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## **A Historical Survey of the Georgian–Iranian Relations in the Nineteenth Century**

**George Sanikidze**

The G. Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies, Tbilisi  
The I. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

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### **Abstract**

Various problems concerning Georgian–Iranian relations during 19th century are discussed in this article. Georgia's incorporation into the Russian empire at the beginning of the century inevitably meant curtailing the sphere of influence of Iran over east Georgia, but even under these circumstances the relations between the two countries were not severed. After considering the historical background and the climate that took shape during the new phase in Georgian–Iranian relations, we turn to economic relations. In the nineteenth century, Georgia and its capital gradually became a transit route for Iranian goods entering Russia and Europe, and vice versa. The social life and the cultural activities of the Iranian community of Tbilisi are discussed in the final section of the article.

### **Keywords**

Georgia, Iran, South Caucasus, Tbilisi, Russian-Iranian wars

The nineteenth century marks the beginning of an entirely new era in the history of Georgian–Iranian relations. The course of development was primarily the result of Georgia's incorporation into the Russian empire, which inevitably meant curtailing the sphere of influence of Iran over east Georgia. The relations between the two countries were not severed but acquired several new aspects. First and foremost, the relations were of economic nature, as Georgia and its capital had gradually become a transit route for Iranian goods entering Russia and Europe, and vice versa. The second aspect involved the filtering of European and Russian ideas as well as cultural and technical advancements to Iran through Georgia. Yet another significant aspect was the social and cultural activity of the Iranian community of Tbilisi. These aspects of Georgian–Iranian relations are considered in turn after describing their historical background and political context.

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### The Political Framework

South Caucasus, and east Georgia in particular, were high on the agenda of the Iranian foreign policy at the end of the eighteenth century. The Russian-Iranian relations over the cardinal issue of Georgia had been somewhat problematic even before the annexation of east Georgia, i.e. the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti. Following the Iranian invasion of Georgia in 1795 by the notorious Agha Mohammad Khan, Russia would attempt for years to convince Iran to give up its territorial claims to east Georgia.

In November 1799 an auxiliary Russian legion commanded by General Lazarev was deployed in Georgia under the terms of the Treaty of Giorgievsk. The stationing of this particular contingent was followed by the arrival of Russia's representative Kovalenski. Kovalenski and Lazarev took advantage of the weakness of power of King Giorgi XII and gradually started to interfere with the internal affairs of Kartli and Kakheti. Russia thus gained a foothold in Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

In the same year, prior to the annexation of the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti in that year, the Russia's representative at the Georgian court Kovalenski dispatched his envoy (Merabishvili) to Iran in order to deliver Russia's official stance on the issue of Georgia. According to this position, Georgia had become a protectorate of Russia after the signing of the treaty of 1783; Iran had to come to terms with this fact and was expected not to harm good relations with Russia in this regard.<sup>2</sup> In his reply to Kovalenski, Fath-'Ali Shah's first vizier, Hāji Ebrāhim wrote: "Georgia has never been Russia's dominion. Georgia, Kakheti and Tbilisi have belonged to Iran from time immemorial. Only Erekle<sup>3</sup> managed to take it away from Iran and you are well aware how severely he was punished for it; the wrath of Āghā Mohammad Khan had been unleashed upon Georgia... The treaty signed by Erekle with Russia has no validity. For instance, if any of Russia's subordinate nations voluntarily decided to side with the Iranian ruler and signed a treaty with him, would such a treaty be valid? It will never be Russia's dominion... The throne of Iran is consolidated at present, it has a ruler who does not intend to transfer the countries in hand to others." (Dubrovin, *Istoriya*, IV, pp. 303-304)

Iran was trying to reach agreement with the Georgian king by bypassing Russia's representatives. These tactics seem to explain the fact that, while

<sup>1</sup> For the Establishment of the Russian Authority in Georgia and its consequences see: Burnashev; Butkov; Dubrovin (1871-88, 1897); Dumbadze; Lang; Markova (1966); Salia; Samsonadze; Sharashendze; Shengelia.

<sup>2</sup> Sharashendze, pp. 69-70.

<sup>3</sup> Erekle (Irakli, Heraklius) II (1720-1797), King of the kingdom of Kartli (1744-1762) and the united kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti (1762-1797).

Kovalenski's envoy (Merabishvili) was being delayed in Iran, the Shah dispatched his representative with the purpose of conducting confidential negotiations with King Giorgi XII of Kartli and Kakheti. In 1799, before Merabishvili's return to Tbilisi, the Shah's envoy had an audience with King Giorgi XII and handed him an edict. The Shah demanded that the Georgian king acknowledge Iran's supremacy and send his son, David, to the Shah's court (Tsagareli, pp. 156-57) as a token of loyalty. The Iran's representative urged King Giorgi XII to comply with the Shah's proposal or face invasion by Iran. (Dubrovin, *Istoriya*, IV, p. 300)

In the same period, Tbilisi assumed a significant place in the Russian-Persian relations. The diplomatic relations between Russia and Iran were established in Tbilisi at the end of the eighteenth century. The relations continued into the first Russo-Persian war (1804-1813). The capital of Georgia had become "the military highway" for the Russians heading for Iran, as well as a place where diplomatic encounters took place. (Natchkebia 2001, p. 200) In the same period, Georgia was to lose its independence. When King Giorgi XII died in December 1800, the Russian Czar, Paul I, made the most of the situation and incorporated Kartli and Kakheti into the Russian Empire in January 1801. Under an edict of the Czar Paul I, the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti was abolished and declared a province of Russia.

Following the annexation of the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti, Russia became a direct neighbour of Iran. A new phase had started in the Georgian-Iranian relations. The Georgian political elite were divided. Some supported accession to the Russian empire, while others hoped to regain the country's independence by using the connections with Iran. Iran, for its part, envisaged regaining control over east Georgia. If this were to happen, Kartli and Kakheti would be granted much greater independence than within the Russian empire, based on the realpolitik of the time. Concerned about the establishment of the Russian rule in Kartli and Kakheti, Iran was looking for ways to dislodge Russia from Georgia. In June 1803, the son of Erekle II, Prince Alexander, who aspired to the throne through an anti-Russian uprising aiming at Georgia's secession from Russia with Iran's assistance (Orjonikidze; Bendianishvili, pp. 73-79), had an audience with the Iranian Crown Prince, 'Abbās Mirzā, in Tabriz. That same year, Grigori XII's son, Teimuraz, also fled to Iran from Tbilisi.

