

## Caucasian Multiculturalism, as the Burden and the Opportunity and the Private Archive of Russian Empire's Georgian General

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### Abstract

The Caucasus is considered as one of the difficult geopolitical regions. It includes Georgia, which differs from other Caucasian ethnics in religious-cultural context. Georgia, which has been strongly influenced by Persia and Ottoman Turkey for centuries, as well as by Europe, fully becomes a part of Russian Empire and gets under even stronger European influence. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Caucasus was characterized by multiculturalism that, in general, causes the atrophy of values and the marginalization of national components, as a result. The subject of our research is the private archive, namely, 700 letters of Grigol Orbeliani (1804-1883), Georgian poet, military person and public figure, the General of the Russian army. In this material, we can find the various concepts of self-identity. In this regard, it is significant to analyze what place was taken by Russian on the one hand and Eastern on the other hand phraseology and sayings in his mentality. How does Orbeliani understand and develop the phenomenon of "homeland"; what forms of tolerance does he reveal; what is his perception on Imperial, Caucasian and Georgian contexts, and so on. These very letters give us the opportunity to find not only Orbelianian contours of self-identity concept, but contributes to our attempts of marking human groups and societies' ethnic and religious identities as well.

**Keywords:** Grigol Orbeliani, Caucasian, Multiculturalism, Personal letters

### Introduction

The scientific grant project under which this research is being carried out has given us an opportunity to use the corpus research method and look for the trends relevant to us in personal letters of this public figure. The epistolary legacy, not intended for publication and having only interpersonal communication function, often contains data different from official documents, especially if we take into account the fact that Grigol Orbeliani had an intense epistolary relationship with the governors of the Caucasus (Alexander Bariatinsky (1815-1879), Mikheil Vorontsov (1782-1956)), who provided the instructions during the Caucasian war, as well as viceroys and imams as the main actors of the Caucasian War. In his writings, two passions are seen - war and lyric, as well as two interests - his own homeland as a sentimental phenomenon and the Russian empire, in the service of which his good and bad are defined. The public image of the poet and the general without the contextual and meta-textual data of these letters is quite one-sided.

**Methodology:** As far as we had to work on some manuscripts, we mainly used a stage-stratal method of reading manuscripts. Besides, we used different methods and technologies used by neighboring fields of humanities: source studies, ethnography, literary criticism, culturology. For cross-cultural and discourse analysis we complemented these methods with comparative, inductive, deductive, and other universal ones.

Ranging from diplomatic relations to gastronomy, the entire Caucasian existence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was imbued with multiculturalism, which generally leads to the atrophy of values and, consequently, stipulates for marginalization of national components. Those public figures, which helped create cultural and geostrategic variations in the region, were also marginalized.

Grigol Orbeliani's authority, stipulated by not only for his being Caucasian in the eyes of Caucasian mountain-dwellers, but also for his personal skills and values, often became a reliable tool for the officials of the Russian Empire. This ability of the General could be noticed a lot of times, for example in his relationship with Shamil's Naib - Haji Murat: during Grigol Orbeliani's visit in Avar Khanate, he convinced the Naib to come over to the Russian side on the condition that he would

be forgiven for the committed crimes to the government, but after he was dismissed from Avar Khanate, Haji Murat refused to negotiate because he did not trust other generals of Russia (Droeba, 1883).

Grigol Orbeliani objectively assessed the interests and uncompromising efforts of Caucasian leaders towards independence. He repeatedly describes the exemplary courage shown by the Caucasian mountain-dwellers (for example, how two dignified 20-22-year-old Ossetians put up resistance to 20-soldier troop of the Russian army, emphasizing that they did not even think of fleeing the place where they had accidentally encountered the troop). Despite his admiration, he, as a military man, describes the battles while subduing the Caucasian mountain-dwellers with great passion and wrath. One of his letters shows how the army threaded on the skewers, killed, destroyed, took away flags, made their opponents wail, and thus took the blood of Kakheti (Orbeliani, 1855). It should be noted that the main aim of those battles - a complete subordination of the Caucasus mountain-dwellers - was dictated by the Russian imperial view. However, in personal letters, where one expresses freely his aspirations, Orbeliani's other desire could be seen - the revenge for Kakheti (Georgia's historic province), often attacked by mountain-dwellers. Here, as in many cases, the general's interests and intentions are split, and his portrait is more brittle than while corresponding with the viceroys. As for correspondence with them, he expresses his sincere admiration for the cultural and infrastructural projects that the Caucasian viceroys laid the foundation for. Here are two excerpts from the letters written to Mikhail Vorontsov, the viceroy of the Caucasus:

