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The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi*

Austin Jersild and Neli Melkadze

[The theater] cultivates taste, acquaints us with the works of great artists, with the ideas of geniuses, and presents to the crowd the beginnings of the fine arts, that is, the most noble aspirations of humanity.

[Russian] G. S., *Kavkaz*, 1854

The awakening of the people is of no significance without theater and folk poetry.

[Georgian] A. K., *Droeba*, 1876

The Russian field is quickly accumulating a wide variety of works on Russian imperialism. These works now rival the field of colonial studies on the Western empires, and include explorations of imperial ideology, the multiethnic service elite, educational policy, missionary activities, cultural borrowing and interaction among the diverse peoples of the empire, and native responses and challenges to Russian rule.¹ The new studies often venture out to the eastern borderlands of

* Austin Jersild would like to thank and recognize his Georgian language teachers, Tamara Chakhtauri, Tamuna Koshoridze, and Ramaz Kurdadze, the American Council for International Education, and Ronald Suny and the other participants of the Midwest Russian History Workshop held at the University of Chicago, 20–21 October 2001. Both authors are grateful for the comments and suggestions of *Kritika's* anonymous reviewers. For Georgia's contemporary capital we use the Georgian word Tbilisi rather than the Russian Tiflis, except in those cases where the name refers to an "imperial" institution or administrative designation. The Georgian language does not use capital letters, and neither do we in the transliterated footnote references to Georgian materials. In the text, however, we follow English convention and capitalize names and titles.

¹ On imperial ideology, educational policy and missionary work, see Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Michael Khodarkovsky, "Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects': Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia"; Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity"; Dov Yaroshevski, "Empire and Citizenship"; Susan Layton, "Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery"; Bruce Grant, "Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primi-

the empire, such as the Volga-Urals and Turkestan, and complement and complicate a more developed historiography on the western borderlands and its peoples, such as Poles, Balts, Ukrainians, and Jews. Studies of the western frontier often highlight the problem of “Russification,” which generally meant the series of late-19th-century repressive policies designed to limit the economic and cultural activities of the non-Russian peoples.²

As this article will illustrate, imperialism in the East (the southern borderlands of Crimea and the Caucasus were part of the East or Orient [*vostok*] of the imperial imagination) included an impulse to promote and foster rather than curtail cultural expression. This made perfect sense for a Russia that was itself an eastern borderland of a Europe understood by many Russians since the 18th century to be the primary source of their own unfolding “enlightenment” and cultural progress. Russians (and many non-Russians) presented Russia’s connection to enlightened Europe as a justification for imperial rule over the peoples and regions of the distant eastern borderlands. Especially from the 1840s, there

tivism in Late Imperial Russia,” all in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, ed. Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzerini (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 9–26, 58–79, 80–99, 292–310 respectively; Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia’s Eastern Nationalities, 1860–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001). On the multi-ethnic service elite, see Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkereich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1992); on cultural borrowing and the “entanglement” of the diverse peoples of the empire, see Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700–1860* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Willard Sunderland, “Russians into Yakuts? ‘Going Native’ and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s–1914,” *Slavic Review* 55: 4 (Winter 1996), 806–825, and Paul W. Werth, “From Resistance to Subversion: Imperial Power, Indigenous Opposition, and Their Entanglement,” *Kritika* 1: 1 (Winter 2000), 21–43; on native responses to imperial rule, see Edward J. Lazzerini, “Local Accommodation and Resistance to Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century Crimea”; Jo-Ann Gross, “Historical Memory, Cultural Identity, and Change: Mirza Abd al-Aziz Sami’s Representation of the Russian Conquest of Bukhara”; Virginia Martin, “Barimta: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime”; Agnes Kefeli, “Constructing an Islamic Identity: The Case of Elyshevo Village in the Nineteenth Century,” all in *Russia’s Orient*, ed. Brower and Lazzerini, 169–87, 203–26, 249–70, and 271–91 respectively; and Adeb Khalid, *The Politics of Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

² See Edward C. Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification in the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); idem, “Religion and Russification: Russian Language in the Catholic Churches of the ‘Northwest Provinces’ after 1863,” *Kritika* 2: 1 (Winter 2001), 87–110; Witold Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863–1905)* (Lublin: Scientific Society of Lublin, 1998); John Doyle Klier, *Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855–1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

emerged a well-developed Russian ideology of empire preoccupied with matters of culture and enlightenment, which posed an important contrast to traditional Russian militarism and imperial conquest of the frontier.

There were limitations to the promotion of culture on the distant fringes of the empire, however. Many of the imperial promoters of enlightenment had trouble imagining a world in which enlightenment might be spread in the small and exotic languages and cultures of the borderlands. Georgians might participate in imperial *obshchestvo* (educated society), present the plays of Shakespeare, and collect and read French books, but would they develop their own educated society (*sazogadoeba*), and publish their own newspapers and books? Was there a place for non-Russian cultural traditions that did not take their cue from the worlds of Russia and Europe, or for expressions of local culture that questioned this equation of enlightened benevolence with Russia? Early empire-builders and promoters of enlightenment, such as Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov, the special viceroy (*namestnik*) appointed in 1845, could not even imagine that there ever would be such a dilemma in the eastern borderlands, while later officials reacted with suspicion and hostility to this developing world of cultural politics in a place such as Georgia. They foolishly attempted to limit the meaning and spread of enlightenment, which had, since the 1840s, been one of the basic justifications for Russian rule in the borderlands.

Georgia offers an ideal location for the exploration of the problem of high culture and the idea of (European) enlightenment within the context of the multiethnic (and Eurasian) empire. Georgia was a great source of hope for imperial officials hoping to establish an administrative foothold in the complex and turbulent Caucasus. Georgians of course share with Russians a common heritage of Eastern Orthodoxy and Byzantine influence. The modern historical consciousness of both peoples was strongly influenced by the memory of struggle with Islamic empires and cultures. Georgia's enemies included the Ottoman Turks and Safavid Persians, who competed for control of the Georgian kingdoms, until Christian Russia's arrival in the 18th century further complicated the contest of empires. Georgians especially remembered the sack of Tbilisi by Shah Aga Mohammed in 1795, which encouraged many educated Georgians to view Russia as a source of protection and a haven for cultural development.³

³ On Georgia and its relationship to Russia and empire, see Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 113–43. On the Society for the Promotion of Georgian Literacy as an example of an emerging Georgian nationalist consciousness, see Oliver Reisner, "Die georgische Alphabetisierungsgesellschaft: Schule nationaler Eliten und Vergemeinschaftung," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 48: 1 (2000), 66–89; Oliver Reisner, "The Tergdaleulebi: Founders of Georgian National Identity," in *Forms of Identity: Definitions and Changes*, ed. Ladislaus Löb, István Petrovics, and György E. Szonyi (Szeged, Hungary: Attila Jozsef University, 1994), 125–37. On the Transcaucasus nationalities generally, see part 2

