavriz, Erivan and Erzerum." (Peyssonnel, 1754: 153).

King of Kartli and Kakheti (Eastern Georgia) Erekle II too had attempted more than once to establish contact with Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. He sent many missions and letters to the monarchs of Europe asking them political and military assistance. For the purpose of connecting with the countries of Western Europe Erekle used European catholic missionaries in Georgia, promising them his patronage if they could help him receive loans from European countries. However, in the end his requests gained nothing. (Tamarashvili, 1904: 398-403).

Georgia chose Russian orientation amid confrontation between Persia and Turkey. In 1783 the Treaty of Georgievsk was concluded between the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti. In 1801 east Georgia (and shortly afterwards west Georgia too) became part of the Russian Empire.

At the end of this subsection it should be noted that Georgia's relations with Western Europe, specifically with France could not be described as extensive. Generally, traveling in the Caucasus during the 13th-18th centuries was a very difficult undertaking. The number of

European travelers who came here does not exceed 200, while only about ten of them visited Tbilisi. (Natchkebia, 2009a: 90).³

Later, in the second half of the 18th century Georgia acquired a romanticized image in Europe. Wilhelm the Great is reputed to have said that in the West he was the greatest military leader, while his peer in the East was Georgian King Erekle II.

It was also around this time that conception formed in Europe about the exceptional beauty of Georgian people. It is worth noting that up until the 1920s the French encyclopedia *Larousse* would stress that Georgia was populated by the most beautiful human race. (See: *Petit Larousse...*, 1914: 1341).

Georgia's place in the 'Great Game' during the Napoleonic wars

The incorporation of Georgia into Russia proved especially poignant for Persia. Even prior to the annexation of the Kingdom of east Georgia (1801) at a time when Georgia's Russian orientation was taking shape, the first Qajar monarch Agha Mohammad Khan invaded Georgia in 1795 and destroyed Tbilisi almost totally (this fact is referred to by many French authors (Joseph Rousseau – cit. Natchkebia, 2008; Jaubert, 1821: 276; Dieulafoy, 1887/1989: 124) and the fact that in 1810s the city still bore the scars of the invasion is emphasized). "The incorporation of Georgia into Russia was unbearable for Iran whose prestige had been severely damaged; this country had been considered tributary of Iran for centuries and it could not just be allowed to join such an alliance. That is why Iran was extremely frustrated and ready to put up strong resistance." (Najem, 1915: 151).

The address of the Qajar monarch Fath 'Ali Shah prior to the outbreak of the Russian-Iranian war (1804-1813) stated "to conquer Georgia's regions and Tbilisi" and "to annihilate the Russian *giaours* [infidels, G.S.]" were primary objectives. (*AKAK*, II, 1868: 803-805).

At the same time, although "Persia laid claim to Georgia and didn't recognize Russia's expansion into the Caucasus, Fath Ali Shah was busy consolidating the eastern part of his country, while khanates of Transcaucasia didn't even recognize him as a ruler." (Berdzenishvili, 1965: 261).

Therefore Iran needed a supporter amid rivalry with Russia over Georgia. The first such supporter became England. But in April of 1805 the Anglo-Russian treaty was concluded. A third anti-French coalition was then formed. This marked a change of England's policy toward Iran. After that it was France's turn.

After the failure of the Egyptian campaign Napoleon directed his attention to the Iran route for a potential Indian campaign. Napoleon decided to form an alliance with Persia and Turkey. Meanwhile the issue of Georgia became tied up with the planned Indian campaign in a strange way.

Reportedly in 1799 during the Egyptian campaign Napoleon sent his envoy with a letter to King Giorgi XII of Georgia, but he never reached Georgia. He was captured and put to death by the pasha of Akhaltsikhe.⁴ Little is known about this mission and the letter of Napoleon. However, a letter of Prince David addressed to the archbishop of Armenia dated 15th April of 1799, reads: "The French General Bonaparte sent to father, my King a messenger who was coming through the domains of Turkey. He only reached Akhaltsikhe where as pasha found out about him and his intentions he was hanged and all his letters burnt." (Tsagareli, 1902: 203-204).

In June 1802 France was granted the right to sail her ships in the Black Sea based on the agreement signed with Turkey. From now on France's relations with the Black Sea countries were attached greater significance. In this connection one of the reports of the French embassy in Constantinople says that France "will establish contact with such centers as Tbilisi, will start trade with Circassian, Georgia and her neighboring countries." (Epremidze, 1963: 136).

³ The list of European travellers in the Caucasus during 13th-18th cc. see Polievktov, 1935.

⁴ Centre of the South-Eastern Region of today's Georgia. In the 18th c. – part of the Ottoman Empire.

