

**“The Bronze Viceroy: Mikhail Vorontsov’s Statue and Russian Imperial
Representation in the South Caucasus in the Mid-19th Century”¹**

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In June 1982, in the middle of the Caucasus, right behind the Cross Pass, where the Georgian Military Highway reaches its highest point at 2395 meters, I stopped my car and stepped onto a large artificial terrace, located on top of a cliff overlooking a range of majestic peaks. I had been driving south from Russia, and this was my first ever view of Georgia. Around me on the terrace, workers were mixing concrete to build a belvedere, which was officially opened a year later. Named the “Arch of Russo-Georgian Friendship,” the monument recalled the Treaty of Georgievsk two hundred years earlier, when the Eastern Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti put itself under Russian suzerainty.² It was decorated with large, colorful mosaics, depicting scenes from Georgian history in late socialist-realist manner, and it was also one of the last monuments of its kind to be erected in Georgia before the end of the Soviet Union. When I visited the place again last summer, the belvedere was in a rather sad and utterly neglected state. The mosaics had partly fallen down, pieces of the terrace had broken off, and stray sheep were wandering about. The view, luckily, had remained the same.

¹ I would like to thank Khatuna Gvaradze for her help and Robert Crews, Harsha Ram, and Catherine Evtuhov for their comments.

² For contemporary views of the arch, see Frédéric Chaubin, *CCCP - Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* (Cologne: Taschen Verlag, 2011), 284-287.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, epitomized in this and many other crumbling monuments all over the former Soviet bloc, draws our attention to the mixed fortunes of Russian imperial ambitions and points to the successes and failures in the long history of Russia's imperial relations with its component parts.³ Georgia and the South Caucasus have always played a special, both strategic and cultural role in this history.⁴ This was an area of ancient Christian civilizations and exotic Southern culture in a strategically highly important location. Consequently, Russians related to this region with a mixture of romanticism and the arrogance of a military conqueror. While in Western Europe they found themselves in the role of backward, "oriental" Easterners, in the Caucasus, they felt themselves as modern Europeans. This was *their* Orient. And as a consequence (and a typical feature of their empire-building efforts in general), the imperial and later the Soviet central governments attempted to propagate and consolidate their power at the periphery in a "civilizing mission" that included *inter alia* the changing of urban spaces, the introduction of new architectural styles,

³ For a general overview, see Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1992).

⁴ There are plenty of studies investigating Russian expansion in and romantic transfiguration of the Caucasus. For a few selected examples, see V. A. Potto, *Kavkazskaia voina v otdel'nykh ocherkakh, epizodakh, legendakh i biografiakh*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo V. A. Berezovskago, 1887-1889); Thomas Barrett, *At the Edge of the Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700–1860* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999); Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Mikail Mamedov, *Imagining the Caucasus in the Russian Imperial Consciousness, 1801-1864* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Georgetown University, 2010); Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), parts 2 and 3.

the promulgation of European cultural institutions such as theaters, museums and libraries, the putting on of various ceremonies, and the erecting of monuments.⁵

This chapter goes to the roots of Russian imperial propaganda and identity politics by addressing the issue of local representations of imperial power in the South Caucasus around the mid-nineteenth century. Taking its inspiration from Richard Wortman's *Scenarios of Power*,⁶ it explores representational forms of the Russian Empire at its southern fringes by focusing on one particular monument and its opening ceremony. As much as possible, it also includes local perceptions of and popular reactions to these 'pedagogical' efforts. While we do already know quite a bit about the Caucasian educated elites' social and national awakening, their multifaceted views of and numerous conflicts with Russian politics and culture,⁷ we still know almost nothing about how ideas and representations of empire were disseminated on a wider scale, both by state officials and cultural entrepreneurs, and how they affected the minds and actions of ordinary people in the South Caucasus.

When on 25 March 1867 the first secular monument in the South Caucasus, a statue commemorating the late tsarist viceroy Mikhail Vorontsov, was unveiled with great

⁵ On Russian "orientalism" generally, albeit without much focus on the South Caucasus, see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). For specific examples of the "civilizing mission" see Austin Jersild, Neli Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 3 (2002): 27-49.

⁶ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995 / 2000).

⁷ Oliver Reisner, "Travelling between Two Worlds - the Tergdaleulebi, their Identity Conflict and National Life," *Identity Studies* 1 (2009): 36-50.

pomp in Tiflis, as Tbilisi was then called in Russian, what kind of message was sent out by this event and the statue itself?⁸ How did people react to this extraordinary experience? This will be explored in more detail in this chapter. We should not forget, however, that the Vorontsov monument was only one of many examples of imperial representation in the Caucasus, most of which still require in-depth investigation. What, for example, had happened just a few weeks before the statue was unveiled, when the Caucasian Museum, the brainchild of the German naturalist and explorer Gustav Radde, opened its doors to the public in January 1867, after an exquisite opening ceremony, featuring the then viceroy Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, other top brass and the high society of Tiflis? The museum, which in its first three months was already visited by two thousand people – quite an impressive figure in a city of 70.000 inhabitants – presented colorful displays of ethnographic, zoological, botanical and other materials and thereby shaped a peculiar image of the ethnic and natural environment in the Caucasus (and, by extension, the empire which had annexed it a few decades earlier)?⁹ How was this image different from later representations of Caucasian nature, economic and cultural achievements on display at the Tiflis Agricultural Exhibition of 1889 or the Caucasus Anniversary Exhibition in 1901, celebrating hundred years of Georgia becoming part of the Russian

⁸ For a contemporary description, see *Otkrytie pamiatnika v Tiflise svetleishemu kniaziiu Mikhailu Semenovichu Vorontsovu, 25 marta 1867 goda* (Tiflis: Tipografiia glavnogo upravleniia namestnika kavkazskogo, 1867).