Fath-ʿAli Shah assisted the Georgian princes, including Alexander, in every possible way. According to an old custom,<sup>4</sup> he even granted a title of king to

<sup>4</sup> During the Safavid period, the kings and governors of the eastern Georgia were nominated by Savafid Shahs, and were given the title of the "*vāli of Gorjestān*".

another Georgian prince, Iulon. He also called on King Solomon of Imereti (west Georgia) and Sherip Pasha of Akhaltsikhe to turn against the Russians. It is worth noting that there existed a Persian-Turkish joint plan of action against Russia in South Caucasus, but its implementation was impeded by the border dispute between Iran and Turkey. In August 1802 princes Iulon and Parnaoz, who had fled to Imereti, gathered troops and attempted to invade Kartli and Kakheti. At the same time the Iranian army approached the borders of Irevān Khanate. Iran officially declared war on Russia on March 24, 1804. The Iranian historian, Nāser Nājem, notes: "The root cause of the Russo-Persian tensions was Georgia." (Nājem, p. 40) He then goes on to explain: "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." (Ibid., p. 51)

Georgian princes—Iulon and Parnavaz from western Georgia, and Alexander and Teimuraz from Persia, tried to organize the resistance of Muslim Khans of Caucasian regions, highlanders and the Georgian nobility against the Russian authority. (Berdenishvili, II, p. 320) At that time, the Shah's representative, a certain Ya'qub Beg, arrived in Tbilisi and delivered a letter from the Iranian vizier, Mirzā Shafī, to the commander-in-chief of the Russian army in Georgia, General Tsitsianov. The letter contained the Iranian government's demand for the withdrawal of the Russian army from Georgia; otherwise Iran threatened to advance on Georgia. (Quzānlu, *Tārikh*, pp. 695-96) By that time, however, the Russians had established a substantial military presence in east Georgia, and dislodging them was probably impossible.

Iranian leaders continued to seek an alliance with rebel princes of Georgia. In May 1804, Prince Iulon was visited by the Shah's envoy who informed him that the Iranian army was ready to advance on Georgia, and the Georgian princes had to prepare for battle. (Dubrovin, *Istoriya*, IV, p. 346) However, the rebel princes, Parnaoz and Iulon, were soon captured and sent to Russia. Prince Alexander, with the Iranian army on his side, engaged the Russian army under Tsitsianov. At the beginning it looked as though the scales of victory would tip in favour of Alexander, but after the final battle at Echmiadzin, Tsitsianov emerged as a victor. Despite Tsitsianov's assassination during a siege of Baku, the well-equipped and better trained Russian army managed to take over almost the entire East Caucasus. (Sharashenidze, pp. 30-35)

After the assassination of a Russian general, Lazarev, by Mariam, the last queen of Georgia, Prince Teimuraz, the son of Giorgi XII, fled to Iran. He remained in Iran from 1803 to 1810. Teimuraz was in direct contact with

representatives of the French military mission, and was appointed commander of the artillery branch of the Azeri regular army. However, he later fled from Iran and defected to Russia. He settled in St. Petersburg in 1810, and attained great success in scientific activities. (Sharadze; Meskhia; Gonikishvili)

During Napoleonic wars, the so-called Treaty of Finkenstein was signed between Iran and France.<sup>5</sup> Iran had turned away from England and allied itself with France over the central issue of South Caucasus generally, and of Georgia in particular. One of the key points under the Treaty of Finkenstein was the restoration of Iran's supremacy over east Georgia. 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.<sup>6</sup> However, only 65 days later, as a result of the peace treaty of Tilsit, 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. (Natchkebia, 2008, p. 109)

Prince Alexander continued to fight against the Russians in the ensuing years as well. Following the establishment of the Russian rule, he became a leader of Georgia's pro-independence resistance and didn't give up fighting until his death. In 1812, Prince Alexander's (and other Georgian princes') objective was a revolt in Kartli and Kakheti and the blocking of the Georgian military highway. Iran was expected to assist Alexander in the restoration of the kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti. The Kakhetian revolt of 1812 against the Russian domination, though eventually defeated, was a serious challenge to the imperial authority. (Markova 1951; Khantadze; Gelashvili)

By this time peace talks between Russia and Iran had ended without success. A temporary truce expired, and Abbās Mirzā decided to join forces with Prince Alexander and advance on Tbilisi to dislodge the Russians, but he was outstripped by the Russians. On November 19-20, 1812, as a result of a sudden offensive at Aslanduz, 'Abbās Mirzā's army was defeated. Alexander continued his resistance, but without success. He was forced to flee to Dagestan and later to Iran. In accordance with the old tradition mentioned above, the Shah gave him the title of the "Vāli of Gorjestān". Alexander died in Iran in

<sup>5</sup> For the Treaty of Finkenstein and the place of Georgia in this treaty, see Natchkebia (2008); Amini (1995, 1999); Ghaffāri.

<sup>6</sup> Nājem (pp. 96-97) notes: "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."

1844, and is buried in an old Christian church near Teheran, outside the gates of the Shah 'Abd al-'Azim shrine. (Sharashenidze, p. 174)

Under the Golestān Treaty signed after the 1804-1813 Russo-Persian war, Iran surrendered its claims to Kartli and Kakheti, and this signaled an end of Iran's interference with political affairs of Georgia. After the next war, 1826-28, Iran conceded Russia's sovereignty over Georgia yet again under the Turkmenchai Treaty. (Shengelia, pp. 55-72)

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 'Abbās Mirzā: "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, p. 118) The Persian pretense to empire proved fallow despite Āghā Mohammad Khan's temporary subjugation of the eastern Caucasus. (Kashani-Sabet, p. 21)

The border between Iran and Russia was defined under the 1813 Treaty of Golestān. In East Transcaucasia, Iran retained two khanates—those of Irevān, and Nakhjevān. Iran gave up territories occupied by Russia during the war. Under the same treaty, Russia was entitled to the territories, which previously had been under the Turkish control. This applied to the provinces of west Georgia—Imereti, Guria, Samegrelo and Abkhazia. When Iran recognized the inclusion of these regions within the state of Russia, the Iran-Turkish alliance treaty was rendered effectively null and void due as Turkey had claimed these territories. After signing Treaty of Golestān, the Iran-Turkish relations deteriorated and even border conflicts happened between the two countries.