Russia's annexation of Georgia in 1783 and direct incorporation in 1801 meant the extension of imperial traditions of service and education to this corner of the empire. The purpose of imperial education policy was to create a "native administrative intelligentsia," and, to do so, the state sponsored and educated young Georgians from among the "respectable" and the noble.⁴ Many Georgians were eager to take advantage of the privileges associated with imperial service, associate themselves with Europe's notion of progress, and also distinguish themselves from nearby rival and Islamic peoples such as the North Caucasus mountaineers.⁵ Service records from the imperial era left in what has recently been renamed the Georgian National Archive illustrate the important role played by Georgians in various wars against both mountaineers and the Ottoman Turks.⁶ Colonel Giorgi Tsereteli from Kutaisi, for example, not to be confused with the writer and sometime theater critic referred to later in this article, managed to survive fighting in Chechnia and Dagestan from 1855–59, service on the Lezgin Line after the conquest, and combat in the war of 1877–78 against the Turks. In 1876 he helped put down a rebellion in Svanetia.⁷ After the conquest, a Georgian was considered sufficiently reliable to administer troublesome Dagestan oblast' in the 1880s.⁸ Tbilisi served not only as the base of imperial administration and a growing imperial educated society, but also as an anchor for the Russian military in their prosecution of the long Caucasus War.⁹

Tbilisi was host to important innovations in Russian imperial policy. The well-known geographic, ethnic, and religious complexities of the region perhaps contributed to a general willingness on the part of Russian officialdom to innovate in its administration of this frontier. Tsar Nicholas I himself lost patience with the seemingly interminable war and granted extensive authority to Prince Vorontsov, an unusually powerful and independent figure in the imperial ad-

("Nationalism and Social Change under Tsarist Rule") of *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, ed. Suny, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 105–234.

⁴ From an early 19th-century statute, cited in Liudmila Sultanovna Gatagova, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i narodnoe obrazovanie na Kavkaze v XIX v.* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr "Rossiia molodaia," 1993), 16.

⁵ sakartvelos sakhelmtsipo saistorio arkivi (Georgian National Historical Archive, Tbilisi, hereafter SSSA) f. 4, op. 3, 1846–1855, d. 181, ll. 22, 60.

⁶ SSSA f. 7, op. 8, 1861–74, d. 2, ll. 21–52.

⁷ SSSA f. 229, op. 1, 1884–85, d. 127, ll. 33–37.

⁸ SSSA f. 229, op. 1, 1888, d. 220.

⁹ On the war and Sufism in the North Caucasus, see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), and Anna Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom: The Sufi Response to the Russian Advance in the North Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

ministration. As Anthony Rhinelanders has explained, Vorontsov was experienced in the borderlands and well-acquainted with the Caucasus, where he began his military career as an adjutant to Georgian Prince P. D. Tsitsianov (Paata Tsitsishvili) in the early 19th century. He was also the Governor-General of the basically non-Russian region of New Russia (*Novorossiisk*), and the tsar's plenipotentiary in Bessarabia.¹⁰ Vorontsov neither ended the war nor resolved the dilemmas of imperial integration in the region, but his vision of enlightenment profoundly transformed the city of Tbilisi and contributed to the dilemmas of Georgian culture in the later age of nationalism. He presided over the opening of numerous educational institutions and scholarly societies, among them the Society of Agriculture, an Ethnographic Museum, a local branch of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, as well as new publications in Russian such as *Kavkaz* and *Kavkazskii Kalendar'*. The regime sponsored the first journal in the Georgian language, *Tsiskari*, which eventually served to encourage the emergence and development of Georgian culture and literature and the publication of Georgian manuscripts. In time, more independent Georgian newspapers such as *Droeba* and *Iveria* (founded 1866 and 1876) further extended and developed such concerns.¹¹

“Molière” in Georgia

Theater in Russia, as in Europe, historically served as a symbolic representation of the social order, and was closely connected to the ruling dynasty and the elite world of the court.¹² Vorontsov represented the tsar and his elite in the Caucasus borderland, and in this spirit took a great interest in the founding of a theater in Tbilisi immediately upon his arrival in March of 1845. The context of the frontier provided a particular urgency to the work of the theater, understood by Vorontsov and the growing community of educated society to be an illustration

¹⁰ Anthony L. H. Rhinelanders, *Prince Mikhail Vorontsov: Viceroy to the Tsar* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990). See also M. P. Shcherbinin, *Biografiia general-fel'dmarshala kniazia M. S. Vorontsova* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Eduarda Veimara, 1858), 354; P. I. Andronikov, *Otkrytie pamiatnika v Tiflise sveteishemu kniazuiu Mikhailu Semenovichu Vorontsovu, 25 marta 1867 goda* (Tiflis: Tipografiia glavnogo upravleniia namestnika kavkazskogo, 1867), 1–10; E. Willis Brooks, “Nicholas I as Reformer: Russian Attempts to Conquer the Caucasus, 1825–1855,” in *Nation and Ideology: Essays in Honor of Wayne S. Vucinich*, ed. Ivo Banac, John G. Ackerman, and Roman Szporluk (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981), 227–63.

¹¹ gr. kipshidze, “saistorio,” *iveria*, no. 10 (October 1882), 115–28; z. chichinadze, “kartuli gazetebi,” *sakartvelos kalendari* (1897), 462–68; Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 162.

¹² See Murray Frame, *The St. Petersburg Imperial Theaters: Stage and State in Revolutionary Russia, 1900–1920* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2000).

of the virtues of the world of European Enlightenment. Vorontsov followed the Tiflis Theater with great interest throughout his tenure. Even as he departed the region in 1855 he continued to stress the need for its further support, in spite of his awareness of the financial difficulties of the Russian government and the expense presented by the theater. In his 1855 essay to General Nikolai Andreevich Read, in which he assessed his achievements and outlined his recommendations for the future administration of the region, Vorontsov took particular pride in his founding of the theater. The theater was Tiflis's link to Europe, he affirmed, crucial to the transformation of local "*nравственность*" (morality) and an uplifting source of cultural entertainment for Russian administrators and military officers. He stressed that the money needed for its maintenance was well spent, as in Odessa, another borderland city where he previously served the cause of tsar and enlightenment.¹³

Russian officials such as General Sotnikov, the governor of Imeretia, and Georgii Pavlovich Iatsenko, a provincial secretary, helped to plan the founding of the theater immediately following Vorontsov's arrival in Tbilisi. They found a temporary building in 1845, and located a troupe from Stavropol'. The provincial troupe, however, could not compete with the standards of quality prevalent in St. Petersburg or Moscow, and the Tiflis Theater was soon criticized by those with connections to such places.¹⁴ To remedy this, seven new actors were imported from the imperial theaters of St. Petersburg in the fall of 1846, and one from Moscow. A new Italian musical director who had been in Odessa, Dominic Malagolli, was recruited to shore up the fledgling orchestra, and plays that suited the capabilities of the available actors were more carefully chosen.

Bordered by mountain "savagery," Tbilisi was now linked to the cultural world of the empire and beyond, and this new version of public life included more than just a theater featuring actors and actresses with experience in the Russian capitals. A new horse race track had been built, a new dance club offered balls for a larger audience, and Dominic Malagolli, who was in "constant contact with the most famous musical stores in Rome," was offering singing and musical instrument lessons and his own musical performances.¹⁵ "How can one not be joyful at such a rising, developing social life in Tiflis which still carries upon itself the imprint of Asia," the editorial staff of *Kavkaz* exclaimed.¹⁶ An Italian opera

¹³ Sankt-Peterburgskii filial Instituta rossiiskoi istorii Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, hereafter SPbFIRI RAN) f. 36, op. 1, 1855, d. 259, ll. 103-108.