⁹ See the undated detailed report “Vom Kaukasischen Museum,” handwritten by Radde, in *Sakartvelos erovnuli museumis arkivi* (Georgian National Museum Archive), f. Kavkazskii muzei: Delo Kavkazskogo Muzeuma s 1864 g. do 1867 g., ll. 156-156 ob. For a general history of the museum, see Guram Chkhaidze, *Sakartvelos sakhelmtsipo muzeumi (1852-1932)* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos metsnierebata akademia, S.Janashias sakhelobis sakartvelos sakhelmtsipo muzeumi, 2003).

Empire?¹⁰ How did the visits of Alexander II in 1850, 1861 and 1871 and of Alexander III in 1888 differ in style and message? How should they be ‘read’ on a symbolic level? How did local people react to these visits and the empire more generally? Many ordinary Georgian peasants and townspeople, for example, were not impressed and, according to police records, made lots of derogatory remarks.¹¹ How, finally, were the anniversaries of Russian poets such as Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and Griboedov celebrated, who had statues or busts erected in their honor in Tiflis and various other places, paid with money donated by people from all walks of life all over the Caucasus?¹² These are just a few of the questions that still need to be explored if we want to get a better understanding of how the Russian Empire was represented on a provincial level and how it affected and interacted with local identities.

By investigating in a vignette-like fashion such diverse phenomena as tsarist visits, the building and unveiling of different types of monuments, the opening ceremonies and the internal arrangements of museums and exhibitions in one particular geographical region, we are effectively taking a micro-historical approach to the

¹⁰ For contemporary descriptions of the latter, see Voronezhskii, “Na iubileinoi Kavkazskoi vystavke sel’skago khoziaistva i promyshlennosti 1901 goda,” *Kavkazskii vestnik. Ezhemesiachnyi nauchno-literaturnyi zhurnal*, 2, no. 12 (1901): 17-22 and “Kavkazskaia iubileinaia vystavka,” *Niva* 41 (1901): 641-642.

¹¹ There are countless cases of *lèse majesté* between 1871 and 1917 in the archive of the Tiflis *gubernator* and the Tiflis police department. See *Sakartvelos erovnuli arkivi* (National Archives of Georgia) [hereafter *SEA*], *f.* 17 (Kantseliaria tiflisskogo gubernatora), *op.* 1 (Po chasti sekretnosti); *f.* 153 (Tbilisskoe gubernskoe zhandarmskoe upravlenie), *op.* 1 (kniga pervaiia).

¹² See, for example, a circular about a collection for a Pushkin memorial in 1861 in *SEA*, *f.* 84 (Upravlenie tbilisskogo politsmeistera i gorodskie politsii), *op.* 1, *d.* 843.

history of the Russian Empire and its “scenarios of power”. All these events presented the empire in one way or other on the provincial level. They occurred in public spaces such as squares, streets, parks or public buildings like museums, most of which were themselves quite recent introductions (Tiflis, the administrative centre of the South Caucasus, was rebuilt as a “European” city under Vorontsov in the mid nineteenth century, Erevan in the 1880s). They thus appealed to the imagination of the local populations, regardless of their social status, ethnic background and religious belief. They invited these people to make sense of an empire into which they had just been adopted. With this incorporation in the early nineteenth century, the South Caucasus had become part of a large, multiethnic autocratic state that initially paid surprisingly little attention to what is today called identity politics. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, however, when Russian rule had been secured militarily and when Vorontsov introduced a more enlightened regime in the Caucasus, official representations of imperial power and civilizing achievements increased in number, coinciding and potentially getting into conflict with an emerging civil society, new national and social movements, and nascent urban life in the Caucasus. Furthermore, they were an integral part of a new kind of public culture that emerged in other urban centers of the empire as well, but has so far been studied only for major cities in Russia and the western provinces.¹³

¹³ See the contributions by Ted Weeks (about Vilnius), Malte Rolf (about Warsaw) and Karsten Brüggemann (about Reval) in Jörg Baberowski et al. (eds.), *Imperiale Herrschaft in der Provinz: Repräsentationen politischer Macht im späten Zarenreich* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), 121-195, and Malte Rolf, „Russische Herrschaft in Warschau: Die Aleksandr-Nevskij-Kathedrale im Konfliktraum politischer Kommunikation,“ in: Walter Sperling (ed.), *Jenseits der Zarenmacht: Dimensionen des Politischen im Russischen Reich 1800-1917* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), 163-190.

This new public culture was predominantly urban and increasingly commercial. It included operas, theaters, and museums, but also more low-brow entertainments like amusement parks, circuses, cinemas, variety shows (*estrada*), fairgrounds and street festivals. Especially in these “democratic” venues local identity could manifest itself, often spontaneously, and older forms of local culture survived. One of them, the *keenoba* or “Khan’s day,” for example, was a carnivalesque inversion of power, where people disguised themselves with masks, ridiculing foreign invaders of Georgia. Not surprisingly, it was frequently used to comment on the imperial authorities (and their displays of power) who, in turn, paid particularly close attention to this event.¹⁴ But there were also more patriotic themes (from the government’s point of view) on offer for the urban masses. The biggest circus in Tiflis, for example, was run by two entrepreneurs from Moscow, the Nikitin brothers, who were famous for their jingoist programs, boasting all kinds of Russian topics and heroic scenes from Russian history.¹⁵ Public culture in the Caucasus was thus an area of mixed messages and competing identities, where commercial, official and popular cultures met and where meanings of empire and, for that matter, nation, ethnicity, region and city were constantly renegotiated. Studying this public culture will provide us with a better understanding of the multifaceted nature of the relationships between centre and periphery.