After suffering defeat in the second war with Russia during 1826-1828, Iran was forced by the terms of the the Turkmenchai Treaty to give up other regions in the Transcaucasia, and finally surrendered its claim to east Georgia. According to Paragraph 5 of the treaty, "His Majesty the Shānanshāh of Iran, on behalf of himself and his descendants, decrees that as a token of solid friendship with the Emperor of Russia, the dominions which... are situated between the Caucasus Range and the Caspian Sea be awarded to Russia." (Binā, p. 59) The second round of the Russo-Persian wars not only cost Iran Georgia, Irevān, and Nakhjevān, but also imposed on the country a debilitating war indemnity. (Kashani-Sabet, p. 22) The Treaty also set the tone of Russo-Iranian relations down to World War I, and made manifest Persia's inability to challenge Russia's supremacy in Georgia and the Caucasus. (Hitchins, p. 469) Political relations between Iran and Georgia were disrupted for a long time thereafter. The remaining ties were primarily of an economic and cultural nature.

### **Economic Relations**

Close economic relations between Georgia and Iran had had a long history prior to the nineteenth century. For long, Europeans had paid attention to Georgia, and to its capital, Tbilisi in particular, as the best transit route for trade with Iran, although effective steps regarding transit trade were not taken until the nineteenth century. In the 1760s, the French traveler, Peyssonel (p. 153), 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." During the 1750s and 1760s, up to 200 carts loaded with merchandise would leave Tbilisi daily; some of these were bound for Iranian towns, primarily Tabriz. (Salia, p. 365)

Towns of west Georgia, including Kutaisi, also had established trade relations with Iran. According to Catholic missionary Archangelo Lamberti "Kutaisi is a good trading town, because it is located in a place easily accessible on all sides by merchants... Precious Iranian wool, coloured Indian cloth, leather, smoked fish from the Caspian, caviar and spices are delivered by Kartlinians and Iranians coming from Kartli." (Lamberti, p. 26; Katsitadze, p. 21) According to another missionary Don Juzeppe da Milano, the prince of Samegrelo acted as a broker between Iran and West European traders in the business of selling Iranian silk. (Ibid.)

Iran had exported raw silk from Georgia since the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Foreign traders (as well as local ones) bought fabric of Georgian silk in Tbilisi and resold it at a profit in south-eastern countries. Among the exported raw materials red dye in particular deserves a mention. By the end of the eighteenth century, the annual worth of red dye exported to Persia and Turkey amounted to ten thousand Rubles. (Dumbadze and Guchua, I, p. 357) Goods imported from Iran were much more diverse. Iranian goods were imported to Georgia by both Iranian and local merchants. Georgian documentary sources provide ample information regarding these goods. Items made of Iranian fabric feature quite often in these documents. The sources make reference to both ordinary and precious fabric. This fabric was being manufactured in the workshops of Yazd, Gilan, Isfahan, Tabriz, Kashan, Khoi and other Iranian towns. It is evident that the needs of Georgian feudal aristocracy were being met primarily by high quality foreign products; for this reason precious Iranian fabric (or garments made of this fabric) feature extensively in the books of dowries of nobility women. In the Georgian documents related to the end of the eighteenth century frequent reference is made

to the Khoi lain,<sup>7</sup> Isfahan calico, Ganja *sheidish*,<sup>8</sup> Tabriz taffeta, Kashan blue *sheidish*, Isfahan *charda*,<sup>9</sup> Kholi calico, Kashan *charda*, and Tavriz *charda*.” (Javakhisvili, III, pp. 195-197, 200, 202-203) During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, precious stones were also imported to Georgia from Iran. Georgian dowry books and lists of goods often feature gems of Iranian origin: the Nishaburi turquoise, and Badakhshani ruby, sapphire, pearls and emerald. Remarkable leather goods were also imported from Iran, as were famous Iranian carpets.

Georgia was also engaged in international trade with countries of Near East and Europe through Iranian towns. According to the Russian author, Burnashev (p. 47), Georgian merchants exported Russian goods to the Persian and Indian markets via Georgia, while the quantity of inbound goods imported by them was much larger. Trade with Iran remained extensive after Georgia's incorporation into the Russian empire, while old conventional practices continued. Caravans heading for far away lands were convoyed by armed Georgian detachments, commanded by the so-called *caravānbāshi*, who received their pay according to the number of carts loaded with goods (one Ruble per cart). The *caravānbāshi* detachments continued to exist until 1817, when they were replaced by the Russian troops. (AKAK, V, pp. 1, 8)

The situation didn't change after the Russo-Persian war broke out. Despite the war, the border between Persia and Russia remained open and commercial relations were not disrupted. “It should be noted in particular that during the last Russo-Persian war trade with Georgia did not cease at all. Caravans continued to ply in Tbilisi, as during peacetime.” (Natchkebia 2001, pp. 80-81) Goods exported from Georgia to Iran and Turkey included manufactured Russian goods delivered from the markets of Moscow, Makariev and other Russian towns by Tbilisi traders, as well as locally produced gold and silver lace, fabric embroidered with Georgian brocades, and large quantities of red dye. (AKAK, IV, #37) However, at the beginning of the century, however, Tbilisi merchants did not have close trade links with the Russian market. Goods imported from Persia and Turkey still dominated the Georgian market. The Russian commander-in-chief in the Caucasus, General Tormasov notes that the local merchants hardly needed to travel to Russian towns as their business was solely connected with Iran and other Asian countries. (Ibid.) Merchants would arrive in Georgia from the neighbouring khanates and Persian and Turkish provinces, bringing merchandise from their countries. The annual

<sup>7</sup> Homespun dark-blue cotton.

<sup>8</sup> Woman's trousers.