Napoleon decided to include Persia in the expedition against India, taking into consideration the territorial proximity of Persia and Afghanistan. With this purpose in mind, in October 1803, he sent the Ambassador of France in Constantinople, Marshal Brune, and the commissars of the commercial relations of France in Baghdad and Aleppo, Jean-François Rousseau, and Alessandro-Louigi de Coranchez, to collect detailed information about Persia. (Natchkebia, 2008: 230). Shortly Rousseau proposed to the French Foreign Minister Talleyrand to form an anti-English trilateral alliance “between France, Persia and Kandahar. (Afghanistan)” Iran was to act as an intermediary power in order to form an alliance with the latter. Shortly afterward Napoleon sent Amadée Jaubert, a man proficient in Oriental languages and general Romieu on a special mission to Persia. (Amini, 1995: 71-82).

In August of 1806 Romieu and Jaubert arrived in Iran. They conveyed Napoleon’s request to the shah: the French army had to be allowed to be stationed on the southern Iranian coast. If Fath ‘Ali shah granted this request, Napoleon pledged support in conquering Georgia and driving out the Russians. (Tabaghua, 1974: 18).

The envoys dispatched by Napoleon to Persia would point out that domination over Georgia was of paramount importance to Persia. The French didn’t overlook strong anti-Russian sentiment in Georgia, either: in 1805 Jaubert wrote to Talleyrand from Erzurum regarding the Russian policy in Georgia: “the people of Georgia are disgruntled with the Russians now more than ever. Prince Tsitsianov has imprisoned 60 eminent citizens of Tbilisi; two sons of Prince Erekle have found refuge with the ruler of Persia.” (Jaubert, 1997: 95). J. Rousseau adds: “Georgians are awakened from their idea about the moderateness of Russian rule. They are already complaining because of the severity of the Russians and are awaiting impatiently the opportunity to take off their heavy yoke, similar to that of the Persians, but that they themselves put on (*AMFAE*, MD/Perse, VI, doc. 19, fol., 167r-168r; Natchkebia, 2008: 237).

At the same time many Georgians entered in the service of the Russian authority. As Alexandre Romieu noted: “Russians have more than ten to twelve thousand soldiers in Georgia. The greater part of them were Georgians disciplined ‘à la Moscovite’ and the rest – Cossacks”. (Cit. Natchkebia, 2009a: 94-95).

Amid rivalry with France the activity of Catholic missionaries and prospects for the spread of Catholicism in the country were causes for Russia’s concern. On May 20th 1805 the Russian consul Konushenko in Sinop, wrote to the Russian ambassador I. Italinskii in Constantinople: “your suspicions that French agents operate in Georgia and Persia are well founded.” The consul adds that Porta’s people in Georgia operate in the interests of France; at the same time Catholic missionaries who are in Persia and Georgia report to France on everything that happens in these parts: “the French envoy Dupré in Trabzon keeps abreast of everything because caravans leave Erzurum every day, while ships sail from Anapa, Pazisi (Poti), Sokhumi and Batumi; at the same time they continuously bring from there Georgian captives for sale.” (*AKAK*, II, 1868: 886).

In the same period Georgians living in exile in Iran had extensive communication with the French envoys. In August 1805 Prince Teimuraz met general Romieu. Teimuraz describes the relation with the French in Iran in one of the letters he later wrote to Marie Brosset. (*Teimuraz...*, 1964: 57). Prince Teimuraz is known to have compiled an “Italian-Persian-Turkish dictionary” for General Gardan, the French ambassador to Iran. It is printed as a supplement to a book published in 1809 in Paris and Marseille. (*Journal...*, 1809; Sharadze, I, 1972: 32; Natchkebia, 2002b). General Gardan also added this dictionary to his book. (Gardane, 1809; Natchkebia, 2009a: 96).

In 1809 Georgian Princes Alexandre and Teimuraz sent letters to Napoleon with general Gardan pleading for assistance in the fight against Russia. (Tabaghua, 1974: 28-31; Natchkebia, 2002a). On his part King Solomon II of Imereti also appealed to Napoleon for help. (Lang, 1957: 263-265; Tabaghua, 1974: 31-34).

The so called Treaty of Finkenshtein between Persia and France was concluded in March of 1807. The Treaty of Finkenstein is referred to by every author who deals with Franco-Iranian, Russian-Iranian and Franco-Georgian relations. (Amini, 1995; Atkin, 1980; Ghaffari, 1999;

Dumbadze, 1973; Kighuradze, 1971; Lang, 1957; Najem, 1915; Natchkebia, 2005, 2009b; Sharashendze, 1984; Shengelia, 1988; Tabaghua, 1972, 1974). The treaty was directed against Russia and England. Iran had turned away from England and allied itself with France over the central issue of South Caucasus generally, and of Georgia in particular. Articles 3 and 4 of the 16 paragraph treaty applies Georgia (more precisely east Georgia – the former Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti which was perceived in Europe to be Georgia in general, as opposed to west Georgia (Kingdom of Imereti and several princedoms – since concluding the above mentioned truce of Amasia this part of Georgia became the sphere of influence of the Ottoman Empire and in the nineteenth century was incorporated into the Russian Empire as a result of Russian-Turkish wars).