¹⁴ M. M. Gaprindashvili, „Gruzinskaia kul’tura v XIX v.,” in: *Ocherki istorii Gruzii*, 8 vols. (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1990), 5: chapter 16. For a contemporary description, see “Keenoba,” *Tiflisskii listok. Illiustrirovannoe pribavlenie* no. 5 (14.3.1899): 1-2. For derogatory comments about *keenoba* by a Russian official, see *Khelnatserta erovnuli tsentri* (National Center of Manuscripts), Tbilisi, *f. Lichnyi Arkhiv Evgeniia Gustavovicha Veidenbauma, d. 60/6* (*Dnevnik Veidenbauma* no. 2, 19.6.1889-28.5.1892), l.107 ob.

¹⁵ Iu. Dmitriev, *Tsirk v Rossii, ot istokov do 1917 goda* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), 169-174.

When the former viceroy, Mikhail Vorontsov, had died on 18 November 1856 in Odessa, it took about a week for the news of his death to reach Tiflis.¹⁶ Immediately, a church service was held for him on 28 November in the Sioni Cathedral, with masses of people in deep sorrow, “as if they had lost a relative”.¹⁷ Within weeks, an initiative to collect money for a monument in his honor got underway, instigated by members of the Georgian nobility, but also by “other estates,” as the press announcement of the fundraising campaign underlined.¹⁸ Fedot Bobylev, editor and regular feuilleton writer for the newspaper *Kavkaz* praised the idea of a monument as a “big step towards Europe” and even called it a “historic turning point.”¹⁹ The fundraising was launched in the Spring of 1857 appropriately by the tsar himself with a donation of 3000 rubles, supplemented by 2000 rubles from the Grand Dukes. Within a year, over 25.000 rubles had been collected. By June 1866, after a second fundraising campaign had been launched in April 1865 in order to cover additional costs for transport and the setting up of the monument, 32.983 rubles had come together.²⁰ The final result of the fundraising in early 1867 was 36.104 rubles, 44 and

¹⁶ For a general history of Vorontsov’s viceroyship, see Anthony Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov: Viceroy to the Tsar* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

¹⁷ „Pis’ma v S.-Peterburg,” *Kavkaz* (6.12.1856): 384-385.

¹⁸ The official permission for the collection was issued by the Kavkazskii komitet in St. Petersburg on 14. February 1857. See *SEA, f. 7* (Departament glavnogo upravleniia glavnonachal’stvuiushchego grazhdanskoi chast’iu na Kavkaze), *op. 1, d. 690* (Ob otkrovenii v Tiflise pamiatnika pokoinomu General-Fel’dmarshalu Kniazii Vorontsovu), *ll. 24 ob.-25*. It was announced in “Pamiatnik v chest’ byvshago Namestnika Kavkazskago, pokoinago General-Fel’dmarshala Svetleishago Kniazia Mikhaila Semenovicha Vorontsova,” *Kavkaz* (14.3.1857): 95.

¹⁹ B. B. [Fedot Bobylev], „Pis’ma v S.-Peterburg,” *ibid.*: 95-96.

²⁰ „O prikhode i raskhode summy, sobrannoi na sooruzhenie v Tiflise pamiatnika Kniazia Vorontsova“, in: *SEA, f. 8* (Departament obshchikh del glavnogo upravleniia

three quarter kopecks. This sum, the final report of the campaign proudly proclaimed, was not only made up of the 5 thousand rubles given by the tsar and his family as well as the donations of wealthy people, who contributed thousands, hundreds, tens and single rubles, but it also included “modest kopecks from ordinary people (iz sredy narodnoi) without means”. They all gave out of “heartfelt admiration and gratitude” for Vorontsov.²¹ While one might expect a bit of hyperbole in an official report, a look at the actual donors’ lists in the archives shows that indeed people from all walks of life in the Caucasus and beyond had participated in the collection.²² Money came from as far as Novorossia, where Vorontsov had served as governor general and where another statue of him had already been unveiled in Odessa in 1863.

While the fundraising got underway in and around the Caucasus, coordinated by the office of the then viceroy, Prince Aleksandr Bariatinskii, a group of Caucasophiles in St. Petersburg began to discuss the shape of the monument and to organize its construction. The two main players were the famous writer Vladimir Aleksandrovich Sollogub and the state councilor Ivan Fedorovich Zolotarev. Both of them had once served under Vorontsov in Tiflis. Sollogub was the first to come up with the idea of an equestrian statue, which he tried to sell to Bariatinskii in a letter from 7. June

namestnika Kavkazskogo), *op. 1, kniga 1, d. 4* (Ob iskhodataistvovanii Vysochaishago razresheniia na soorusheniia v Tiflise pamiatnika byvshemu namestniku Kavkazskomu fel’dmarshalu kniazuiu M. S. Vorontsovu), *ll. 100-105*, with detailed information about money being paid for raw materials, their transport and labor.

²¹ Supplement to *Kavkaz* (23.3.1867).

²² *SEA, f. 8, op. 1, kniga 1, d. 4, ll. 1-88*. Among the donors was, for example, the current viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich with 2000 rubles, many military units, 31 peasants from villages in Shemakha region, who together collected 19.5 rubles, and numerous other individuals.

1858.²³ According to Sollogub, such a statue would be preferable in the Caucasus, “where a man is nothing without his horse” (où l’homme n’est pas complet qu’à cheval). Furthermore, since people [in the Caucasus] would not understand complicated symbols and allegories, simplicity would be crucial. As it happens, Sollogub had already approached the “premier sculptor” in the capital, Nikolai Stepanovich Pimenov, who had kindly provided him with a drawing of such a statue. To bolster his case, Sollogub attached the drawing to his letter (see Illustration 1).