<sup>9</sup> Canopy, baldachin.

turnover of goods at the time, including silk, cotton, fabric made of silk, cotton and flax, sugar, coffee, spices, steel, lead and other small articles imported from Asian countries to Georgia amounted to 800,000 Rubles (in silver). According to records of 1812, basic commodities and luxury items were being imported from Iran in large quantities. Goods exported to Iran from Georgia included fur, silk and cotton fabric, sackcloth, black agate and wax. Georgian linen interwoven with gold was particularly in demand. Close trade links are also evidenced by the fact that the Persian silver coin 'Abbāsi (*Abazi* in Georgia) (80 French centime) was in circulation throughout all provinces of the Transcaucasia during this period. (Dumbadze, p. 89-92)

It should be noted, however, that up until the war, Tbilisi did not feature as a trade and transit route between the East and West. The city assumed this function after the war. In this regard France, which sought to exclude England from the markets of the East, was particularly interested. After signing the Treaty of Finkenstein (May 4, 1807) General Gardanne 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. (Natchkebia 2001) The French consulate opened in Tbilisi specifically for the purpose of making use of the Georgian territory for trade with the East. The French consul, Jacques-François 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 1826; 1987, p. 36)

Following the truce of 1813, trade with Iran improved. Under the Treaty of Golistān, customs-duties imposed on goods imported from Iran were as little as five percent. Preferential duties and almost free trade allowed the local traders to accrue financial capital. People living along the main transit route (Redut-Kale-Tbilisi-Baku-Iran) were afforded an opportunity to make money. The supply needs of the Russian troops deployed in the Transcaucasia, the connection with French capital and rivalry with England, but above all the need to consolidate its position in Georgia, compelled Russia to introduce "free trade" temporarily. The object of trade with Asia was seen by Russia at the time thus: Russia must interpose itself in the European trade with Asia. By virtue of its geographical position, it should become a transit country and take advantage of the turnover of goods between Europe and Asia. Following a gradual conquest of South Caucasus, the idea of linking the trade routes of the Black Sea and those of the Caspian was again revived. 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. "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. (Gamba 1987, p. 235)

Thus the law on transit envisaged much lower duties on transit goods in both directions compared to the Russian imperial tariff (25-30 percent). 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 Russian leaders of the time assumed that by expanding domestic production they would be able, within ten years, to satisfy consumer demand which tended to favour European goods. 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, p. 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.) Persians also traded there. (Mamatsashvili, p. 140) Redut-Kale was destroyed during the Crimean War.<sup>10</sup>

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

<sup>10</sup> For the importance of Redut-Kale for commercial relations between East and West see Pachkoria; Spaskii-Avtonomov, VIII, pp. 21-33.

interests. In the mid-1820s, the French consul 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; English 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 1826, II, p. 159)

Persian goods passing through the Tbilisi custom-house during the period of preferential customs-tariff primarily consisted of the following: cotton, coarse calico, braids, woolen quilts, and linen interwoven with gold, *daraia*,<sup>11</sup> wool, shawls, carpets, thick felt, silk fabric and mixture, various fur-skins and salt. (AKAK, VI, pp. 1, 227) In 1827, the worth of European goods passing through the Tbilisi custom-house was 383,090 Rubles, and that of Persian goods, 1,116,696 Rubles in silver. (AKAK, VII, p. 132) During the ten-year period of preferential customs-tariff, the annual average turnover of goods amounted to 1,700,000 Rubles. (Duckaussie, p. 410) At the end of the term of preferential customs-tariff in 1831, “The Caucasus Trade Depot” was established in Tbilisi. The activity of this commercial unit was aimed at the intensification of trade relations with Iran. “Iranian merchants who export foreign goods to their country via the Constantinople and Trabzon routes will be able to purchase the required quantities of the same goods in Tbilisi, and they will come to this city increasingly often; and finally, the European trade, which is based on price competition will wear off, since the goods exported to Iran from Tbilisi will be cheaper.” (Gugushvili, pp. 261-62)

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, p. 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

<sup>11</sup> Raw silk cloth; silk shawl.

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. Apart from smuggled goods, British goods, mostly cotton fabric, were also entering the Transcaucasia in large quantities under the brand of Iranian goods. England was shipping half-finished cotton products to Iran. After the final treatment there these products were branded as Iranian goods and easily delivered to Georgia and Transcaucasia by paying five percent customs-duties. These goods were cheaper and better than Russian cotton goods, which were squeezed out of the Georgian market. By 1843 the worth of goods delivered in this way had reached 350,000 Rubles. (Dumbadze, p. 914) English calico and cotton not only squeezed out the similar Russian products, but also partly changed local production. For instance the worth of cotton goods imported by Russia from Iran in 1824 had amounted to 2,170,000 Rubles in silver, whereas in 1842 it reached 7,000,000—, i.e. instead of increasing supplies of Russian textiles to the Iranian market, the reverse happened and the sale of Iranian goods on Russia's home markets increased." (*AKAK*, IX, pp. 662-63)

The expansion of British commerce was encouraged by the fact that Mohammad Shah Mohamed issued a decree in 1836, which granted them the right to pay five percent customs-duties on the declared price of goods imported to Iran, i.e. the same right which was granted to Russian traders under the Treaty of Turkmenchai. (Rozhkova, pp. 170-90) It was evident that the introduction of punitive tariffs by Russia was a failure. Russia had closed the Transcaucasian markets for itself, but because of low levels of industrial development it was unable to supply these markets with its own production, and as a result the Transcaucasia was flooded with smuggled goods and goods delivered via Iran. This caused the decline of Russo-Persian trade. Even under these circumstances, however, trade connections with Iran were maintained. For instance in 1838 "Trade with Iran Partnership" was set up in Tbilisi (primarily by Armenian merchants) with the purpose of supplying Iran with manufactured Russian goods, mostly textiles, and to import required raw material for Russian mills. However, this undertaking did not have much success. (Gugushvili, p. 161)

Under the circumstances, the Russian authorities were compelled to take certain measures to improve the situation. The governor-general in the Transcaucasia Aide-de-Camp, General Neidgardt, concluded that trade rules established in 1831 had failed to meet expectations. According to him: "For the purpose of redirecting the whole busy trade between Trabzon and Persia over

to Tbilisi, we need to introduce toll-free transit on Persian goods along the Baku-Tbilisi-Redut-Kale route. We are aware that merchants in Persia trade European goods especially for Gilanian silk, bales of which are currently transported from Persia to Turkey—toward Trabzon. Under the toll-free transit conditions, merchants will naturally choose the Tbilisi direction.” (*POCIA*, f. KK, 1845, doc. #134, part IV, pp. 60-64; Gugushvili, p. 88)