By the Treaty of Finkenstein Georgia's inclusion into the "Great Game" between East and West had been institutionalized.

According to article 3 of the treaty: [Napoleon] recognizes Georgia to be a legitimate dominion of his majesty emperor of Persia and pledges to make every effort to force Russia to leave Georgian and Persian territories. This was the most important part of the treaty as far as Persia was concerned. The rest of the articles applied more to its own obligations. Napoleon pledged his support to Iran, albeit in an ambiguous manner: he would assist the Iranians after they dislodged Russia from Georgia and took over Tbilisi. "The Finkenstein Treaty . . . was prepared in such a way that political interests of France, such as exclusion of England from Iran, were easily traced in it, whereas the paragraphs applying to Iran were ambiguous and vague." (Najem, 1915: 96-97).

It also applied to the contribution of Georgian mamluk troops for Napoleon's anticipated India campaign.

The mission of French general Gardane in Iran (1807-1809) was aimed at creating conditions for the implementation of the treaty. One of the goals of Gardan's mission was to reform the Iranian army to European standards and act against Russia and England.

However, only 65 days later, as a result of the peace treaty of Tilzit, France agreed to give Russia *carte blanche* in the East, which amounted to abrogation of the Treaty of Finkenstein. Under the circumstances, Iran redirected its diplomatic efforts back to England. Georgia still remained a vital issue for the Qajars at the negotiations between Persia and England, although England didn't undertake any effective measures in favour of Iran either. The Gardan mission continued its activity in Iran, but it no longer had a political bearing of the Truce of Finkenstein.

At the end of 1808 general Gardan arrived back in Teheran, where the Iranian side presented their complaints, uppermost among which was the requirement that Napoleon fix the Georgia issue. The Franco-Russian agreement said nothing on this issue. Therefore Iran received no practical gains from the treaty of Finkenstein, except for article 7, according to which the French pledged to send artillery officers and other military specialists to train and reform the Iranian army to European standards.

Nevertheless, Napoleon's envoys tried to persuade Fath 'Ali Shah that Napoleon would presently dispatch his representative to Tbilisi and the issue of truce between Russia and Iran would be arranged favorably for Iran. (Tabaghua, 1974: 18). The French emperor wanted to settle the Russian-Persian relations with the view of dragging Russia into India campaign.

With regards to Napoleon's Georgia policy it should be noted that on the whole this policy was void of any religious factor. While religion had been in the foreground in the past, now no significance was attached to it (a rather vague stereotype of Christian Georgia that existed during Middle Ages and early modern age, a Georgia Europe could rely on in the fight against the Muslim world, had disappeared altogether. The image Georgia acquired was that of a bridge into East, a matter of contention and bargaining chip between East and West, rather than a Christian region.

After signing the Treaty of Finkenstein (May 4, 1807) general Gardane arrived at the royal court of Persia, and was received as an ally. The Tilzit Treaty (4 July, 1807) allowed him to return via Tbilisi. It was this journey of the French mission that first marked Tbilisi as a transit

town between Persia and Europe. Tbilisi also became a place of diplomatic encounters. Félix Lajard, First Secretary at general Gardan's mission in Iran arrived here in 1809. (Natchkebia, 2009a: 96). He was to purchase various items for the mission and he met Commander-in-Chief Gudovich (1806-1809). It was the first acknowledgment of Tbilisi as a politically important city.

It is worth noting that "The Report on Georgia" was compiled by Gardan's aide-de-camp Camille Trézel (1780-1860) in 1809. Trézel wrote: "these people (Georgians) have European morals and manners, our restlessness and our requirement to own much smaller parcel of land, but safe in the knowledge that this places us above the Easterners". With regards to Tbilisi (which still remained largely destroyed at the time as a result of Agha Mohammad Khan's invasion) Trézel wrote: "Tbilisi is the first town where after two years spent in silent Asian towns with narrow empty streets and hot sands we rediscovered with great relish the European traits." (*AMFAE*, "Perse", t. IX, 1806-1808, f.150v. Cit.: Tabaghua, 1974: 19-26). Trézel mentions the markets of Tbilisi which from the point of view of Europeans conferred to the city an oriental aspect. Another traveller stresses: "In the caravanserais retailer Persian, Turkish and Armenians had their deposits of goods." (Freygang, 1816: 114)

France took an interest in Georgia even after concluding the peace treaty of Tilzit. In spring of 1808 on the initiative of Felix Lagorio, Napoleon's royal consul in Feodosia, an expedition was dispatched to Georgia to take stock of the Russian forces stationed in Imereti and Samegrelo. The expedition report was published in Paris in 1809 in the magazine "Nouvelles Annales des Voyages".

At the end the historic competition for Iran between England and France was won by England. At the same time, while Russia was still competing with England in Iran, Europe was no longer taking an interest in the Caucasus region. In the treaty concluded between England and Iran in 1812 Georgia is not even mentioned. Therefore Europe had come to regard Georgia as Russia's dominion.