¹⁴ *Kavkaz*, no. 6 (8 February 1846), 22; "Otchet o Tiflisskom Teatre," *ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁵ "Muzykal'noe izvestie," *Kavkaz*, no. 39 (28 September 1846), 156; "Muzykal'nyi vecher," *Kavkaz*, no. 43 (26 October 1846), 169.

¹⁶ "Tiflisskii vesti," *Kavkaz*, no. 39 (28 September 1846), 153.

performed yearly in Tbilisi from 1851, led by a certain Ramoni, who charmed Russian audiences with his “beautiful voice and beautiful appearance,” and in late 1853 the first full-scale ballet was performed on the Tbilisi stage.¹⁷ Artists, Russians in Georgia reported with enthusiasm, were making the move from Nevskii Prospekt in St. Petersburg to Erevan Square in Tbilisi.¹⁸ Lev Tolstoi was one of the many who was impressed with these accomplishments of Tbilisi in the early 1850s, and he applauded the efforts of Tbilisi to imitate St. Petersburg.¹⁹ The approval of a prominent writer such as Tolstoi, already a promising representative of the most sacred of cultural callings in the 19th century, was particularly welcomed by educated society in the Caucasus borderland.

The quality of this transplanted culture on the edges of the empire remained an important concern for educated Russians throughout these early years. Weak theatrical performances had made a mockery of the theater’s unstated purpose, which was to impress the “natives” as an expression of the best and most sublime of the civilized world. The flop of Aleksandr Sergeevich Griboedov’s *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*) in October 1846 thus raised serious concerns in the pages of *Kavkaz* about the inexperience of director Aleksandr Iablochkin and the lack of preparation of many of the young actors.²⁰ This concern for the quality of the theater was accompanied by a different and unexpected problem: empty seats often greeted the new actors and orchestra.²¹ The attention to these two problems exemplified the attempts by Vorontsov and educated Russians in the Caucasus to mold and create what they considered to be a proper theater-going public: a public receptive to the best and most significant aspects of European culture. Lev F. Ianishevskii chided those who chose not to attend the performances of an Italian violinist in March of 1847. The significance of the arrival in Tbilisi of a certain Paris, a musical figure already well-known in Europe, to a place “just beginning to rise from its heavy sleep,” was not to be underestimated.²² Ianishevskii was relieved to discover that Tbilisi had made a good

¹⁷ “Neskol’ko slov,” *Kavkaz*, no. 13 (13 February 1854), 49-51; “Benefis Manokhina,” *Kavkaz*, no. 6 (20 January 1854), 11.

¹⁸ V., “Sneg v Tiflise,” *Kavkaz*, no. 49 (6 December 1847), 193-94.

¹⁹ *Sankt-Peterburgskii filial Instituta vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk* (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, hereafter SPbFIV RAN) f. 6, op. 1, d. 33a, l. 36.

²⁰ “Tiflisskii Teatr,” *Kavkaz*, no. 41 (12 October 1846), 161-62; “Eshche o gore ot uma,” *Kavkaz*, no. 42 (10 October 1846), 165-66.

²¹ “Tiflisskii Teatr,” *Kavkaz*, no. 36 (7 September 1846), 142-43.

²² L. F. Ianishevskii, “Kontserty g. Parisa,” *Kavkaz*, no. 13 (29 March 1847), 49; “Pervyi kontsert g. Parisa,” *Kavkaz*, no. 10 (8 March 1847), 37.

impression on this musician, who was inspired to continue to other southern cities of the empire such as Sevastopol and Odessa.²³

Editorial writers in *Kavkaz* attempted to educate, inform, and mold a Tbilisi public appreciative of theater as the form of cultural expression most representative of the civilized world.²⁴ The theater, wrote a certain G. S. in *Kavkaz*, was no simple form of entertainment, but was of “higher and greater significance, in that it cultivates taste, acquaints us with the works of great artists, with the ideas of geniuses, and presents to the crowd the beginnings of the fine arts, that is, the most noble aspirations of humanity.”²⁵ The new theater had to be excellent because it presented the standard to which the indigenous cultures were to aspire. Russians themselves were to be educated, properly informed, and properly behaved in order to present their best face to the surrounding uncivilized populations.

Vorontsov soon had higher ambitions, and he wrote to T. S. Gedeonov in St. Petersburg, the Director of Imperial Theaters, to enlist his support for the construction of a new building for the theater in Tbilisi. A number of useful purposes would be served, Vorontsov stressed to Gedeonov. The “natives” would be further acquainted with the Russian language and Russian theater, and the many Russian officials and military officers stationed in the Caucasus would no longer be “deprived of the entertainments of the capitals.”²⁶ Vorontsov’s cultural agenda included the maintenance of culture among the Russians as well as the cultural education of the non-Russians. An Italian architect who had worked in Odessa, A. Skudieri, was called to Tbilisi by Vorontsov to work on a new building for the theater, as well as other Tbilisi structures. The Tamamshev Theater on Erevan Square was announced by a fountain and pool, which carried water along Nagornyi and Vel’iaminov streets to the Armenian Bazaar.

Vladimir Aleksandrovich Sollogub was named an artistic adviser to the rejuvenated theater, and in his customary dramatic prose commemorated its opening in April of 1851. Asia again encountered Europe, Sollogub wrote for *Kavkaz*. Amidst Cherkes (Adygei), Georgians, Armenians, Tatars (Azerbaijanis), and Lezgin (Dagestanis), the theater, Sollogub believed, along with other new buildings, bridges, streets, and squares, was another indication of the recent and rapid successes of the beneficial influence of European civilization. In contrast to Europe, Sollogub wrote, in Tbilisi the opening of a theater was of great significance, as here the borders of Europe met those of Asia. “Here, in Georgia,

²³ “Poslednie kontserty g. Parisa v Tiflise,” *Kavkaz*, no. 18 (3 May 1847), 70.

²⁴ “Podslushannyi razgovor,” *Kavkaz*, no. 43 (26 October 1846), 170.

²⁵ G. S., “Proshchal’nyi benefis g-na Derbeza,” *Kavkaz*, no. 14 (17 February 1854), 53.

²⁶ *Teatr v Tiflise s 1845–1856 god* (Tiflis: Tipografiia kantseliarii glavnonachal’stvuiushchego grazhdanskoi chast’iu na kavkaze, 1888), 7.

in the East, the theater is, in a word, an event unimaginable for centuries, unheard of and for many still incomprehensible.”²⁷ Because “culture” came from the West in his estimation, the long history of Persian influences upon Georgia’s literary tradition was apparently irrelevant.²⁸ The “Eastern style” of the theater’s interior was complemented by exterior references to Byzantine themes, which reminded Sollogub and both Russians and Georgians of their common Orthodox past. The tsar’s box was covered with medallions which bore inscriptions such as Sudrak, Shakespeare, Calderon, Molière, Goethe, and Griboedov.²⁹ “European music” performed by an Italian opera at the masquerade ball which ushered in the opening of the theater on 12 April 1851 filled the Oriental hall. The Italian opera company had performed in Taganrog, Kharkov, Kiev, and other cities in southern Russia and Ukraine, and remained in Tbilisi to perform 30 times in the winter of 1851–52, and in subsequent years until the outbreak of the Crimean War.³⁰

For many educated Russians, however, Tbilisi continued to fail to measure up to their notion of “Europe.” Too many young and inexperienced actors, singers, and musicians, or aging performers in the twilight of their careers, were finding their way to the Tbilisi stage, and too many theater seats remained empty during the performances.³¹ The public itself, in the view of some Russians, lacked the qualities necessary to fulfill its task in the borderlands. “The theater is a requirement of civilization (*grazhdanstvennost*),” one such critic, writing under the initials N. P., argued; within its walls one could hear the “delicate pulse of education and the noble aspirations of society. Without an understanding of the fine arts there is no exit from ignorance.”³² The continuing prevalence of empty seats at the theater, however, forced N. P. to question the level of education and refinement of educated society in the borderlands. N. P. believed the development of theater paralleled that of civilization generally – prominent in ancient Greece, in decline during the Middle Ages, rediscovered in the Renaissance, and so on. The theater was imported to Tbilisi from Europe, however, having already passed through its childhood and youth. Portions of the Tbilisi public, he was

²⁷ *Teatr v Tiflise*, 65; Count V. A. Sollogub, “Novyi teatr v Tiflise,” *Kavkaz*, no. 29 (17 April 1851), 117. Also see SSSA f. 5, op. 1, 1863–67, d. 109, ll. 27–28.