In a review of Russia’s trade with the Transcaucasia prepared in 1844, one can read: “The current state of this trade has been determined by the two measures which were taken by the government in 1828 and 1831. These were 1) The “perpetual” rule established under the Treaty of Turkmenchai which specified that only five percent customs-duties would be levied on all Iranian goods delivered to the Transcaucasia, and 2) The application of Russia’s so-called European extremely protectionist and essentially punitive customs-duties at all ports of the Black Sea from Poti to Anapa since 1831. (*AKAK*, IX, p. 662) Under the law of 1846, toll-free traffic was allowed for European transit goods going from the ports of Redut-Kale and Sokhumi-Kale to Persia via the Tbilisi-Nakhjevān route, and on Persian transit goods going from Baku to Europe via Redut-Kale and Sokhumi-Kale. This move was above all directed against the Turkish route. (Gugushvili, p. 26) By reopening the Transcaucasia as a transit point in the Iran-Europe trade, the Russian empire hoped to increase customs revenues again.

In 1848, additional provisions took effect under which sale of European and Persian transit goods, including colonial goods, was allowed only in Tbilisi, needless to say after making preliminary declaration and paying the specified customs-duties. The Imperial decree of 1850 explicitly stated that: “the rules, which have been established for transiting foreign goods to Persia via the Transcaucasia shall from now on apply, without exception, to all goods sent to Tbilisi, and no customs-duties are to be levied at Redut-Kale and Sokhumi-Kale. Whereas transit goods were earlier allowed to remain at the Tbilisi custom-house without paying customs for up to six months, this term shall now be extended to one year from entry at the Black Sea ports. Upon expiry of this term, customs-duties shall be collected in Tbilisi on all foreign goods, unless they are sent en route to Persia.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 28-29)

In addition, the first article of the new transit rules established in 1852 stated: “European and colonial goods going to Persia can be transited via the Transcaucasia without paying customs from Redut-Kale, Sokhumi-Kale and Tbilisi—by the Yerevan road to the Persian border;” and its second article: “It is allowed to transit Asian goods bound for Europe without paying customs by the same road.” (*POCIA*, f. LL, 1852, doc. #279, pp. 1-119; Gugushvili, p. 73) It is worth noting that the main items of import from Iran during the 1850s were cotton and silk fabric. As a result of these measures, the flow of

Iranian goods increased not only into Europe, but also to Russian towns. At the end of the 1850s, Persian goods of great worth were being exported into the inner provinces of Russia, primarily the Novgorod market, from the Transcaucasia. (*CIAR*, f. 40, desc. 1, doc. 14, pp. 206, 417) Turnover of goods increased particularly in the 1860s. From 1863 onward, transit of goods from Turkey to Persia along the Erzurum road shifted to the Transcaucasia due to the fact that Turkey had established “new quarantine rules” on the Persian border. After this, the Transcaucasia transit trade developed rapidly.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Tbilisi became a major telegraph and postal junction, linking the Caucasus and Russia with Iran. (*Central State Historical Archive of Georgia*, f. 11, c. 2602, II. 97-99; f.11, c. 7343, I, 53; Ter-Oganov, p. 211) In 1864, the governor-general of the Transcaucasia, General Field Marshal Mikhail Romanov, wrote in a letter to the Caucasus Committee of St. Petersburg that the Azeri administration of Persia had given an order in December 1863 to “redirect all merchant transport, including passengers and state mail going to Europe and on their way back to the Tbilisi and Poti routes, and asked for our assistance in enforcing this order.” (*POCIA*, f. KK, doc. #170, pp. 1-2) Extension of the network of railways led to a significant increase in trade and transit connections. Following construction of the Poti<sup>12</sup>-Tbilisi railway (1872), transit goods delivered from Poti to Tbilisi were sent to Persia via: 1. the Tbilisi-Irevān-Nakhjevān-Julfa route and then on to Tabriz 2. Tbilisi-Baku,<sup>13</sup> and then goods were shipped onto the desired Persian ports and other trading centres. (Gersevanov, III, pp. 565-601)

The situation changed in the 1880s. In 1883, Russia cancelled South Caucasus transit route for the purpose of increasing marketability of Russian goods. This measure was somewhat similar to the decree of 1832, although this time Russian goods more marketable, and there were other possibilities to trade with Iran. A ban on transit via the Transcaucasia blocked off shipments of European goods to Iran and resulted in an increased marketability of Russian goods in northern Persia, thus increasing Russia's exports. The significance of Georgia as a transit route between Iran and Europe was therefore diminished, although economic relations between the two countries were maintained. By the end of the 1880s, Russian goods delivered to Georgia were still partly earmarked for export to Persia. Among the items exported to Persia were 1,800,000 Rubles' worth of flour and 2,300,000 Rubles' worth of iron and ironmongery. (Dumbadze, p. 413)

<sup>12</sup> Georgian port on the coast of Black Sea. Its commercial importance is particularly increased during the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>13</sup> The linking up with Baku by rail led to the intensification of trade.

### Iranians in Tbilisi

Iranian population and the dynamics of its change need to be discussed before considering the Iranians residing in Georgia. Several complexities are encountered in this regard: some records (especially at the turn of the century) make it practically impossible to distinguish ethnic Persians and Azeris from other Muslim populations. At the beginning of the century, Muslims were chiefly referred to as the “Tartars;” and sometimes reference is made to “Turkish-Tartar” population.<sup>14</sup> However, certain distinction is made later (particularly after the Russo-Turkish and Russo-Persian wars resulted in an increase in Muslim populations of the Russian empire). The name “Tartar” in reference to the Azeris was retained—for instance, Pushkin (V, p. 418) notes that the owner of Tbilisi’s famous Persian bath-house was a Persian, while the bath-house attendant was a Tartar. Also in the second half of the century, there were cases when censuses of Shi’ites and Sunnis were carried out separately. According to a tentative assessment, the dynamics of Georgia’s Muslim population during the nineteenth century was the following: in 1801: 40,000 (total population 670,000); in 1832: 36,300 (702,000); in 1864: 51,300 (1,302,000); in 1873: 54,800 (1,439,000); in 1886: 68,800 (1,648,000); in 1897: 81,700 (1,867,000). (Antadze, p. 71)