The true state of affairs about the early Russian-Iranian conflict on Georgia is probably

best captured by the French diplomat Amadée Jaubert, who quotes the words of a ruler of an Azeri province, Ahmad Khan, regarding the Crown Prince Abbas Mirza: "our current ruler . . . with his mighty hand has united everything, except Georgia, a province that in reality hasn't been part of the empire for a long time now." (Jaubert, 1997: 118) The Persian pretense to empire proved fallow despite Agha Mohammad Khan's temporary subjugation of the eastern Caucasus. (Kashani-Sabet, p. 21)

This long-lasting war between Russia and Iran ended with the signing of a peace treaty in Gulistan on October 12, 1813. Iran recognized Kartli and Kakheti and Azerbaijan Khanates as the property. The Caspian sea was under Russian control. After the second war, in 1828 The Nakhichevan and Yeraven Khanates also became Russian possessions

Overall during the nineteenth century as a result of Russian-Iranian and Russian-Turkish wars the South Caucasus as a whole ended up within the Russian Empire. This fact didn't give rise to any particular opposition from Western Europe.

At the end, it must be stressed that by the beginning of the 19th century Georgia had become part of world geopolitical games. For some time to come Georgia would become a bargaining chip in the "Great Game", but the country retained political significance of this kind for only a short while. Nonetheless, it was the first time Europe had a clear perception of Georgia from the political and military points of view as a crossroads between Europe and Asia.

Commercial importance of Georgia for France

Following the incorporation of Georgia and a large part of the Southern Caucasus into the Russian Empire Georgia gained critical importance for Europeans in terms of trade, at a time when the Ottoman Empire was declining. By the beginning of the 19th century French capital had assumed increasingly important role here. However, the freedom of French capital was restricted by Russia, which tried in every way to promote trade relations with the South Caucasus and use this territory for trade expansion in the East. To achieve hegemony in the South Caucasus French capital had to confront trade companies of British India as well.

During the Iran-Russian war the capital of Georgia generally represented the sphere of military interest of Russia and it hadn't yet assumed the significance as a trade and transit route between the East and West. The town continued trading with the North Caucasus, Iran and Turkey. The population was small, while the city itself was in ruins. It was yet to acquire the function of the capital of a Russian Caucasus and its geopolitical role for Russia's entry in the Middle East.

In order to consolidate its position in Georgia and Transcaucasia Russia was forced to declare a temporary "freedom of trade" here. Russia's understanding of trade with Asia at the time was as follows: Russia was to engage in trade between Europe and Asia. Thanks to its geographic location it was to become an intermediary power that would be impossible to bypass in the trade between Europe and Asia. After the gradual conquest of Transcaucasia the idea of linking up the trade routes of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea resurfaced again. Transcaucasia represented a kind of bridge between Europe and Asia and was a very convenient route for transit trade.

As mentioned above, after the incorporation into Russia Georgia's trade links initially were limited to the Near East and the North Caucasus, although it should be emphasized that these trade relations were quite extensive. Jaubert wrote: "it should be pointed out that during the last Russian-Persia war trade with Georgia never stopped. Caravans came and went in Tbilisi as they did during the peace time." (Jaubert, 1997: 80-81).

Russia's entry in the region gradually changed the situation. Extending contact with Europe via the north route was made much easier by building the Georgian Military Road.

So called "high preferential tariffs" introduced by the Russian Empire in 1810 represented significant hurdles to European capitals. Despite subsequent amendments customs tariffs remained high and therefore unfavorable for the Europeans. Eventually they managed to have the tariffs reduced. Jacques François Gamba was instrumental in achieving this.

Gamba has a special place among the 19th century authors who wrote on Georgia. He was the first consul of France in Tbilisi.

During Bourbon restoration Gamba prepared and submitted to the French government the *Improving Asia Trade* project. The project envisaged using a transit route that went over Russia (namely the South Caucasus). Minister Richelieu (who previously held office of Governor of Odessa) became interested in the project. The minister considered that the French trade companies must pay particular attention to Georgia. In his view Georgia and its capital Tbilisi could become the hub of transit trade between Europe and Asia. By order of Richelieu Gamba traveled twice in southern parts of the Russian Empire and was eventually appointed consul general of France in Tbilisi in 1821.

The French consulate opened in Tbilisi specifically for the purpose of making use of the Georgian territory for trade with the East. Gamba wrote on the Black Sea, and therefore the significance of the Georgian territory: "an adequate measure to contain England's monopoly and excessive might and free Europe from her influence would be the reunification of Europe and Asia, interconnection of the two by the Black Sea, i.e. closed sea." (Gamba, 1987: 36).