"I am spiritually inspired by the letter of Your Excellency. It described the recent past, famed with great deeds, in vivid colors: the fierce battles, even the subdued Caucasus, which had never been subdued before, the established peace in your beloved Georgia, liberation of thousands of captive Christians, the most beautiful road in the country which was paved for approximately 8000 ft to the top, where once only the eagles flew, mountain passes, construction of the canal along numerous dessiatinas (1.09 hectares) to enliven the barren land, the railroad projects, and many more ... Let me express my deep gratitude to you, being a thousand versts (1.6 km) away from you, for the glory and for the prosperity and happiness of the greatest country. And why should not you be happy and proud of the things that happened due to your hands, the things that will live as long as the Caucasus lives?! " (Orbeliani, 1864).

Or: "The Caspian shore is now enjoying your glorious, forethought deeds: the headquarters are finished and look like the lovely, small towns where armies that had no shelter before live quietly; beginning with Shura (Temir-Khan-Shura) with its magnificent fountains, buildings, towers and a wonderful temple ... A beautiful church had been built in Dagestan; there are three beautiful stations between Shura and Derbent; and the trade is getting better and better " (Orbeliani, 1855).

These fragments perfectly illustrate the "New Caucasus" as a justifying argument for long and bloody Caucasian wars. Although this letter is written to the official, it cannot be thought that Grigol Orbeliani referred to the bureaucratic tribute here.

In a letter to Alexander Baryatinsky, Grigol Orbeliani regrets that "new individuals are emerging in the Caucasus who have not spent anything to pacify the Caucasus and to bring peace and order there; who did not work for the well-being of this country and who only wish to get closer to Russia; Therefore, these individuals do not possess memorials, that is, the power that would relate them to the Caucasus" (Orbeliani, 1861). It is clear that this is a letter of a person who worried for the present and the future of the Caucasus.

It is noteworthy that in the image of Grigol Orbeliani we get not only the portrait of a man living on the edge of several cultures, but also a portrait that seeks to portray the Caucasus as a monogenic ethnocultural and political entity amidst many cultural streams. The conflict, on the one hand, between Grigol Orbeliani's ethnic interests and personal values, and the official (job) order on the other hand, creates quite substantial contradictions, though unique opportunities emerge in this situation. Time and again, Grigol Orbeliani appeared to be an indirect demiurge of Caucasian geopolitics. The intense nature of his correspondence with the viceroys and several passages from these letters suggest that Grigol Orbeliani had an indirect influence on the conduct of human resources policy in the Caucasus. Once, he wrote to Alexander Baryatinsky: "Mushtaid died in Tbilisi ... Please do not renew this title in the future. Those who think that a Muslim with such a high ranking may be a devotee of the Christian authorities are ignorant. Can we demand from Metropolitan Isidore a sincere devotion to the Shah of Persia? There was no Mushtaid here even when Georgia was under Persian influence; why would we want him here now?" (Orbeliani, 1861). With such influence, the General used to change the ethnic and religious climate in the region, especially in Georgia.