According to the data of 1886 Georgia’s “Tartar-Turkish” population was comprised of 72.5 percent Sunnis and 27.5 percent Shi’ites. The latter primarily lived in the districts of east Georgia—Tbilisi, Borchalo, Signaghi and Telavi.<sup>15</sup> These are only estimated figures since in most cases exact censuses were not conducted. For instance, the census of 1832 omitted Muslim women. Later censuses were not comprehensive in terms of female populations either. There existed other difficulties as well. “Residing without registration in Tbilisi was commonplace.” (Antadze, pp. 32, 63) Tbilisi, as we have seen, held a special position in the relations between Georgia and Iran. In the nineteenth century, Persians comprised the largest Muslim community of Tbilisi. (Asatrian and Margarian) At the beginning of the century, Tbilisi was a relatively small town, compared to the seventeenth century (rapid reduction of the population had been caused by invasion of Āghā Mohammad Khan). According to the data of 1803 the “Tartars” (implying Muslims) comprised only 2 percent of Tbilisi population. (AKAK, II; Kakabadze) A few years later, however,

<sup>14</sup> For Georgia’s and Tbilisi’s population in the nineteenth century, see Antadze; Jaoshvili; Kakuria.

<sup>15</sup> *Svod statisticheskikh dannikh o naselenij zakavkazskogo kraia, izvlechennikh iz posemeinikh spisikov 1886 g.* [Collection of Statistical dates on the population of Caucasian district from families’ list of 1886], Tiflis, 1893, pp. 196-199, 324-327.

they comprised as much as 11 percent of the population (500 heads). (Jam-buria, p. 142) In 1825, the French consul Gamba estimated the population of Tbilisi to be at least 33,000. "Among them... 500 families are Tartar and Persian; each family has at least six members." (Gamba 1826, II, p. 58; Polievkov & Natadze, p. 79) Gamba's data reflects the real picture, rather than numbers of officially registered residents. This is evidenced by the data of subsequent census of 1835 according to which 723 Muslims were recorded in Tbilisi (they are still referred to as "Tartars"), this amounts to 2.7 percent of the population of Tbilisi of the time. (Evetskii, p. 145)

By 1864, the Persians and "Tartars" (Azeris) are mentioned separately. Whereas the Persians comprised only 0.88 percent (529 heads) of Tbilisi population in 1864, the Persian element rose to 10 percent (7,153 heads) in the following year, according to the data for 1865. The number of the Tartars was 1,523 heads (2.2 percent).<sup>16</sup> The Persians had increased overall by 6,624 heads in one year. Women among them had increased by only eight head (total 29). On the one hand, these facts testify to the imperfect census, but on the other hand, they provide sufficient basis for assuming that many men were temporary residents involved in workmanship and trade in the city, and often married local women. This assumption is supported by the fact that later, in 1876, only 1,700 heads were recorded, while the number jumped to over 6,000 in 1899. The number of temporary Persian populations grew during the summer. (*Central Historical Archive of Georgia*, f. 414, desc. 414, doc. 36, p. 11) Observations of the French traveler Orsolle on the Persian population of Tbilisi in the 1880s probably reflect the reality most accurately: "In Tbilisi, there live ten or twelve thousand Persians; part of the population might have settled here at the time of Iran's domination over Georgia, but... is continually renewed and enlarged by numerous Persians who come to seek their fortune in the Caucasus." (Orsolle, p. 43)

As for the religious makeup of the population, Muslims comprised 3.6 percent of Tbilisi's population according to the official records in 1876. Out of the Muslim population of 4,300, 3,700 were Shi'ites.<sup>17</sup> For the most part the Persian population retained their Iranian nationality. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the ratio of Persian nationals of Iran in the Russian empire according to statistical data. 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

<sup>16</sup> *Sbornik statisticheskikh svedenii o Kavkaze* [Collection of Statistical Informations on Caucasus], part. II, Tiflis, 1869, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> *Tiflis po odnovevnoi perepisi 1876 g.* [Tiflis by One-Day Census of 1876], Tiflis, 1877, pp. 106-107.

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, p. 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 manpower. Orsolle (p. 43) 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.”

Tbilisi’s close trade links with Iran has already been mentioned. A number of nineteenth-century authors concentrate on these links. The Russian journalist Dunken-Vehling vividly describes the arrival of a Persian trade caravan in Tbilisi early in the century: “you come across a caravan of camels carrying on their humps variegated Persian carpets and precious Kirman shawls, swaying in an orderly manner and jingling numerous bells.” (Dunken-Vehling; Polievktov & Natadze, p. 95) Goods from Persia entered Tbilisi by the Nakhjevān road from the towns of Tabriz, Ardebil and Rasht. There were a number of caravanserais in Tbilisi as in any other eastern city. This term had become widely used and replaced the Georgian word for ‘inn’ in the eighteenth century. Caravanserai was a hotel, warehouse, trade centre and a workshop all at the same time. Gamba notes that only the Persians stayed at one of the three caravanserais of Tbilisi. “In the caravanserai, there are stocks of Persian silk fabric, embroidered carpets and other splendid eastern fabric.” (Gamba 1826, II, p. 160-164) Orsolle goes on to say: “the Tartar or Persian market is on the opposite bank of the Mtkvari; it is made up of broad and high arched passages... in front of the shop there sits its owner waiting for his customers and smoking a tobacco-pipe, the Persian *nārgil*. The majority of these traders sell silk fabric and carpets imported from Persia.” (Orsolle, p. 44) Large quantities of Persian carpets, mostly from Tabriz, entered Tbilisi. One of the most famous shops of Tbilisi was G.M. Akhsharumov’s and G.S. Janinov’s “Persian and Caucasian Shop”. (*Central State Historical Archive of Georgia*, f. 254, desc. 3, doc. 3505, pp.1-57; Anchabadze & Volkova, p. 103)