²⁸ See Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 58–86.

²⁹ *Teatr v Tiflise*, 71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 103–123.

³¹ E. K. S., “Teatral’naia khronika,” *Tiflisskii Vestnik*, no. 215 (5 October 1877), 2; idem, “Teatral’naia khronika,” *Tiflisskii Vestnik*, no. 242 (5 November 1877), 2; I. A. N., “Teatral’naia zametka,” *Kavkaz*, no. 120 (28 May 1878), 1.

³² N. P., “Tiflisskii teatr,” *Kavkaz*, no. 80 (11 October 1859), 443.

forced to conclude, remained in their cultural childhood.³³ Their clapping and shouting at inappropriate moments betrayed their ignorance and their distance from the audiences of Europe.³⁴ For some Russians the expansion of empire was about the expansion of culture, education, and what N. P. referred to as “civilization.”

The development of cultural life indigenous to the region thus became a matter of importance to Vorontsov and the Russians. “Native” imitation of the best that Europe had to offer would confirm that Russian rule was indeed benevolent and an instigator of progress in the borderlands. Theater in the borderlands would reproduce Russia’s own cultural experience, in which its theater was initially “imitative,” as the Directorate of Imperial Theaters proclaimed in 1892, but eventually became an expression of Russian life and caught up with the advanced West.³⁵ Russia’s encounter from the early 19th century with Germany’s Romantic cultivation of indigenous custom was apparently to be reproduced by non-Russian peoples on the frontier. Vorontsov and other officials, of course, could hardly imagine the longer term implications of this promotion of native cultures. In early 1850 a theater was built and a vaudeville presented in Lenkoran, and plans were made to stage Griboedov’s *Woe from Wit. Kavkaz* reminded its readers of the significance of such an event: “Remember where Lenkoran is located – in the southern-most corner of the Russian Empire,” where tigers and wolves roamed. The younger generation appeared to appreciate what the world of Russia had to offer, as the grandsons of the Talysh ruling khan, Mir-Ibragim Talykhanov and Mir-Ali Talykhanov, were participating in the production. “Thank God,” it was reported in *Kavkaz*, that Russians in the Caucasus were spending their time “in entertainment that nourishes the mind and soul and that the natives also participate in this. The faster and sooner they are led along this path the closer they will be to a moral and aesthetic education.”³⁶ Even Muslims and mountaineers far from Tbilisi were part of Vorontsov’s intended audience. The quickest to respond to imperial initiatives were Armenians and Georgians in multiethnic Tbilisi. After a February 1863 play in Armenian, the Society of Armenian Citizens in Tiflis, as an official reported, felt “the need to have a theater in their language.” On 30 September

³³ Ibid., 445.

³⁴ N. P., “Tiflisskii teatr,” *Kavkaz*, no. 81 (15 October 1859), 449-51.

³⁵ Vladimir Petrovich Pogazhev, Anatolii Evgrafovich Molchanov, and Konstantin Andreevich Petrov, *Arkhiv Direktsii Imperatorskikh Teatrov*, vol. 1, otd. 1 (St. Petersburg: Direktsiia Imperatorskikh teatrov, 1892), 1.

³⁶ “Smes’,” *Kavkaz*, no. 12 (11 February 1850), 45.

1864 officials in Tbilisi stipulated that the Armenian community might use the theater one day per week without charge.³⁷

Vorontsov and educated Russians were most proud of the achievements of the Georgians.³⁸ At the invitation of Vorontsov, Prince Giorgi Eristavi presented *Razdel* (*gachra*) a comedy about the life of Georgian landlords, on the stage of the Tiflis Noble Gymnasium in 1850.³⁹ Eristavi had translated *Woe from Wit* into Georgian, and was associated with other Georgian poets and writers who had been greatly influenced by Western literature and culture in the 1830s and 1840s, men such as Aleksandr Chavchavadze, Nikoloz Baratashvili, and Dimitri Kipiani.⁴⁰ When Vorontsov introduced Eristavi to the tsarevich Aleksandr Nikolaevich in Tbilisi in 1850, he supposedly began “I recommend to you, Your Highness, the Georgian Molière.” To this he replied, “I am very glad to hear that the Georgians have their own Molière.”⁴¹ Vorontsov and his family attended the staging of *Razdel*, and the Viceroy was impressed enough to appoint Eristavi to form a permanent Georgian company.⁴² The Georgian company performed their comedy (in Russian) at the Tiflis Theater in early 1851. Theater critics noted certain stylistic defects, but expressed admiration and ethnographic curiosity at the portrayal of Georgian customs, “still to a large extent unknown to us.”⁴³ As a certain Prince T. suggested, the development of Georgian theater was part of the development of Georgian “*obshchestvennost'*,” and hence was worthy of Russian encouragement and direction. He was impressed by the talents of Georgian actors and actresses such as Abramidze, Dvanadze, Japaridze, Tamiev, and Eliozov. In a report to the emperor, Vorontsov stressed that the development of Georgian theater would bring the Georgians closer to the Russians, and have a beneficial influence upon the development of “science and taste, and upon the refinement of [their] morals.” He applauded the fact that Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, he claimed, were frequently heard in Georgian homes and on the streets.⁴⁴

³⁷ SSSA f. 5, op. 1, 1863–67, d. 109, ll. 81, 170–73, 196.

³⁸ *Otchet po upravleniiu kavkazskim kraem za 1849, 1850, i 1851 gody* (Tiflis: Tipografia kantseliarii namestnika kavkazskogo, 1852), 58.

³⁹ *Kavkaz*, no. 5 (18 January 1850), 17–18; Layfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 171.

⁴⁰ Dmitrii Dzhanelidze, *Gruzinskii teatr: S drevneishikh vremen do vtoroi poloviny XIX veka* (Tbilisi: Zariia vostoka, 1959), 336–47.

⁴¹ A. Khakh-ova, “Pervyi Gruzinskii dramaturg (kn. G. D. Eristov),” *Kavkazskii Vestnik*, no. 11 (November 1900), 5.

⁴² *Teatr v Tiflise*, 125–26.

⁴³ “Razdel,” *Kavkaz*, no. 35 (6 May 1850), 137–39.

⁴⁴ *Otchet po upravleniiu kavkazskim kraem*, 61; also cited in *Teatr v Tiflise*, 134.