The Transcaucasia was seen as a bridge between Europe and Asia as it was a convenient route for transit trade. Russia wanted to revive this very transit route, and by the decree of October 8, 1821, preferential tariffs were introduced. Customs-duties imposed on goods imported from Europe were set at only five percent of the price of goods, and transit of European goods bound for Iran via the Transcaucasia was made toll-free. Preferential duties would apply

for ten years; the decree took effect on July 1, 1822. From that date onward, the European trade with Asia was to be carried out through South Caucasus, i.e. Odessa-Redut- Kale-Tbilisi. Gamba wrote: “Based on the decree of October 8 (20) 1821, all goods imported to Georgia from abroad will be taxed by only 5 percent of the declared price of the goods, in the same way duties are levied on goods imported from Iran on the basis of the Gulestan Treaty.” (*Ibid*, 235).

By such concessions, Russia sought to make way for European goods entering the Central Asia and Iran via the Transcaucasia, as Russia itself was unable to satisfy these countries’ needs with its own production. The law was also expected to result in shifting the Trabzon-Erzurum route onto the Transcaucasian territory, and to “strengthen Russia’s political influence on the European continent and versus Iran-Turkey as well.” (Bodenshtadt, 1965: 170) The significance of the Georgian port of Redut-Kale (Kulevi) on the Black Sea was especially enhanced. “Redut-Kale was the busiest harbour on the east coast of the Black Sea . . . , which for years had been regarded as a linking centre for trade transactions between Persia and Europe.” (*Ibid.*) Redut-Kale was destroyed during the Crimean War.⁵

Although the five-percent tariff concession and toll-free transit meant that European countries and France in particular would secure the markets of South Caucasus and Iran, the Russian government was hoping that a ten-year period of preferential tariffs policy would encourage the markets of South Caucasus and Iran to expand; the demand for European goods would increase, but upon the expiry of this term, Russian bourgeoisie would dominate the emerging markets. This decree gave great impetus to the development of trade in Georgia, and made the country part of the international trade. During this period the transit route of Georgia was used by English as well, despite the fact that preferential tariff was directed against England and served France’s interests. (Sanikidze, 2008: 157). In the mid-1820s, Gamba wrote: “Many Englishmen returning to Europe from India have passed through Tiflis lately. They embark from Bombay and in 15-20 days they reach the Bandar-Bushehr harbor in the Persian Gulf. The residence of consulate general of England is in this harbor; Englishmen are heavily involved in trade, and they distribute manufactured goods from India and their own country throughout Persia. From Bandar-Bushehr they easily reach Tiflis within six weeks by caravans”. (Gamba, II, 1826: 159).

Gamba’s activity in the Caucasus was overly dynamic and he even managed to serve his own economic ends as well. Georgia’s Commander-in-Chief General A.P.Ermolov received an order from the emperor of Russia according to which Gamba was entitled to set up trade establishments in Georgia and plots of land would be delivered into his possession for farming. (*AKAK*, VI, I, 1882: 263).⁶

Preferential transit in Transcaucasia during 1821-31 greatly facilitated capital accumulation among merchants and increased therefore their subsequent influence. At the same time the preferential tariff had positive impact on living conditions of the local population as a whole. (Mgaloblishvili & MikiaSvili, 2007: 302). Local enterprises started development as well. As early as 1827, the Russian government lent eighty thousand silver rubles to a Frenchman named Castella to build a silk-spinning mill in Georgia. Several skilled workers came from France to work for Castella, but most of the workers – usually fifteen to twenty but sometimes as many as fifty were local. Most of the machinery, of course, was imported. (Antelava et al., 1967: 85; Pintner, 1967: 43n).

When Castella died, the state took over the plant and ran it until the 1840s. But this outlay of government capital was exceptional, and by the end of the 1820s Russian authorities began to see the Asian continent as a source of raw materials for the embryonic industry of Central Asia. As Russia itself began to initiate some industrial development, Russian officials visualized Transcaucasia as a supplier of raw materials rather than area to be developed economically. (Sunnii, 1994: 91).

⁵ For the importance of Redut-Kale for commercial relations between East and West see Pachkoria, 1968; Spaskii-Avtonomov, 1847: 21-33.

⁶ About Gamba’s biography, see Nikoladze, 1962:12; khantadze, 1987: 5-9.

Gamba wrote: “the day when Tbilisi becomes a major market where many caravans will arrive from the Indy’s shores which stretch from Panjab to Gujarat, new trade combinations will be developed here, broad intercommunication will be established between manufacturing Europe and Asia, which is rich in all kinds of raw material that our factories need. This new route, this market in the country of civilized people...is a significant development for France and it should be paid due attention; it is also important for Russia, one of the provinces of which is destined to become a large-scale trade hub; finally it is important for all of Europe which is looking for sales markets for its industries.” (Gamba, II, 1826: 161).

Gamba’s work is important also in that it details the ethnic and religious make-up of Tbilisi population, changes in the town’s character and its restoration process. The French consul’s work is an invaluable source not only for studying economic life of Georgia⁷, but also for studying its natural wealth, everyday life of population and culture.

Overall Gamba’s contribution as the first European consul in Tbilisi is invaluable and symbolic.

Gamba died in 1833 in Kutaisi. His daughter Charlotte Gamba, his only heir, lived also in Kutaisi. In 1851 his creditors sequestrated his property and his whole estate was sold off to pay his creditors.