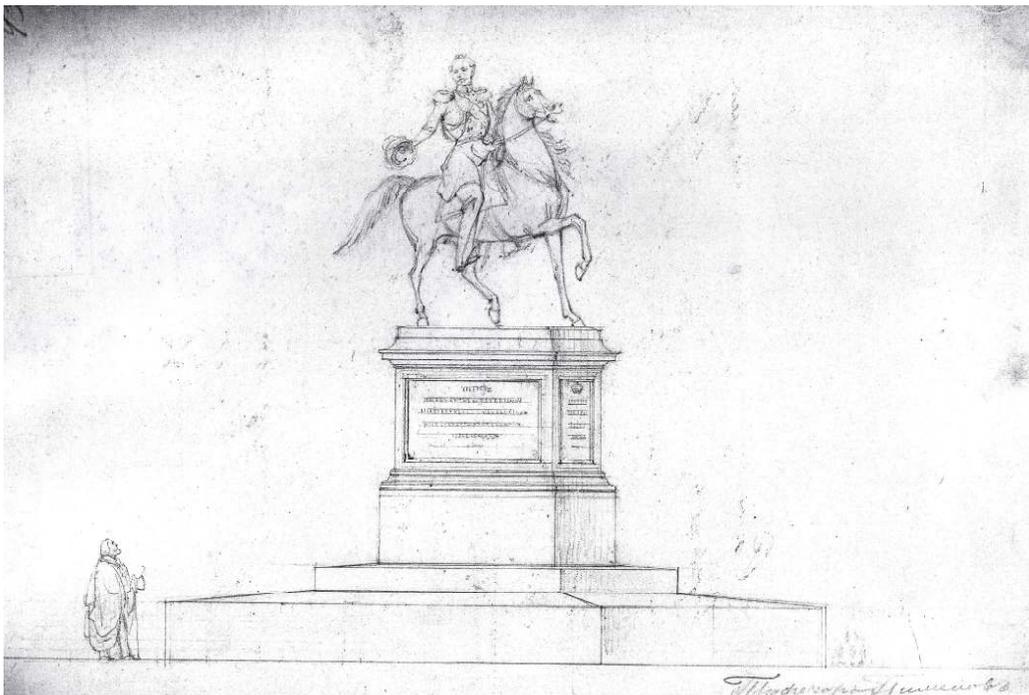


Illustration 1: “Nikolai Pimenov: Sketch for an equestrian statue”

While Pimenov might be more expensive than Peter Klodt [who later famously created the horse figures on Petersburg’s Anichkov Bridge and the monument to

²³ *SEA*, f. 8, op. 1, d. 8 (Ob iskhodataistvovanii Vysochaishhago razresheniia na soorusheniia v Tiflise pamiatnika byvshemu namestniku Kavkazskomu pokoinomu fel’dmarshalu kniaziu M. S. Vorontsovu), ll. 41-45 ob.

Nicholas I in front of St. Isaac's Cathedral – HFJ], he enjoyed a very high reputation as an artist, Sollogub concluded.²⁴

Bariatinskii was not impressed. Although the fundraising campaign for a monument was proceeding successfully, he was clearly shocked when he heard about the price tag of the proposed equestrian statue – 41.000 rubles. He asked his office chief, Alexis Kruzenshtern, to inquire about a statue of a standing figure. It seems that Pimenov took offense at such penny pinching. He never responded to the inquiry. Eventually, the viceroy's office chased him up and finally got an answer through Zolotarev in March 1859, who had visited Pimenov in his studio and asked him in person for a new, non-equestrian sketch.²⁵ Pimenov, with the indignation of a long-serving and (self-) important professor of the Imperial Academy of Arts, said he could of course produce a standing figure, but he still thought that an equestrian statue would be better, and that the tsar himself would also have liked such a monument in the Caucasus. It would have best represented Vorontsov's personality. He would have sat on a simple mountain horse, with a simple saddle. To support his argument for an equestrian monument, he then listed the statues of Wellington in London, of the Duc d'Orleans in Paris, and of Jeanne d'Arc in Orleans. He might of course have referred to an altogether more conspicuous equestrian statue, the Bronze Horseman, which he would have seen every day across the river from his window in the Academy, but since Vorontsov was not of royal or imperial status such a comparison was obviously

²⁴ Pimenov was the son of an even more famous sculptor, Stepan Stepanovich Pimenov. He is mostly known for his statues in St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg. See *Pamiatniki arkhitektury Leningrada* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo literatury po stroitel'stvu, arkhitekture i stroitel'nym materialam, 1958), 162-63 and passim.

²⁵ *SEA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 48-49.*

not deemed appropriate. What matters more here is the argument of both Sollogub and Pimenov that Vorontsov on horseback would better suit the tastes and traditions of the people in the Caucasus. In other words, the former representative of the empire should be represented in a way that takes local customs and ways of life into consideration. While for financial reasons this could not be achieved with the monument that was eventually built, the unveiling ceremony of it displayed a similar attempt to include local peculiarities, as we will see shortly.