Not all Russians were enthusiastic about non-Russian contributions to “culture,” however, and some admirers of Italian opera even objected to the Georgian songs that preceded the production.⁴⁵ A decision was made to stage Georgian plays (still in Russian) on separate evenings. The onset of the Crimean War, the accumulation of theater debts, and the departure of Vorontsov resulted in reduced support for the theater. When Nicholas I died in the winter of 1855, the theater was closed for a six-month memorial, and General Nikolai Nikolaevich Murav’ev, Vorontsov’s successor as Viceroy, who was less convinced of the importance of the development of Tbilisi cultural life, curtailed the activities of the theater and the opera. Vorontsov’s parting words to General Read went unheeded.⁴⁶ A single Russian acting company was supported on a reduced budget, and the Georgian company found itself without funds.⁴⁷

The spark had found dry tinder, however, and Georgian theater groups, such as the circle led by Niko Avalishvili, became active again in the 1860s. Amateur plays in Georgian were performed in Kutaisi in 1861, Gori and Khoni in 1865, Telavi in 1867, and in other towns in the 1870s. In 1873, in the village of Bandza in Megrelia, an amateur group performed a Georgian translation of *The Merchant of Venice*. Chavchavadze heralded the emergence of Georgian theater: “Finally,” he said, “we too will have a single social place where we can express our joys in our native language, indulge our failings in our native language, and where we can with the help of our native language take in with a glance our entire life in all its wisdom and expectation.”⁴⁸ Thanks to his prodding and support, among others, a professional Georgian theater was established in 1879.⁴⁹ The troupe performed some 35 times per year, offering plays and adaptations, in Georgian, from Molière, Balzac, Shakespeare, Gogol’, Griboedov, Pushkin, and Ostrovskii.⁵⁰

By the 1870s and 1880s the thriving Georgian-language press served as a regular promoter of Georgian theater and indeed of all things Georgian. Georgians emphasized the importance of the Georgian language in schooling, the arts, literature, and the press, and worried about the preservation of ancient

⁴⁵ Kn. T., “Eshche o gruzinskom teatre,” *Kavkaz*, no. 8 (26 January 1855), 11.

⁴⁶ SPbFIRI RAN f. 36, op. 1, 1855, d. 259, ll. 103-108.

⁴⁷ *Teatr v Tiflise*, 155-60.

⁴⁸ Cited in G. Buknikashvili, *Gruzinskii teatr za sto let* (Tbilisi: Zariia vostoka, 1950), 31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-31; Layfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 185.

⁵⁰ A. Khakhanov, “Gruzinskii teatr (1850-1895),” *Kavkazskaia zhizn’*, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1896), 14-19.

Georgian manuscripts.⁵¹ A Georgian ethnography emerged, as in Russia, from Romantic literary representation dedicated to unearthing the “habits and customs” of the people. Georgians collected folklore, proverbs, and songs, a process that again signified the “awakening of the people.”⁵² “There was a time,” wrote Serge Meskhi in *Droeba*, “when educated youth denigrated all that was Georgian,” and permitted “our [cultural] life to languish.”⁵³ Chavchavadze prodded Georgians to overcome their heritage of fragmentation and diversity, and to imagine themselves in a new way. Was there a Georgia, he asked, or simply a land of Imeretians, Gurians, Megrelians, and Kartvelians? “If Georgian is not their common name, then what is common to all of them?” “[I]f the people of the countryside are not Georgians, then who are they?” he asked.⁵⁴ *Droeba* frequently alerted its readers to events in Italy and Germany in the 1860s and 1870s, with extended attention to issues germane to the Georgian experience, such as regional diversity, separate princely kingdoms, locally raised armies, and so on.⁵⁵

The theater stood at the center of these new questions. Contributors to *Droeba*, *Iveria* and other publications routinely chronicled performances and events in the world of the theater, and followed Chavchavadze in his explicit linking of the emergence of Georgian productions to the flowering of a Georgian national identity. The theater, emphasized a contributor to *Iveria* in 1882, was an example of the “strengthening of our national conscience and the awakening of our motherland.”⁵⁶ Chavchavadze and others praised the work of playwright Giorgi Eristavi, a Pushkin-like figure who managed to evoke the “spoken

⁵¹ b. ketriashvili, “am droebis kartvelebi,” *droeba*, no. 24 (12 August 1866), 1–2; “sakartvelo,” *droeba*, no. 20 (27 May 1872), 1; “kalebis sakhelosno shkola tpilisshi,” *droeba*, no. 3 (22 January 1870), 4.

⁵² a. k., “mtserloba,” *droeba*, no. 33 (31 March 1876), 1. On the emergence of ethnography in Russia, see Nathaniel Knight, “Science, Empire and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845–1855,” in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 108–41.

⁵³ s. meskhi, “droeba’ 66–76,” *droeba*, no. 24 (7 March 1876), 1.

⁵⁴ il. chavchavadze, “zogierti ram,” *droeba*, no. 27 (14 March 1876), 1.

⁵⁵ “utskho kveknebi,” *droeba*, no. 25 (26 June 1870), 3. For other examples of regular reporting on events in Germany and Italy, see *droeba*, no. 14 (3 June 1866), 2; *droeba*, no. 29 (16 September 1866), 2; *droeba*, no. 31 (30 September 1866), 1–2; “politika,” *droeba*, no. 43 (26 October 1867), 1. See also Akaki Surguladze, *I. G. Chavchavadze: Znamenets natsional’no-osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniia gruzinskogo naroda* (Tbilisi: Izdatel’stvo Tbilisskogo universiteta, 1987), 25–26, 42, 106.

⁵⁶ “kartuli teatri,” *iveria*, no. 11 (1882), 90; “teatri da khelovneba,” *iveria*, no. 263 (8 December 1902), 3.

tongue” rather than the literary Georgian of the past in his work.⁵⁷ Theater critics and educated Georgians generally dedicated significant attention to the politics of cultural identity, which in the emerging age of nationalism meant an increasingly critical orientation to the Russian presence in Georgia.

Imperial officials in this later period of what scholars have generally called “Russification” were aware of this new terrain of cultural politics within the empire. To them the early promotion of Georgian culture appeared naive and even somewhat dangerous. In this later age of “Russification” officials were increasingly suspicious of non-Russian expressions of culture. The building that housed the original theater burned in 1874, and was replaced by a new structure that was not finally completed until 1896. Tighter budgets reduced the annual state subsidy for the theater from 48,195 rubles in 1870 to 30,595 in 1896, and rising salaries and expenses left the theater over 70,000 rubles in debt by 1902.⁵⁸ Less interested in the culture and values of the European Enlightenment, Governor-General Prince G. S. Golitsyn associated the theater and other cultural institutions in Tbilisi with an effort to acquaint the “native public” with “Russian literature, Russian music, [and] Russian writers and composers.”⁵⁹ While Vorontsov had worried about isolated and ignorant natives altogether without what he understood as culture, Golitsyn faced a different alternative. “Natives” and especially intellectuals, he complained, in their founding of a local press, literature, and theater, were “striving for the national cultural isolation of the native population.”⁶⁰ Officials in the borderlands took their cue from the last two tsars and their advisers in St. Petersburg, who explicitly rejected historic traditions of imperial identity in favor of a new Russian “national myth,” to refer to the research of Richard Wortman.⁶¹ As was the case previously with Vorontsov and Nicholas I, center and periphery closely intersected: Ilarion Vorontsov-Dashkov, High Commander in the wake of the events of 1905, was previously minister of the court of Alexander III.⁶² Once an outpost and sign of Enlightenment culture

⁵⁷ ilia chavchavadze, “chveni ubeduri mtsibnobroba am saukuneshi,” *droeba*, no. 4 (29 January 1870), 1; a.k., “mtserloba,” *droeba*, no. 33 (31 March 1876), 1. On Chavchavadze generally, see Surguladze, *I. G. Chavchavadze*.