Gamba protected interests of France’s commercial bourgeoisie and fought against English influence. Interests of Russia and continental Europe had temporarily coincided in confronting England. From the beginning, preferential tariff in Transcaucasia had formidable opponents in Russia, but the fight against preferential tariff began in earnest after Kankin was appointed minister of finance of Russia. Kankin considered that the law of October 8th 1821 was causing great harm to Russia.

During preferential customs and nearly free trade Tbilisi became filled up with cheap European goods. A transit rout going from Europe into Iran was thrown across Redut-Kale-Tbilisi; Russian goods were squeezed out of market even more. A weak Russian industry was losing lucrative market. Understandably, there were continuous protests by Russian industrialists. Russian bourgeoisie demanded that high excise-duties on European goods be restored.

Shortly before the expiry of the specified term, Russia cancelled preferential customs-tariff set for European goods. In 1832, an extremely high tariff was set for European textile goods. However, this decision did not bring about desired results for the Russian empire. The cancellation of preferential customs-tariffs and toll-free transits on foreign goods led to obvious change. The transit trade route from Europe into Iran that had been revived in the 1820s was now proving inefficient. The main line of Europe’s “Asian trade” (Redut- Kale-Tbilisi-Baku) had to rival with the Trabzon route. “A trade company, set up by the British in Trabzon, flooded the eastern markets with own goods.” (Dumbadze, 1973: 914). After the cancellation of tariff concessions trade between European countries and Iran shifted toward the Trabzon-Erzrum route. The profit, which had been gained by Tbilisi and Redut-Kale under toll-free transit now went to Trabzon-Erzrum. Many Tbilisi merchants chose to engage in transit trade using the Trabzon-Erzrum route, by which they delivered European goods to Iran.

Getting undesired results prompted the government of Russia to rectify the situation, although the territory of Georgia didn’t gain significance it had when preferential tariffs were in force. Despite this Georgia and Tbilisi still remained in France’s sphere of interests. The French established various types of enterprises here, and the city too gradually acquired a European appearance.

The Russian writer P. Zubov wrote in 1833: “being a trade center of Transcaucasia Tbilisi attracts merchants from different countries of Asia and Europe whose clothes and appearance create amazing diversity. Turks, Persians, Indians, Tartars, Germans, English, French,

⁷ For instance Gamba’s data on weights and measures in use in Georgia are very important – local, Oriental, Russian and European units of weights and measures were used simultaneously). (See: Mgaloblishvili & Mikiashvili, 2007: 328-349).

highlanders, Armenians, Georgians, Russians and others in national costumes, tunics and frock coats; European carriages, German buggies, Georgian carts. All of these are passing before our eyes every minute in a continuous panorama and form an original picture.” Meanwhile all of this had resulted directly from the application of preferential tariff. (Zubov, 1834: 170; Polievktov, 1930: 87-88; Gugushvili, I, 1949: 214)

Despite the ban European goods still entered the Transcaucasia market either through smuggling or officially. As preferential tariff applied to trading with Iran and Turkey, European goods disguised as “Asian goods” were still squeezing out the Russian industrial goods.

(Meskhia, 1958: 401). After the cancellation of tariff concessions trade between European

countries and Iran shifted toward the Trabzon-Erzrum route. The profit, which had been gained by Tbilisi and Redut-Kale under toll-free transit now went to Trabzon-Erzrum. Many Tbilisi merchants chose to engage in transit trade using the Trabzon-Erzrum route, by which they delivered European goods to Iran. After the setting up of the British company in Trabzon, goods were smuggled into Georgia in large quantities. Setting up customs by the Russian empire

proved ineffective in fighting contraband. (Sanikidze, 2008: 158-159). But in general, progress

and economic success that had been anticipated under the extended preferential tariff never realized.

French authors about Georgia and Tbilisi during the second half of the 19th c.

During the 19th c. Tbilisi gradually obtained traits of an European city. It concerned many aspects of the city life – social, economic or cultural. This multiethnic and multicultural city with the mix of Eastern, local and Western traditions represented special interest for European travelers.

Gamba as the consul of France was primarily interested in economic aspects. But travelers in the subsequent years paid attention to economic aspects, as well as taking notice of other features, such as multi-ethnicity and multi-confessional character of Tbilisi, everyday life of Tbilisi citizens, change in the city’s architecture, the effects of exposure to European culture and at the same time close cultural ties with Persia etc. It should be noted, Persian language even in the late 1820s was popular in Georgia, especially among the nobility, and the knowledge of this language was considered as a ‘bon tone’, as to imitate the Persian manners. (Bélanger, II, 1836-1846: 31). Simultaneously, a public school of European style for young people started to form europenized young Georgians. If the parents spoke Persian, their children began to study European languages. This process continued throughout the first third of the nineteenth century.