Tbilisi Muslims, above all Persians, strictly observed their traditional everyday standards, both in their family lives and public activities. Despite total Europeanization, which also affected the town’s Muslim population (especially the privileged classes), even their clothes retained specific ethnic characteristics. For instance, a tradition of dyeing the hair and beard with henna was kept alive for a long time and marked the Persians off until the beginning of the

twentieth century. The Persians wore *akhalukhi*,<sup>18</sup> trousers, low knitted hats or tall peaked hats made of sheepskin. Their rich compatriots showed off their wealth by putting on several *akhalukhi* on top of which they wore a loose long cape made of thin woolen cloth. *Akhalukhi* were usually made of Cashmere wool. Rich Persians also wore slippers (mostly green ones worn over knitted socks). A Persian would be marked off in Tbilisi by a significant detail: by their beard, moustache and nails dyed ruddy. This tradition of dying with henna was observed by the Persian Jews as well. Men would dye their beard, while women and girls their hair, feet and even teeth. (Zisserman, p. 12; Gastghausen, p. 41)

The city administration was divided into ten police districts. The Persians lived primarily in Vorontsov #6 district, which included Seyedabad as well. This neighbourhood was located near the fortress where the descendants of Imam Ali, called Seyeds (*sayyeds*) settled as early as in the seventeenth century. The eighteenth-century Georgian historian, Vakhushti (p. 334), noted: "Shah Sefi made the Seyeds settle here (Tiflis). That is why the Persians call it Seyedabad." The neighbourhood was originally called Tiflis, later Seyedabad and finally Kharpukh (the Armenian for common cold). In the eighteenth century Seyedabad had been a village, but at the beginning of the nineteenth, it was already within the limits of the city. (Beradze 1977, p. 53) The French traveler, Le Baron de Baye, writes: "The Muslim fortress had always been occupied by the Persians or the Turks. Even nowadays the Muslims live around its ruins. This part of the city includes bath-houses as well. It has retained its name of "Seyedabad", which means the residence of the Seyeds or the descendants of Muhammad." (de Baye, p. 8-9) In Seyedabad there was a customs-house, in front of which boxing matches were organized. (Beradze 1980, p. 48)

There were other sites of Tbilisi bearing Persian names as well. One of the towers in the 1800 plan of Narikala (the above mentioned Muslim fortress) was called the Tabriz tower. There were Sardar-Abadi (*sardār-ābādī*), Tabriz and Abbas-Abadi (*Abbās-ābād*) squares. The shoe-makers street was called Kharazkhaneh (*kharrāz-khāneh*), the street of cotton dealers—Bambakhaneh (*panba-khāneh*), and that of tanners—Dabakhaneh (*dabbāq-khāneh*). (Kvirkvelia) The Mushtaidi (*mojtahed*) park had special significance in nineteenth-century Tbilisi. It was considered as a public park and was even called the *bois de Boulogne* of old Tbilisi. (Beradze, 1980, p. 51) The area adjacent to the park was called Mojtahed neighbourhood and the street leading to the park, Mojtahed Street. The park was laid out by the Mojtahed Āqā Mir Fatāh, who had settled in Tbilisi after the 1826-1828 Russo-Persian war. The Iranian

<sup>18</sup> Caucasian (tight-fitting, buttoned) tunic.

traveler, Majd os-Saltaneh (p. 81) provides especially important information regarding the well-known Mushtaidi Park: “Āqā Mir Fatāh is the son of late Āqā Mir Yusof; he comes from Tabriz. After Iran capitulated in the Russo-Persian war he went to Tabriz. After signing truce he escaped to Russia because of this shameful fact and settled down in Tbilisi. He laid out a park here which is still named after him. There used to be a boulevard as well as a monument here. Mojtahed is one of the famous neighbourhoods of Tbilisi.”

One of the sights of the city is the “Blue” mosque, a perfect example of the Muslim architecture, which was build by order of Shah ‘Abbās I (Shah Esmā’il I, according to other data). Unfortunately, it was demolished during the Communist rule in 1951. Apart from this mosque, there was a Sunni mosque as well, though the 1803 data records only a single Shiite mosque. According to the German author Guldenshtadt who traveled to Georgia in 1768-1775, the Tartar-Muslims had three mosques. (Guldenstadt, pp. 270-271; Polievktov & Natadze, p. 41) According to Klaproth (p. 6), who traveled to Georgia in 1807-1808, there were two mosques in Tbilisi: one for the Persian-Shi‘ites and another for the Tartar-Sunnis. The latter had been destroyed by Āghā Mohammad Khan, but its beautiful minaret survived intact. It had been built by Eshāq Pasha, the commander-in-chief of the Ottoman army in 1710. According to the French commercial commissar in Baghdad, Jean-François Rousseau’s information Agha Mohammad Khan destroyed two Sunni mosques in Tbilisi. (Quoted in Natchkebia 2001, p. 197) One of the sights of Tbilisi was and continues to be even at present the Persian or ‘motley’ sulphur baths which fascinated a number of travelers, including A. Pushkin and A. Dumas. Dumas (pp. 293-198) was in raptures over the Persian bath which apart from its direct function also served as a place of gathering and entertainment for Tbilisi citizens. Here he listened to a guitar-like musical instrument being played to the accompaniment of Sa‘di’s poetry.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the architecture of Tbilisi was under a strong Persian influence. At the beginning of the century a traveler writes: “For the most part houses have the same structure as in Persia. The local houses represent more or less a quadrangle with a few built-in windows.” (Melikset-beg; Polievktov & Natadze, pp 73-75) It is worth noting as well that the Persians were reputed to be the best builders in the Caucasus. For this reason many Persian construction workers settled in Tbilisi on a temporary basis. The residence of the leader of the Shi‘ites of Transcaucasia, the Sheikh ol-Eslam, was also in Tbilisi. During the second half of the century, the Sheikh ol-Eslam was Abd ol-Salam Akhund-Zade. Valuable information on his activity is preserved at Batumi’s historical archive: “in Tbilisi in that year (1891), died the Persian clerical leader, Sheikh ol-Eslam Akhund-Zadeh of the Cauca-

sus, who commanded well-deserved respect not only among Muslims, but the entire population of the city. Probably everyone remembers the effective participation of the deceased in calming down the opposing sides during the Armenian-Tartar confrontation in the city—by his preaching and his personal influence, he had helped to avert bloodshed.<sup>19</sup>

Le Baron de Baye's information on 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 widespread, as much as lighting candles over the graves. (de Baye, p. 9)

Muslims, who are numerous in Tbilisi, are not only Shi'ites, there are Sunnis as well. Both are having remarkable Persian influence. The Sunni leader bears a title of the Mufti of the Transcaucasia. Each has a mosque of his own. Consulate-general of Persia functioned in the city; there also functioned charity, cultural and educational centres. Consulate-general of Persia was located in a new district Sololaki. "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." (Chevalier Lycklama a Nijeholt, p. 358) Officially the Persians were subjects of the Shah, and this kept them aloof from other citizens. They assembled by the consul's house to celebrate various notable dates.