⁵⁸ The theater had always been heavily subsidized, and cost overruns were routine from the beginning. See SSSA f. 5, op. 1, 1869–71, d. 1094, ll. 2–3.

⁵⁹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg) f. 1263, op. 2, 1903, d. 5616, l. 239.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 241.

⁶¹ Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 210–12.

on the savage frontier, the theater increasingly stood for the cultivation of indigenous identity in opposition to empire.

Books and their Many Uses

The first library in Tbilisi, like the theater, emerged from Russia's colonial concerns about the promotion of culture in the borderlands. Georgian book publishing was limited in the 18th century, and frequently interrupted by political catastrophes. Vakhtang VI, the early 18th-century Kartli monarch, founded in Tbilisi the first Georgian publishing house, collected numerous manuscripts, and attempted to create a library. Vakhtang and his supporters escaped the brief and brutal period of Turkish rule from 1723 to 1735 by moving to Russia on Peter I's invitation in 1723. There they continued their literary efforts and published an additional 17 works in Georgian from 1737–44, primarily of religious content, to complement the earlier 20 books published in Tbilisi.⁶³ Book publishing continued in the long reign of Irakli II, monarch of a united Kartli-Kakheti from 1762–98, but the Persian invasion of 1795 interrupted the development of Georgian literary culture and inhibited any meaningful discussions about the development of a library as a source of education and cultural uplift. There was a plan, for example, left by Prince Ioann (the son of the last tsar of Georgia), to establish a public library with separate holdings for religious and secular works. The plan, however, remained on paper: the invasion and destruction of Tbilisi did not allow for the realization of the project, and the library was never founded.⁶⁴

In 1828, Griboedov pursued the matter of the founding of a library in Tbilisi with his like-minded friend Nikolai S. Mordvinov.⁶⁵ Griboedov died the following year, but the idea for the creation of libraries outside the central Russian cities continued within the ministries of St. Petersburg. Mordvinov wrote Arsenii A. Zakrevskii of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in April 1830: "Enlightenment, especially of the people, and in particular regarding agricultural production has seen very limited success Insufficient information exists about various types of science and culture, except in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Odessa, where public reading libraries have been established and where any person, even

⁶³ a. loria and n. gurgeniḏze, *sabiblioteko sakme sakartveloshi* (Tbilisi: metsniereba, 1974), ix; g.i. kiknadze, ed., *kartuli tsigni: bibliografiia (1620–1920)*, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: tsignis palatis gamotsema, 1941).

⁶⁴ loria and gurgeniḏze, *sabiblioteko sakme sakartveloshi*, 148; *ioane bagrationi ḏjuldeba (kartli-kakhetis) sakhelmtsipoebrivi repormeḃis proekti* (Tbilisi: stalinis sakhelobis Tbilis sakhelmtsipouniversiteti, 1957), 57.

⁶⁵ V. V. Uznadze, *Istoriia Tiflisskoi publichnoi biblioteki (1846–1917)* (Tbilisi: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Gruzinskoi SSR, 1957), 71.

of modest means, can make use of books and journals in Russian and foreign languages.”⁶⁶ Zakrevskii supported the suggestions of Mordvinov, and on 5 July 1830, especially convinced of the role of public libraries in the economic development of the country, he issued a special circular to provincial governors to work with local nobles and directors of educational institutions to find means for the founding of provincial libraries. The Ministry of Internal Affairs initially made plans to open 52 libraries, and successfully managed to open 29. Vorontsov was one of the first provincial officials to respond to the initiatives from St. Petersburg, and he contributed to the founding of a library in 1829 in Odessa. The Odessa Public Library was the central book repository for the entire region of New Russia, and became one of the more important libraries in pre-revolutionary Russia.⁶⁷ The imperial state worked to extend its vision of education and enlightenment from the capital cities of the empire to the provinces, and tended to visualize the non-Russian borderland regions as similar in this regard to Russian regions.

Zakrevskii’s circular made it to Tbilisi as well, where local authorities considered but quickly forgot the matter. The circumstances of the region at that time, with the bloody Caucasus War draining resources and attention from the state, did not lend themselves to a consideration of issues such as the opening of a library. Officials instead worried about more basic issues of order and control. Things only changed with the arrival of Vorontsov a decade or so later. As in Odessa, Vorontsov continued with his vision of imperial enlightenment, and he established the first public library in the Caucasus in January 1846. Vorontsov gave the new institution a quick start by purchasing a large collection of books from St. Petersburg. As he explained to the Chair of the Caucasus Committee (and Minister of War) Aleksandr Ivanovich Chernyshev on 31 December 1848: “In Tiflis and throughout the region I did not find one public library. Wishing to form one in Tiflis to spread the desire for reading and to acquaint the population with the benefits of enlightenment, I laid the foundations for a public library through the purchase of the vast and rich library, up to several thousand volumes, of the former rector of St. Petersburg University, Professor Anton Antonovich Degurov.”⁶⁸ Beyond this Vorontsov relied on the support and interest from educated society throughout the region. The library even received book

⁶⁶ Ibid., 23; M. Lazarev, *Rasskaz ob odnoi biblioteke* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo kulturno-prosvetitel’noi literatury, 1950), 19.

⁶⁷ M. Iu. Matveev, “K istorii obrazovaniia regional’nykh bibliotek v Rossii (1830–1917 gg.),” *Problemy natsional’nykh bibliotek i regional’nykh biblioteknykh tsentrov* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskaia natsional’naia biblioteka, 1994), 3: 187–218; Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov*, 109.

⁶⁸ “Vsepodanneishii raport kn. M. S. Vorontsova ot 31-go dekabria 1848 goda,” *Akty Kavkazskoi arkhologicheskoi komissii* (Tiflis, 1885), 10: 856.

contributions from people in other parts of the empire.⁶⁹ In the shadow of the Tiflis Library, smaller libraries also surfaced in the Caucasus: in Stavropol', funded by a group of administrators; in Shemakha, with state support and the support of local administrators; in Temir-Khan-Shura, supported by a local scholarly society; and in Piatigorsk, funded by the Directorate of the Caucasus Mineral Waters.⁷⁰ Russian and non-Russian alike shared a sense of imperial purpose about the significance of education and enlightenment on the frontier regions of the empire.

Gavriil Alekseevich Tokarev, a provincial secretary within the viceregency (*namestnichestvo*) of Vorontsov, was responsible for the initial organization of the library. His primary interest was the collection of numerous works written about the Caucasus. With 500 silver rubles taken from the sale of *Kavkazskii kalendar'* in 1846, Tokarev worked on the composition of an extensive bibliography of the many works about the Caucasus produced by ancient and modern writers. This was no small task, of course, as the region was famous as subject matter for Romantic writers in both Europe and Russia.⁷¹ The results of his two-year long work were a series of bibliographic articles in *Kavkaz* in 1847 and 1848.⁷² As he explained in 1848: "I collected in one place everything of which I was aware Finally, after my initial bibliographic work, I can move to the important work of creating a public library in Tiflis, which will specialize in materials on the region."⁷³ Tokarev donated 48 works in 125 volumes to the library.