In 1858-1859 Alexandre Dumas traveled to Georgia. This journey resulted in his famous book *The Caucasus*. Tbilisi was the destination and the focal point of his journey. That is why the book centers on Georgia’s capital.

The Caucasus by Dumas vividly documents a bygone era and unlike other travelers’ notes, which lack Dumas’s writing skills and imagination, this book can be read in one sitting. At the same time Dumas imparts some significant facts about the history of Georgia, traditions of the Caucasian peoples, their everyday life, and political and economic situation.

Dumas had prepared well for this journey. He had read almost every available book on the Caucasus, including ancient Greek authors, eastern chroniclers of the Middle Ages (e.g. a book by Ibn Hawqal, a 10th century Arab geographer and traveler), and European authors Chardin, Tavernié, Dubois de Montpereux, Chevalier Gambat etc. One of his main sources was *The*

History of Georgia by Marie Brosset that had been recently published. Dumas recounts historical anecdotes about the Caucasian peoples, above all about Georgians. He describes the activity of viceroys Yermollof, Vorontsov, Paskevich, Niedhart in Tbilisi, which by then had become the residence of general-governors of the Caucasus. He also focuses attention on Georgian and Caucasian princes, Cossacks, Shamil's uprising, etc.

Dumas stayed at a house of the French consul Finot. Dumas wrote that the time he spent in Tbilisi was one of the best periods of his life in terms of favorable conditions created for work.

The first thing that caught Dumas' eye in Tbilisi was the change that had taken place both in the city and in the lives of its inhabitants. Dumas's impressions tally with the remarks by Gamba and Klapproth who inferred that thanks to its geographical location this Asian town sitting on the crossroad between the East and the West could gradually become a truly European city. In the first quarter of the 19th century this small Asian town was becoming increasingly attractive to the Europeans. At the time of Dumas's visit there existed a small French-speaking community in Tbilisi comprising 153 people. Dumas wrote: "those who know Tbilisi only by Klapproth and Gamba's accounts would not guess it was the same city, which the two travelers described, should they arrive in the city today" (Dumas, 1965: 334), Dumas adds: "I own up when I was coming to Tbilisi I thought I would see a half savage town. But it seems I was wrong. Thanks to the French colony, which is primarily made up of Parisian tailors and milliners, Georgian ladies are only two weeks late in keeping up with the fashion trends of the Italian theater and Gandi boulevard". (*Ibid*, 340)

What stands out in the book is the description of a Tbilisi theater: Dumas wrote: "I had not seen anywhere in my life an auditorium of a theater so ravishing as the one I saw in Tbilisi...I could not wish for anything more for that beautiful auditorium in terms of its architecture and decor". (*Ibid*, 274).

Dumas also wrote about a German village in a Tbilisi suburb. On the other hand, Dumas also detected the Asian side of the city. He wrote about famous Persian baths of Tbilisi with great enthusiasm. During his stay in Tbilisi Dumas went to these baths every day and he even intended to order Tbilisian masseurs from France. (*Ibid*, 298) Dumas also describes a ball at the residence of Governor Bariatnitskii, market places, caravanserais, and types of city dwellers. He wrote about the beauty of Georgian women with great enthusiasm.

In Dumas's work there is no shortage of humor, either. He describes how he was awarded a *best drinker's certificate*. He also devotes attention to the Georgian *supra* (feast). Humor doesn't betray Dumas here either, and he adds that "During a Georgian feast moderate drinkers at the table would drink five or six bottles of wine, and sometimes ten or 12. It isn't rare for a man at a *supra* to drink up to 15 bottles of wine. God has bestowed on Georgians a wine that won't make you lose your mind". (*Ibid*, 344)

During the 1880s another French traveler E. Orsolle visited Georgia. His work centers on a description of ethnic and confessional composition of the Tbilisi population. Orsolle provides valuable information on Persian nationals of the Russian empire: "as for the Persians of the Yerevan province, who have been the Tsar's subjects since 1828, they have joined the Russian army and administration voluntarily; knowledge of eastern languages makes them very needful in the Asian provinces; being adroit and intelligent the majority of them have become completely European in their habits and ideas, and have sometimes achieved high posts; above all they are remarkable gentlemen; many of them speak French fluently." (Orsolle, 1885: 43). From the social point of view the most advanced stratum among the subjects of Iran were merchants, followed by those of artisans, other workers and hired man-power. Orsolle writes on the Iranians of Tbilisi: "the majority of these Iranians are businessmen and they are distinguished by their intelligence. We should trust the saying: "it takes two Jews to rob one Armenian, and it takes two Armenians to rob one Persian." (*Ibid*.)

The work of Dutch traveller Chevalier Lyclama A Nijeholt, published in French, devotes attention to describing Tbilisi neighbourhoods. "The Sololaki district is almost entirely Russian and most houses here are private. There is also a palace of a prince, descendant of the last king of

Georgia. Here are the residences of the French and Persian consuls.” (Lyclama a Nijeholt, 1872: 358). It is worth noting that the French and the Persian consulates are located side by side. His description of a religious holiday at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral located in the ancient capital of Georgia is extremely interesting.