The construction of the monument took longer than anticipated. Pimenov fell ill in 1863 and died in 1864, leaving behind only a model of the statue, which was kept in a wooden shed in the main court of the Admiralty. It fell to his pupil, Vasiliï Kreitan, to cast the actual bronze figure, supervised by a council of members of the Academy.²⁶ The pedestal, in the meanwhile, also encountered problems. It had to be built twice. The first version, planned and erected between 1862 and 1864 under the supervision of Provincial Secretary Rais and made out of stone from the village Garichvari, near Gori, was not only very expensive because of the long transport route, but its base also turned out to be too large, seriously impeding coach traffic on the square where it was set up. It was demolished in 1865, its large blocs were chopped up to become cobble stones, and a new, smaller and more delicate pedestal was built with less expensive stones from Algeti during the summer of 1866 under the supervision of Court Counselor and Academician Simonson. He, however, also had his share of

²⁶ See letter by Pimenov about his illness from 31. August 1863 in *SEA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 208-209*, and correspondences between the director of the Academy, Grigorii Gagarin, and Zolotarev from 31. January 1865 and 29. May 1865 in *SEA, f. 8, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 150-152*. Zolotarev also served as the middleman for the final payments to Kreitan. See *SEA, f. 10 (Finansovyi department glavnogo upravleniia namestnika Kavkazskogo), op. 1, d. 3487, ll. 1-3*.

difficulties, as he was running up against a cartel of Tiflis stonemasons who made it almost impossible to stay within reasonable financial limits.²⁷

Meanwhile in St. Petersburg the finished bronze figure was disassembled, packed in eight large boxes, and shipped via London and Constantinople to Poti, then up the Rioni River to the village of Opiri. From there the boxes were taken on special carts to Tiflis, where they finally arrived in early September.²⁸ Not much happened over the winter. When the weather was getting better, four builders from St. Petersburg arrived in February 1867, assembled the statue and, within two weeks, put it on the pedestal.²⁹ Obviously, since this was the first major monument to be erected in the Caucasus, native builders did not yet possess the necessary skills to carry out the appropriate procedures. The pedestal thus was the only local contribution to the monument whereas everything else was built in and imported from St. Petersburg.

²⁷ An engineer's report about the first pedestal in *SEA*, *f.* 8, *op.* 1, *d.* 8, *l.* 241; for the setting up of the second pedestal, see several reports and calculations in *SEA*, *f.* 8, *op.* 1, *d.* 4, *ll.* 90-91, 94-98.

²⁸ See reports about the shipment and telegrams between Zolotarev and the new head of the viceroy's administration, Baron Aleksei Pavlovich Nikolai, *ibid.* *ll.* 118-127.

²⁹ Bill over 827 rubles for travel, pay and daily allowances of these workers in *SEA*, *f.* 7, *op.* 1, *d.* 690, *ll.* 12-13.



Illustration 2: “Opening ceremony of Vorontsov monument in Tiflis”

Illustration 2 shows the opening ceremony of the monument on 25. March 1867. The photograph itself is a rare early snapshot of Tiflis from the collection of the writer and local historian Ioseb Grishashvili. It was taken by an officer of the Russian Army, a lieutenant Korzhinov, whose name is scribbled in red pencil on the back.³⁰ As we can see, Vorontsov was indeed very popular, attracting a rather large crowd. Although it is impossible on such an old photograph to actually make out individual persons, it is clearly visible that there were quite a number of people from different backgrounds present. And indeed, as we know from contemporary newspaper reports, apart from the official guests and the local population, over 400 village elders from various

³⁰ The photo, which is not catalogued, is kept in an unnumbered folder in the *Ioseb Grishashvilis biblioteka-muzeum* (Ioseb Grishashvili Library Museum), which is part of *Erovnuli sametsniero biblioteka* (National Science Library) in Tbilisi. For a digital version on a “virtual wall” of the library, see: <http://www.sciencelib.ge/en/node/34> [last accessed 10 October 2013]. I thank Nodar Grigorashvili of the museum and the film director and photographer Giorgi (Gia) Gersamia for their help.

regions traveled to the city and took part in the unveiling ceremony.³¹ They joined the current viceroy, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich and his family, several military units, representatives of various religious denominations, Tiflis honorary citizens, members of the guilds (*amkari*) and the nobility. Before assembling around the monument in meticulously prescribed order (eventually over 1000 honorary guests had to be squeezed onto the small square), the festive community had started the day at 10 o'clock in the morning with a religious service in the St. George Kashueti Church.³² Everyone then moved in a solemn procession across the Mikhailov Bridge, which, together with the adjacent streets, had been closed off to traffic and pedestrians already since 8 o'clock in the morning. The bridge, which had been built during Vorontsov's reign, was lavishly decorated with greenery, colorful flags, pennants and numerous shields on which Vorontsov's achievements were inscribed "in Russian and the local languages."

When the Grand Duke arrived at the scene, a choir sang Dmitrii Bortnianskii's "Kol' slaven nash gospod v Sione" (How glorious is our Lord in Zion), the unofficial spiritual anthem of Russia. After the music had finished, Baron Nikolai, the head of the viceroy's administration, read the official instruction to build the monument (Hundreds of copies of this instruction were later distributed as souvenirs among the crowds.) At his last word, the veil was pulled away from the statue, the military units stood to attention and an elaborate religious ceremony got underway. With the crowds

³¹ A very detailed contemporary description of the opening ceremony and the ensuing feasts, on which the following paragraphs are based, is given by N. Dunkel'-Velling, "Otkrytie pamiatnika Kniaziu Mikhailu Semenovichu Vorontsovu," *Kavkaz* (30.3.1867).