Vorontsov appealed to Count Uvarov of the Ministry of Enlightenment for help in gaining access to publications of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, the support of various universities throughout the empire, and various private collections. Some of the more important ones were the collection of the Georgian intellectual Dimitri Kipiani, the 6,846 volumes of Degurov, and 75 works in 242 volumes (primarily in French) belonging to Colonel D. D. Davydov, an adjutant to Vorontsov. In 1847, the library began to subscribe to periodical publications in various fields from the bookseller P. I. Krashennnikov in St. Petersburg (121 titles), from the French bookstore Got'e in Moscow (71 French and English

⁶⁹ sakartvelos sakhelmtsipo muzeumis arkivi (Archive of the Georgian State Museum, Tbilisi, hereafter SSMA), Fond Tiflis Public Library, 1848–1849, dd. 223, 224, 226.

⁷⁰ *Nash kraj: Dokumenty, materialy 1777–1917* (Stavropol', 1977), 376; "Otchet gen. fel'dmarshala kniazia A.I. Bariatinskogo za 1857–1859 gg.," *Akty Kavkazskoi arkhologicheskoi komissii* (Tiflis, 1859), 2: 1326; SSMA, Fond Tiflis Public Library, 1858–61, d. 229, l. 75.

⁷¹ On Russian literature and the Caucasus, see Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁷² G. A. Tokarev, "Ob istochnikakh svedenii o Kavkaze," *Kavkaz* (1847), nos. 27–28; *Kavkaz* (1848), nos. 5, 6, 24, 25, 26.

⁷³ Tokarev, "Ob istochnikakh," *Kavkaz* (1848), no. 26.

titles), and from the German bookstore Arl't in Moscow (11 German, Greek, and Latin titles).⁷⁴

The local Georgian intelligentsia was active as a supportive group for the library.⁷⁵ The promotion of culture, like the imperial service elite, was a multiethnic undertaking. Other local contributors included the Armenian David Arzanov, the Pole Konstantin Orlovskii, and the Ukrainian Sergei Vasil'kovskii.⁷⁶ The early planners explicitly addressed the Georgian intelligentsia: "In Tiflis there is no public library, and young people from the Georgian nobility, having received their initial education, are greatly inhibited by their inability to keep up with the latest material in science and literature. To facilitate this, several members of the Georgian nobility are prepared to donate some 30 silver rubles a year toward the founding of a library."⁷⁷ Their material was kept in the home of Dimitri Kipiani, who served as the organizer.

Formed in 1846, the Tiflis Public Library was prepared 5 June 1848 to welcome its first visitors. Stepan Vasil'evich Safonov, the Director of the Office of the Viceroy, welcomed patrons in *Kavkaz* on 5 June 1848: "The opening of the library allows us to accomplish our primary goal – to provide those who wish with a free source of books."⁷⁸ The library was open every day except Sunday, from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Book and journal procurement continued to progress, so that the collection consisted of 1,300 titles in 3,600 volumes, of which 153 titles in 333 volumes were about the Caucasus.⁷⁹ To house the growing materials, Vorontsov asked Vakhtang Orbeliani to construct a building at his own expense and then rent it to the Tiflis Library. He did so on Aleksandrovskaia Square in the center of Tbilisi, and rented it to the library for 28 years at a yearly cost of 1,200 silver rubles. The new building opened 1 May 1852.

The languages indigenous to the region, including Georgian, were barely represented in the library. The library was conceived in the spirit of respect for Europe and its culture, and intended as a means of extending the virtues of that world to the borderlands of Russia. Russia too, in the conception of most

⁷⁴ Adolf Petrovich Berzhe, *Prodolzhenie kratkogo kataloga Tiflisskoi publichnoi biblioteki s 1861–1865 gg.* (Tiflis: Tipografiia glavnogo upravleniia namestnika kavkazskogo, 1866); SSMA, Fond Tiflis Public Library, 1850–1852, d. 225, l. 58; 1853–1854, d. 226, ll. 10–11, 39, 108.

⁷⁵ Intelligentsia supporters included Zakaria Eristavi, Zakaria Palavanlishvili, Vakhtang Orbeliani, Elizbar Eristavi, Zakaria Orbeliani, Konstantin Dadiani, Aleksandre Onikishvili, Nikoloz Baratashvili, Nikoloz Bezak, Mikhail Tumanishvili, Dimitri Djordjadze, Davit Chavchavadze, Grigol Orbeliani, and Ivane Orbeliani.

⁷⁶ d. i. kipiani, *memuarebi* (Tbilisi: ganatleba, 1930), 104–7.

⁷⁷ Ibid.; Uznadze, *Istoriia Tiflisskoi publichnoi biblioteki (1846–1917)*, 71.

⁷⁸ *Kavkaz* (1848), no. 26.

⁷⁹ G. Tokarev, "Otchet po publichnoi biblioteke pri kantseliarii Namestnika kavkazskogo za 1846–1848 gg.," *Kavkaz*, no. 47 (1848); SSMA f. 3, op. 3, 1848, d. 223, l. 218.

Russians, was unmistakably a “European” culture and hence was continuing Europe’s work of enlightenment on its most distant frontier. The imperial service elite generally included numerous families from Europe, and some of them were particularly important in matters relating to the frontier and the expansion of the empire. Karl von Baer, for example, a German and co-founder of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, visited the library during his trip to the Caucasus in 1855 and expressed his delight with the growing collection.⁸⁰ The first Chief Librarian in Tiflis was the former lector of French at St. Petersburg University and the librarian at the Rumiantsev Museum, Ludwig de Saint Thomas. He was succeeded by his son.

Little was published in the native languages of the region at this time, of course, but the preponderance of European and Russian materials is nonetheless startling, as the following tables illustrate:⁸¹

Table 1.

Linguistic Composition of the Collection of the Tiflis Public Library, 1848

Language of Publication	Quantity of Titles	Quantity of Volumes
Russian	599	1488
French	474	1265
German	112	619
English	46	84
Latin	36	127
Greek	8	12
Polish	5	44
Georgian	4	4
Armenian	3	4
Azerbaijani	3	3
Czech	3	4
Turkish	3	3
Arabic	2	2
Farsi	2	2

These trends continued as the library grew:

Table 2.

Linguistic Composition of the Collection in 1853

Language of Publication	Quantity of Titles	Quantity of Volumes
Russian	1081	2634

⁸⁰ *Nachrichten über Leben und Schriften: des Herrn Geheimrathes D-r Karl Ernst von Baer* (St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1865), 579.

⁸¹ The tables are drawn from Tokarev, “Otchet po publichnoi biblioteke,” *Kavkaz*, no. 47 (1848); and Berzhe, *Prodolzhenie kratkogo kataloga*, xiii–xv.