Informations on Georgia by Le Baron de Baye are particularly important. These include a work dedicated specifically to Tbilisi in which the author displays a profound knowledge of the city’s history. He emphasizes ethno-confessional composition of Tbilisi population. He provides many interesting details about the districts and architectural monuments of Tbilisi. The author also notes that valuable material of natural history; archeology and ethnography of the Caucasus are kept at a Tbilisi museum. It is interesting that Le Bai expresses regret that Georgians are gradually neglecting their traditional and unique national costume and changing over to European clothes.

Le Baron de Baye’s records regarding Islam and Muslims of Tbilisi are especially interesting and valuable. According to this French traveler the elder of Tbilisi Sunnites at the time bore a title of the mufti of the Transcaucasus.

Le Baron de Baye’s information on Shiites’ leader Akhund-Zadeh is also worthy of note as it attests to his great authority with the city population, on the one hand, and to a strong Persian influence, on the other: “a visit to the Shiite spiritual leader of the Transcaucasia Sheikh ol-Eslam was very interesting. His name is Akhund-Zadeh. He is from the Tartar Azerbaijan and about 60 years old. He was born in Elizabetpol which adopted the Persian language and he comes from the mullah family. He must be grateful to the Caucasus administrators for his appointment; therefore he can be regarded as a functionary, although he makes use of his strong influence over his coreligionists. The average income from furnished houses is twelve thousand Rubles and spent on his church and charity. Guided by the Shiites’ leader and Mr. Velichko, who had introduced me to him, I visited a Muslim cemetery (Gabristan). After showing me a house in which the dead are embalmed, I was shown some of the oldest graves. Over one of these is placed a dome inlaid with enamel. Under the dome rests Seyed, Mohamed’s descendant. In front of the mausoleum earth was red with blood. Sheep had been sacrificed in memory of the holy man. This custom is wide-spread, as much as lighting candles over the graves.” (de Baye, 1990: 9).

Some other French travellers (Stanislas Menié, Charles-Lefèvre Pontal, Jane Dieulafoy etc.) presented also an overall picture of Tbilisi and Tbilisian life of the end of the 19th century as seen from the European perspective.

During evaluation of works by the French authors of the second half of the nineteenth century exceptional benevolence they displayed toward Georgia and people living in this country should be emphasized. It should be noted that unlike the previous periods they didn’t come to the country on specific missions and did not seek ways of carrying out in practice the political and economic interests of France (in evaluating the Russian rule they often noted that this development had facilitated the process of Europeanization of the country and strengthening connections with Europe). Each and every one of them notes that the country was a kind of bridge and crossroads between East and West, Asia and Europe which added unique fascination and attraction to the city.

Finally it is worth noting that Georgia drew attention not only from French diplomats, merchants, writers and travelers. Interest in ancient Georgian culture and history existed as well. The French researcher Frederick Dubois de Montpereux (1798-1850) traveled to Georgia on order by St. Petersburg Academy and in his three volumes work Georgia’s history, geography, natural resources and ancient monuments are described in detail. Duboua’s richly illustrated work is especially important since many of the monuments of Georgian architecture he described no longer exist today. (Dubois de Montpereux, 1839-1843). Contribution by academician Marie-

Félicité Brosset (1802-1880) to the scientific study of the history of Georgia should be particularly noted. (Brosset, 1848-1858).⁸

Georgia also attracted attention of foreign photographers. French photographer Jean Rault created ethnographic photographic studies in many areas of the Russian Empire. Only few copies were printed of his album "Collection des types des peuples de Russie, Roumanie et Bulgarie". I got hold of this album at the archive of the Golestan Palace Museum in Tehran. The album was a gift of the Russian emperor to the shah of Iran. It is interesting that apart from the French and Russian inscriptions each picture also has an inscription made by Naser od-Din, Shah of Persia. Several photos (including those taken in Georgia) have been awarded a prize at the Paris exhibition of 1878. The album contained 28 photos of Georgians and most of these photos previously were unknown in Georgia. Rault's photographs are important as photos of Georgians taken in natural environment of the 19th century are extremely rare. The photos are also noteworthy for studying Georgian character types, their mode of dress, weapons, social and regional diversity, etc.

In conclusion it is worth noting that in the beginning of the 19th century a considerable part of France's East policy was centered on Georgia. This is evidenced by a special place of Georgia in the treaty of Finkenstein. After Russia consolidated its position in the region Georgia drew France's attention as a transit trade route. During confrontation between Britain and Russia over Iran and Central Asia (so called "The Great Game") France wasn't an active actor, therefore political interest in Georgia was put on a back burner. Despite this during the 19th century Georgia and its capital Tbilisi still attracted the French economically. French travelers' records regarding multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population of Tbilisi, as well as demonstrating its transformation from an Asian to a European city are particularly important.

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⁸ About the life and work of M. Brosset, see: Bouachidze, 1996.

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