The consulate carried out a number of significant functions and it was one of the most important foreign missions in Tbilisi. The consul commanded great respect among the Iranian subjects. Majd os-Saltāneh (pp. 80-81) writes: "Mo'in al-Vozarā has been appointed as Iran's consul-general of the Caucasus in Tbilisi. In no city is Iran's state consulate as privileged as in Tbilisi; special

<sup>19</sup> *Historical Archive of Ajarian Autonomous Republic*, 1891, i-7, f. 8-9, doc. 338.

building with magnificent furniture is designated for it. The subjects are well pleased. The consul himself commands great respect among the population since he is an educated and experienced man. The consulate is a place of ceremonial receptions, paying respect and relaxation.” In terms of the building and its furnishings, the state of Iran has no such consulate in any foreign land apart from Tbilisi. The consulate is the pride of Iranian subjects living in Tbilisi. (Ter-Oganov)

The Shiites would celebrate Ramadan Bairam in the square situated at the Muslim cemetery. The Namaz (Friday prayer) was held there led by the Sheikh ol-Eslam. The Tbilisi Persians also celebrated the Iranian New Year: “The Shi’ite Muslims celebrate their New Year on Sunday, March 9 (March 21 by Gregorian Calendar). The celebrations always last for three days. The Persians living in Tiflis wish a happy New Year to their consul first, a whole bunch of them come playing zurna (musical instrument) and beating drums. On that day the consul’s house is well-decorated. The consul greets them with sherbet and after hearing them first says a few words himself. This year as always the Muslims have celebrated their New Year on a large scale. After visiting the consul some of them went to Mushtaidi Park and others to the Botanical Garden for a walk. Trams were overcrowded with them. You could spot smiling and well-dressed Muslims everywhere.” (Newspaper *Iveria*, 1886, #55) The holiday of Moharam was celebrated by the Shiite community of Tbilisi on a large scale. (Gotsiridze; Sanikidze, pp. 34-36; Sanikidze & Walker)

The Persian influence on the city life was significant. The oriental style amalgamations of artisans and merchants called *Amkari*, formed in Tbilisi in the Middle Ages, were widespread in the nineteenth century. For instance the manager of Amkari was called *Ustabash*, as in Iran. Although the banner of the shop featured a Christian saint protector of the trade, yet the Iran’s influence was felt: this image was called *Pir*, which is the Persian word for ‘sage’. *Karachokheli*, a typical representative of the class of small merchants and artisans of Tbilisi, was a vivid figure. Some researchers find certain similarities between Karachokheli and *javanmardi*.<sup>20</sup> This is suggested by the second name of Karachokheli—Jomardi. (Beradze, 1980, p. 48) Tbilisian troubadour *Ashugi* (oriental singer) also held an important place in Tbilisi public life. The origin of *Ashugi* is also Persian and *‘Ashbeg(i)* means ladies-man or admirer. Coffee-shops with *Ashugi* and *Sazandar* were introduced into everyday lives of citizens from Turkey and Persia. (Anchabadze & Volkova, pp. 102-03) During holidays the citizens of Tbilisi were entertained by clowns and jesters. Clowns were mostly

<sup>20</sup> On this and other connections with medieval origins, see the previous article by Gabashvili in this volume.

Persians. They performed as acrobats. Especially popular were walking on stilts and rope-walking. (Ibid., p. 243)

The Europeanized Tbilisi attracted Persian intellectuals. Among the Persian intellectuals involved in public work in Tbilisi, Fāzel Khān Garrusi, also known by the pen-names of Ravi and Shaida, should be mentioned. He spent later part of his life (1838-1852) in Tbilisi and taught at Tbilisi's first music school. In 1847, the Russian newspaper *Kavkaz* (1847, #23) published his *khutba* on the occasion of the official opening of the school. Garrusi, who was a well-known poet, also published school books—Persian and Arabic grammar, and a commentary on the Koran and sectarian doctrines. In 1821, the Iranian painter named Alaverdi (Allāhverdi) arrived in Tbilisi to study lithography on the request of the heir to the throne 'Abbās Mirzā. He studied the subject and sent books with lithographs from Tbilisi to Tabriz. (Shcheglova; Ter-Oganov, *op. cit.*, p. 209) Tbilisi became a major centre of publishing the Persian language literature. There functioned two Persian publishing houses here the 'Gheirat' and 'Aigrepin'. Persian text-books, fiction and historic literature were published in Tbilisi. Also there were Iranian charity organizations: 'Charity of Muslim women of the Caucasus' and 'Iranian charity organization.' (Anchabadze & Volkova, p. 259) The Iranian traveler, Yahyā Dowlatābādī (III, p. 17), notes that Tbilisi also played an important role as a socio-political centre for free-thinking Iranians. (Ter-Oganov, p. 213)

In conclusion it can be said that despite the modification of relations between Georgia and Iran caused by Georgia's unification with Russia, the relations during the nineteenth century still remained extensive. Whereas Iran still tried to regain control over Georgia in the first quarter of the century, which was one of the major causes of two wars between Iran and Russia, she did not press any claim to east Georgia later. Economic relations remained extensive throughout the century, although they were subject to certain changes due to the policy of the Russian empire. Territory of Georgia was the most important transit route for Iran throughout the century, as European and Russian goods entered the country and Iranian goods were taken to the European and Russian markets via this territory. The Iranian community played an important role in social and cultural life of Georgia's capital Tbilisi. Iranian influence on Tbilisi and everyday lives of its citizens was strong.

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