³² For a list of the "official" participants in the ceremony, see *SEA, f. 7, op. 1, d. 690, ll. 23-23 ob.*

listening “silently and devoutly,” the “harmonious choir of the clergy” proclaimed a long life to the tsar and the whole imperial family, eternal memory to the deceased field marshal and a long life to the heroic Russian military. The religious ceremony ended with Exarch Evsevii blessing the statue and the surrounding troops with holy water. After he and the other clergy had left, the army units and the numerous veterans, who had served under Vorontsov, in a ceremonial march passed by the monument and the viceroy, positioned next to it on horseback, and saluted them both simultaneously. They then proceeded “in orderly columns” and to the tune of the Gerzel’ Aul march across the bridge to the Alexander Gardens, where a *supra*, a typical Georgian feast, was held.³³ The soldiers and veterans took their seats at tables on the upper terrace of the Gardens, behind the Kashueti Church, where food and drink was catered for by a Collegiate Assessor Mirzoev, while the village elders and *amkari* were hosted in the lower part of the Gardens by the Tiflis Hereditary Honorary Citizen Babanosov. The approximately 3500 men were soon joined by their wives and children, raising the number of guests to almost 5000. Yet everyone was welcomed at this “truly Homeric feast” and treated lavishly to food and drink by the two generous hosts. Unfortunately, the contemporary report says nothing about the actual dishes served at the occasion. But since this was the high time of Lent, the menu will have consisted of bread, beans and perhaps fish rather than the normal *supra* fare of *khachapuri* and suckling pig, decorated with parsley and radish in snout.

³³ On the role of the *supra* as a culturally distinctive feature for Georgia, see Florian Mühlfried, “Celebrating Identities in Post-Soviet Georgia,” in: Tsypylma Darieva, Wolfgang Kaschuba (eds.), *Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2007), 286-289.

While the feast in the Alexander Gardens was already well underway, the top brass and the highest civilian ranks arrived on the other side of Golovin (today's Rustaveli) Prospect at the viceroy's palace for a festive dinner. In the great hall of the palace, a picture of Vorontsov was hung opposite the portrait of the tsar and decorated with greenery and flowers. Around the picture stood a number of non-commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers of Vorontsov's former regiment, forming an honorary guard. Once the dinner had started, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich gave the first speech. After drinking to the health of the tsar, he proposed a toast to the memory of Vorontsov, expressing his happiness at seeing so many of the field marshal's former officers, who "had witnessed his beneficial activities in the region". He was also glad that he had been able to participate in the opening of the monument, which had been erected as a sign of "gratitude of the whole Caucasus." He expressed his conviction that the good work begun by Vorontsov will bring "abundant fruits of welfare to the Caucasus, which is so dear to us all". He finished his speech with the toast: "May the memory of Count Mikhail Semenovich live long in the Caucasus; may this region prosper, which he loved so much and which we all also love so truly."

After the speech of the viceroy, Baron Nikolai, praised him for his kind words and his continuation of all the beneficial work initiated by Vorontsov. Providence had destined him, Mikhail Nikolaevich, to present to the region many of the blessings that Vorontsov had so much cared about. The war, to which Vorontsov had dedicated so much effort, had come to an end [after the capture of Shamil in 1859 and the defeat of the Western Caucasus in 1864], industry and trade were flourishing, roads were being built and Tiflis was expanding and becoming wealthier. With the unveiling of the

statue, a renaissance of the happy days of Vorontsov's rule is now celebrated. And everyone is happy for the region to be under the care of the current viceroy.

After this toast to Mikhail Nikolaevich, a toast to Vorontsov's widow was said, followed by a poem, written for the occasion by major-general V. V. Domantovich. While his verses have little literary value, they still reveal the flavor and a quite specific understanding of the events surrounding the opening of the monument, in which Georgia has a very prominent place:

[...]

“All of Georgia, in awe,
Before his image
Bows her head!

Glory to Him! Of all blessings
Was he the truthful deliverer!

[...]

He turned steppes into paradise,
He advanced and enlivened Odessa,
And Georgia, happy land,
He moved to fame and progress.

Glory to you, oh Georgia!

We thank you deeply
For that you appreciate highly
Your rulers' deeds;

In this, your recognition shines
Your devout loyalty to the tsar;

Russia applauds you

For the monument to the hero!

May live forever in the Caucasus,

In your valiant people,

And in Russian military tales,

The memory of him!

We unite in spirit and in heart,
Oh brothers, at this glorious day!
Lovingly hovers over us
The late hero's shadow;
And in hallowed greeting to it
Roars excitedly the Kura,
May he hear the to him familiar,
Always victorious – Hurrah!

After two more toasts, the feast came to an end. According to the newspaper report, everyone felt like being “part of a family” and participating in a family event. People talked among each other long into the evening, they remembered the works and words of Vorontsov. When the southern night set in, torches were lit on the Mikhailov Bridge, the embankments, adjacent houses and squares were illuminated, and the lamps around the pedestal of the monument were turned on, “making the statue appear in a tremulous light...”.

But this was not yet the end of celebrations. On the next day, the 26th of March, another festive lunch for 42 military and civilian officials who had served under Vorontsov was held in two beautifully decorated pavilions in the Mushtaid Gardens.³⁴ These gardens, initially established in the 1830s by a high-ranking Shiite cleric in Russian service and still popular today among Tbilisi residents, had been acquired by the state during Vorontsov's time as viceroy and, like similar parks elsewhere in Russia, turned into a pleasure garden for the local population, with restaurant, open-

³⁴ For a description of the lunch, including the many toasts, see N. Dunkel'-Velling, “26 Marta v Tiflise,” *Kavkaz* (2.4.1867).

air theater and other attractions.³⁵ Now they were the setting of what the reporter of the newspaper *Kavkaz* called a “family holiday” for Vorontsov’s “service family”. The pavilions were delightfully decorated in mostly red and white, the colors of Vorontsov’s coats of arms. The walls were covered with greenery, fruit baskets and lots of flowers, symbolizing Vorontsov’s initiatives to “enhance the fertile nature of Georgia through the establishment of gardens and vineyards”. Between these gifts of nature, the names of north-Caucasian villages were inscribed, where Vorontsov had distinguished himself militarily. The main pavilion, finally, displayed a portrait of Vorontsov, framed in a laurel wreath, while the second pavilion contained a bust of him and a painting of his wife.