French	2521	6365
German	217	1004
English	713	1862
Latin	558	858
Greek	51	99
Polish	42	152
Georgian	7	10
Armenian	14	17
Azerbaijani	3	3
Czech	3	4
Turkish	3	3
Arabic	6	14
Farsi	3	3

Russian, French, German, and English, as the tables show, were the languages of the library. While the English language was generally distant from the Russian empire (although Vorontsov himself knew English and his father was Catherine's ambassador to England), French and German complemented Russian as the primary languages of the multiethnic service elite.⁸² In the Caucasus this combination was perhaps best exemplified in the very person of Adol'f Petrovich Berzhe (Bergè). Born in Russia, but of a German mother and a French father, as his name suggests, Berzhe had a long and productive career of imperial service in Tbilisi. He was editor of *Kavkazskii kalendar'*, chargé d'affaires of the Caucasus Department of the Geographic Society, and chairman of the Caucasus Archeological Commission.⁸³ He was the Director of the Tiflis Public Library from 1858 to 1868.

These "Europeans" on the Russian frontier quite comfortably contributed to imperial culture, which was *rossiiskaia* rather than *russkaia*, and included a vision of the enlightened cultural transformation of both provincial Russia and the more distant borderlands. The sign of this transformation was the emergence of a cultural voice among peoples previously unexposed to the experience of "civilization." With extraordinary vigor Russia itself had embarked on a similar path in its relationship to Europe since the 1830s. The imperial state clearly played an important role in the emergence and development of Georgian national identity.⁸⁴ As with the theater, however, Georgians associated with the library

⁸² On the Vorontsov family, see Rhinelander, *Prince Mikhail Vorontsov*.

⁸³ "Otchet o sostoianii i deistviiakh ot dela s 1859 po 1863 god," *ZKOIRGO* (Tiflis, 1864), 6: 9.

⁸⁴ On the "paradoxical" impact of many policies of the Petrine state, see Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 99.

quickly posed questions pertaining to Georgian culture, in this case concerning the dilemmas and weaknesses of Georgian-language publication and the meager Georgian-language holdings of the library. Library officials collected issues of local language newspapers from the Caucasus, such as *Droeba* and *Iveria* in Georgian, the first but short-lived Turkic-language newspaper in the Russian empire (*Ākinchi* from Baku), as well as Armenian publications.⁸⁵ Georgians portrayed the publication of a new book in Georgian as a cultural event, of significance for the broader questions of Georgian identity and the development of Georgian culture.⁸⁶ Georgians sometimes contrasted their own “negligence” to Armenian efforts at self-strengthening.⁸⁷ The strong economic and demographic presence of Armenians in Tbilisi perhaps pushed a Georgian nobility in comparative decline to emphasize its special capabilities in matters pertaining to high culture.⁸⁸

Vorontsov was an important patron of borderland cultural institutions and scholarly societies whose chief purpose was the representation of a modern empire divorced from the heritage of conquest. In 1869, the administration of the library was combined with that of the Caucasus Museum, both directed by Gustav Radde, another transplanted European scholar active on diverse Russian frontiers in the imperial service. The Caucasus Museum, founded 1867, provided artifacts throughout the imperial era to the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg and other institutions that allowed for the exposition of the imperial purpose in the borderlands.⁸⁹ Georgians themselves responded sympathetically to this enlightened version of empire, and to the imperial interest in the

⁸⁵ SSMa, Fond Caucasus Museum, op. 8, 1876, d. 20, ll. 35–57. On the emergence of non-Russian intelligentsias and the press in the Caucasus, see Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992); Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23–36; Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *La presse et le mouvement national chez les musulmans de Russie avant 1920* (Paris: Mouton, 1964), 35–43; Austin Jersild, “Rethinking Russia from Zardob: Hasan Melikov Zardabi and the ‘Native’ Intelligentsia,” *Nationalities Papers*, 27: 3 (1999), 503–17; Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 113–43; Layfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 139–232; Suny, *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 1–18.

⁸⁶ “bibliografia,” *droeba*, no. 19 (19 May 1872), 1; “akhali ambavi,” *iveria*, no. 83 (28 April 1887), 1; *iveria*, no. 253 (23 November 1895), 1.

⁸⁷ ingalo janashvili, “istoriuli da geograpiuli agtsera heretisa,” *mogzauri*, nos. 1–4 (1903), 65.

⁸⁸ According to A. S. Nadezhin, “Dvizhenie naseleniia v Zakavkazskom krae,” *Sbornik svedenii o kavkaze* (Tiflis, 1885), 9: 1, the Tbilisi population of 86,455 people in 1880 included 38,513 Armenians, 22,285 Georgians, and 19,804 Russians.

⁸⁹ SSSA f. 5, op. 1, 1880, d. 6085, ll. 1–2. See Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, forthcoming 2002).

promotion of education and high culture in a land far from Europe. After Vorontsov's death in 1856, the Georgian nobility and the numerous scholarly societies donated funds for the construction of a monument in his honor in Tbilisi, begun in 1860 and finished in 1866.⁹⁰ Still in 1893 Giorgi Tsereteli remained enthusiastic about the crucial work of Vorontsov in preparing the "soil" (*niadagi*) for subsequent Georgian cultural development.⁹¹ Even today, as Georgians rethink their relationship to Russia in a time of nation-building after the demise of the 20th-century multiethnic political and cultural entity, they tend to refrain from criticizing the viceregency of Mikhail Vorontsov.



The emerging Georgian educated society (*sazogadoeba*) of the 1850s and 1860s possessed a strong sense of purpose regarding this imperial vision of the civilizing process on a distant frontier of "Europe." For both Russians and non-Russians the "imagined community" of significance in the borderlands from roughly the 1840s to the 1880s was the imperial rather than the national community.⁹² This imperial community was to be united by common conceptions of high culture, enlightenment, and progress. The path to enlightenment, however, meant the extension of the Romantic work of culture-building to the non-Russian peoples, which resulted in time in explicit attention to the cultivation, as we have shown in this case, of a specifically Georgian identity. This Georgian cultural nativism, Miroslav Hroch's "Phase A" stage of national development that quickly hinted at the next stage of more overtly political activity ("Phase B"), was safely conducted within the empire.⁹³ In this process the imperial state provided the Georgians with important resources, but also important limitations. Early promoters of cultural institutions in the borderlands visualized enlightenment, while accessible to all peoples, as something by definition associated with the high culture and languages of the West. Russia's promotion of this version of culture in its eastern borderlands illustrated its own "Western" identity, and justified its colonial presence. As we have shown, however, in matters of culture the newly enlightened Georgians quickly posed new questions about national identity and Georgian

⁹⁰ Shcherbinin, *Biografiia general-fel'dmarshala kniazia M. S. Vorontsova*, 354. The monument was destroyed after the revolution.

⁹¹ g. tsereteli, "ormotsda sami tseli kartulis teatrisa," *kvali*, no. 2 (10 January 1893), 11; also a. k., "mtserloba," *droeba*, no. 32 (28 March 1876), 3.

⁹² The phrase of course refers to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁹³ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22–23. See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 130; and idem, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 2–19.

culture within the empire. Georgians appropriated concepts, traditions, and institutions for themselves and for their own purposes in a way that surprised and sometimes alarmed imperial officials. Tensions increased in the later era of “Russification,” when imperial officials seemed to abandon the heritage of the multiethnic empire and service elite and instead explicitly identified themselves and the state with ethnic Russians and Russian culture. Non-Russian “enlighteners” and cultivators of indigenous custom now found themselves in an ambiguous relationship with the imperial state and its culture. Georgian nation-builders today struggle with a similar ambiguity in relation to the legacy of the Soviet state, which featured a multiethnic society and administrative elite that offered both promise and impediment to the nationalities.

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