The lunch started around 3 o’clock in the afternoon. The first toast, as customary, was dedicated to the tsar, followed by the anthem “God Save the Tsar”, sung by all the guests. Then Baron Nikolai gave the first speech in which he likened the unveiling of the statue to the resurrection of a cherished past. “We are all the children of the same common fatherland,” he proclaimed, “we are all living in the Caucasus, be it as natives or as adopted sons [...]” This set the scene for a rather long eulogy of Vorontsov’s military career, which, as the speaker underlined repeatedly, was closely linked to the Caucasus, and of his genuine popularity as a modest and down-to-earth administrator during his time as viceroy in Tiflis, when he became famous for riding through the town on a small mountain horse and tending to anything that needed attention, from quarrels between people in the streets to the building of the Mikhailov

³⁵ The establishment of amusement parks for the urban population was a wide-spread phenomenon in 19th-century Russia. See Al’bin M. Konechnyi, “Shows for the People: Public Amusement Parks in 19th-Century St. Petersburg,” in: Stephen Frank, Mark Steinberg (eds.), *Cultures in Flux: Lower Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 121-130.

Bridge and the restoration of the city more generally. After Baron Nikolai had finished his speech, Dmitrii Kipiani, the Marshall of the Nobility, took the stage. Kipiani, who in his youth had participated in the anti-Russian conspiracy of 1832 and who throughout his life was an ardent supporter of Georgian language and culture, spoke on behalf of the Georgian nobility who, after all, had initiated the building of the monument. With its opening ceremony, he remarked, a heartfelt wish had now come true, which was shared by the whole population of the region. The statue expressed the grateful memory of everyone for Vorontsov, whose “statesmanship and sacred patriotic intentions had led to good and healthy beginnings in everything”, had extinguished the seeds of evil and harm, and had inculcated through moral more than material forces, a solidarity between the rulers and the ruled. “We saw that all his deeds emanated from these high moral standards;” Kipiani finished, “we saw that from there emanated his appreciation of and respect for our beliefs, our ideas, for all that is sacred to us in the past and the present.” The wish to acknowledge this gratefully and to preserve his fame for future centuries had now been fulfilled.

State Counselor Platon Iosseliani followed with a rather long and flamboyant speech, in which even the forces of heaven and earth were repeatedly invoked. An eminent historian and scholar of Georgian medieval manuscripts, who during Vorontsov’s administration was the publisher of *Zakavkazskii vestnik*, the leading periodical in the Caucasus, Iosseliani, among many other things, repeatedly stressed the unity between Georgia and Russia, praised Vorontsov as a “man of the people” and declared the monument a symbol of the love and gratitude of all hearts and souls in the region. Even the Caucasian sky and soil “feel the shining glory associated with the name Vorontsov”. Yet this monument also speaks to the glory of Russia, which had adopted

the region under its mighty protection. According to Iosseliani, the statue was erected by the “hands of all” in the region. It is like a “popular shrine, it speaks the language of the masses, is the embodiment of the voice of the peoples and tribes, a symbol for contemporary and future gratitude of all of society.” With good reason does Mount Kazbek look at it so majestically, this representative of the Caucasian mountains, under whose shield the whole expanse of the land, from its peaks down to the valleys, greets the statue and forms a harmonious choir to sing a song of praise to the great man. Vorontsov’s love for the Caucasus tied the golden chain of commonality and union between this region and Russia, while he himself stands out like the highest mountains in the Caucasus, the Alps and the Himalayas.

Iosseliani’s speech and those preceding it had all the ingredients for a nascent cult around Vorontsov and his statue. They presented him as a father figure, placed him in an otherworldly environment, linked him to the forces of nature and the majesty of the highest mountains, and turned him into some kind of *Übermensch*. And indeed, soon afterwards some of these motives appeared again in other settings, while the statue itself was meticulously cared for and cleaned annually with the help of funds set aside in the Tiflis municipal budget.³⁶ Vorontsov’s portrait began to embellish journals and magazines, and he became the subject of works of literature long before he appeared

³⁶ On most photographs of the monument, a ladder can be seen on the ground next to the pedestal, which was used to reach the statue for cleaning. Around 1900, the sum reserved for the annual cleaning was 500 rubles. A major repair of the statue, including the removal of green stains resulting from bird droppings, was necessary at that time. See *SEA*, f. 192 (Tiflisskoe gorodskoe obshchestvennoe upravlenie), *op.* 8, *d.* 87 (Ob ispravnom sodержanii pamiatnikov kn. Vorontsovu i Pushkinu v gor. Tiflise), *ll.* 1-3.

in Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat*.³⁷ In a poem from 1870, for example, which was published posthumously in 1871 in the main literary journal of the time, *Tsiskari* ("Dawn") under the title "To the Vorontsov Monument", Ekaterina Eristavi, a member of an old Georgian noble family and the granddaughter of the last Imeretian king Solomon II., proclaimed that all the Caucasian nations had erected the monument for this modest, liberal and just man, who was the protector of oppressed people.³⁸ He brought happiness and joy to the Caucasus and attracted every Georgian's heart. "Look at the monument, which we erected for him! And give it your devotion. He loved us like a father [...]. I stand here, the witness of his deeds, at his monument. I owe him to pray for him forever. I want to hug him and weep, as signs of my gratitude."

The examples of praise for Vorontsov have so far been confined to members of the Georgian nobility and the Russian military and civilian administration. Unfortunately we do not know what was said or done during the opening ceremony or at the *supra* by the many common people who participated in these events. But we do have a description of how ordinary residents of Tiflis reacted when they first saw the statue.³⁹ While the lunch in the Mushtaid Gardens was underway on the second day of the celebrations, curious locals apparently in large numbers flocked to the new monument. According to the newspaper report, many of them bowed in front of the statue, kneeled down, prayed, and some even kissed the pedestal. It is of course hard to know whether this was done out of genuine gratitude to Vorontsov or whether other

³⁷ See, for example, his portrait on the front page of *Illiustrirovannaia gazeta* 20 (25.5.1867).

³⁸ Ekaterina Eristavi, "Vorontsovis dzeglsa," *Tsiskari* 3 (1871) 149-50. I thank Zeinab Lomjaria for the biographical information about Eristavi.

³⁹ N. Dunkel'-Velling, "26 Marta v Tiflise," *Kavkaz* (2.4.1867).

motives were behind this peculiar behavior. Most likely it occurred for a rather simple reason. Since these people had never seen a secular monument before, they reacted to it in the way they generally reacted to venerated objects, that is as if they were in church, in front of an icon. In that respect, the transfiguration of Vorontsov into a saint-like figure was not only a matter of eulogies among the elites.

The opening of the Vorontsov monument was by far the biggest and most magnificent ceremony that Tiflis had experienced for a long time. Its dramaturgy, at first glance, resembled similar events in St. Petersburg or, for that matter, the unveiling of the Vorontsov monument in Odessa – a religious service, troops standing to attention, members of the imperial family, representatives of the clergy and of different estates, token common people.⁴⁰ Yet in Tiflis, local traditions, like the *supra*, were integrated in the ceremony as well, the inscriptions on the shields on the bridge were “in the local languages,” presumably Armenian and Georgian. Many references were made to the beauty of Caucasian nature, mountains and rivers, and family metaphors were used profusely, with Vorontsov as father figure and Georgians as children or Georgia as a brother of Russia. In a way, these were all gestures towards local sensibilities, just like the monument itself. In place of the venerated Vorontsov, the imperial authorities could simply have put up a statue of the hated Ivan Paskevich, who, from their perspective, had likewise achieved huge successes in the Caucasus. And yet, the Vorontsov monument was also something of a provocation. It was part of a colonial reform of public space, which had already started earlier, under Vorontsov, with the

⁴⁰ The organizers of the Tiflis event had requested information about the Odessa ceremony from their colleagues there. See letter from Upravlenie Novorossisskago i Bessarabskago General Gubernatora to Baron Nikolai and the attached detailed description of the Odessa ceremony in *SEA, f. 7, op. 1, d. 690, ll. 14-16*.

rebuilding of the city itself. The statue was meant to introduce a new iconography (obviously not quite understood yet by those people who kissed it), a new aesthetic category of representation, which in that form had not existed in Georgia before and which was itself an expression of the new political and social order.⁴¹ The geographic location and the spatial symbolism of the monument make this even more evident, as an analysis of Illustration 2 will show.

We are looking southward onto the scene. Because of the *passé-partout* it seems as if we are looking from afar, like through a binocular. The perspective of the viewer lies on a vector that has its origins further north, for example in St. Petersburg. In front of our eyes is Tiflis, with a few newly erected buildings. Vorontsov, the statue, also looks at what he has accomplished, including the bridge that he had built, a symbol for his role as mediator between Russians (north of the river) and Georgians (with their capital on the other side). Beyond the mountains, further south, lie Persia and the Ottoman Empire. It is towards these distant countries that Vorontsov and our virtual St. Petersburg observer look as well. And as it turns out, this observer was not only a virtual one. A few weeks before the ceremony, on the 4th of February, a Caucasian evening was held in St. Petersburg, where Vladimir Sollogub, with typical panache, gave the main speech.⁴² In it, he praised the Russian achievements in the Caucasus, announced the imminent opening of the monument and then passionately proclaimed: “And don’t we see the statue from here? The monumental, unwavering bronze man towering above the roaring Kura?” With these words Sollogub effectively

⁴¹ Zaal Andronikashvili, “Denkmalkultur in Georgien,” *Geisteswissenschaftliche Zentren Berlin. Bericht über das Forschungsjahr 2008*, no. 13 (Berlin 2009), 73-83, here 73-75.

⁴² „Sed’ moi Kavkazskii vecher v Peterburge,“ *Russkii invalid* (12./24. 2. 1867): 3.

summarized the position which the monument held in the mental maps of the Russian elites. It signaled, albeit on a smaller scale, an imperial message similar to that of the Bronze Horseman in St. Petersburg. The empire in the back, he stands at its periphery, steadfastly defends a new outpost, and looks forward to new conquests. The fact that a temporary fence around the Vorontsov monument was soon replaced by one made of Turkish trophy canons that were stuck into the ground as pillars and connected with chains, clearly underlines this imperial message.⁴³

The popularization of the empire at the periphery started relatively late. As the example of the Vorontsov statue in Tiflis has shown, there was clearly no master plan and much was left to the initiative of individual people, both in the capital and in the regions. While civilian and military authorities took part in the organization and implementation, they were not necessarily the driving forces behind the project. There was also no master plan about how the empire should be represented aesthetically at its periphery. While widely used European styles of imperial symbolism were the obvious choice, resulting in an aesthetic *translatio imperii* from St. Petersburg, individual and local features, like the Turkish canons and the Georgian aspects of the opening ceremonies, were also incorporated or, like the equestrian statue, at least considered. Further study will show whether this kind of relatively soft aesthetic imperialism continued to be pursued across the divide of 1917 and all the way up to the crumbling Arch of Russo-Georgian Friendship.

⁴³ Letter to the office of the viceroy about the delivery of the canons from the Tiflis arsenal, dated 4. April 1867, in *SEA*, f. 7, op.1, d. 690, ll. 33-33 ob.