In order to create a multicultural environment, any ethnic subject first experiences marginalization and then is faced by the need to give up some of self-sufficient elements. In the sources of our research, we encounter with the prominent examples of the marginalization of portraits. One letter of Grigol Orbeliani tells us about Shah Qibla-Alam's (Iran's Shah Naser al-Din Qajar (1848-1896)) arrival in Tbilisi in 1878, which he describes rhetorically: "Just imagine, the Khan is wearing our ethnic coat with 'pagoni' (epaulets). Is there any more russification than this?!" (Orbeliani, 1860). This fragment of the letter is interesting in many ways - in the words "our ethnic," the general implies Russian, and expresses dissatisfaction with irony, since personal sympathies overwhelmingly lead to protect the dignity of the Eastern ruler. It is noteworthy that dignity is frequently directly proportional to the protection of identity in this sense. This argument is questioned by one factor - there are cases where the marginal identity is not meant to diminish the quality of dignity but, rather, to bring it to higher standards. Much earlier, in 1866, when Grigol Orbeliani himself visited the same Shah of Persia, he considered the unusual strokes of his portrait worth to note: "the Khan is still a young man, 37 years old, good-looking, a famous cavalryman and gunman, he is learning French and magazines are read in this language, and thus he is distinguished with keen intelligence in his country" (Orbeliani, 1866). Unlike the previous sample, bringing in other ethnic and cultural streams here is a sign of progress and not just the author's implicit irony. The difference is that in the first case it brings the Russian element into the Shah's portrait, and in the second - the European.

"He longs to see Europe, and even tries to fulfill his dream, but it is difficult: it is not easy to get out of Persia for Khan" (Orbeliani, 1866) - This wish of the Shah, who ruled Persia for nearly five decades, is a sign of great courage and, apparently, this evokes compassion in the author of the letter.

The deep vacillation of the national element is indicated by the fragments of Orbeliani's letters in which he speaks of Shamil's son, Jamal ad-Din: "Shamil's unhappy son Jamal ad-Din is grieving for Russia; he cannot get used to the new way of life - the malodorous life of mountain-dwellers; they teach him the Koran and prayers and even circumcision was performed on him, which he still cannot recover from. He resolutely turned down the offer to become the head of predatory parties so that he could steal sheep from the poor locals and thus earn the name of a courageous man. Nevertheless, Shamil seems to love him very much. Once Shamil asked him why he was so miserable, he replied: "Why should I be joyful when my Emperor Nikolai died?" Shamil engrossed in thoughts and said: "Yes, we both have to venerate the memory of this great Padishah: he returned my child to me, and made you a man" (Orbeliani, 1855).

Orbeliani cites Shamil directly. If this is the case, we are faced with a strange reality: the overt confrontation with Oriental, Persian cultural and historical discourse, which was addressed by Jamal ad-Din by means of his father's assessment, is an immediate precondition for "making you a man". This is, of course, an acute statement and an extremely ambiguous stroke of the most ambitious portrait of a Caucasian who fought vigorously with the Russian Empire. As for Jamal ad-Din, in the sources cited in the National Center for Manuscripts of Georgia (in letters to Leonti Nikolai), he explicitly states that "if not for the Father, even the Devil himself would not make me stay in this place." In these letters, he insists on sending him a book of world history, grammar of the Russian language, French-Russian and Russian-French dictionaries, Ivan Krilov's fables and more ... That is why the North Caucasians considered him a Russian spy. This indicates a crisis of ethnic and cultural identity and a rare example of alienation of the Caucasian mountain-dweller.

If we called on the frequency of use of Western and Eastern toponyms, mentioned in correspondence with both friends and official persons (1865-1869), as one of Grigol Orbeliani's arguments identifying the geostrategic and cultural orientations, it would appear that the general had mentioned the European states and cities (for example, Florence, France, Prussia, Geneva, Warsaw, etc.) 75 times, and cities of Persia, Dagestan, Armenia and even Azerbaijan (Gubin, Kaitagh, Tabasaran, Tavriz, Echmiadzin, etc.) - 67 times. This was when the European orientation line would be inferior to the eastern line in terms of avowal.

The Georgian thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost never considered Eastern countries as "an external space". For them, this was represented by Europe. In his personal letters, Grigol Orbeliani emphasized Europe as a cultural space distinct from the own identity, and he managed to show it in the light of household details.

Grigol Orbeliani perceives Europe as "the best place to lead practical life", "rational formation of the character", "bringing up a child", "intellectual and physical development" ... for him Europe had always been a symbol of tranquility and order. We encounter the following passage in one of the letters: "Thrift, order, and purity are the components of their (Germans') character; all of this must be added with bread and butter, coffee, a beer mug, a narghile, or a cigar, Hamburg newspapers - and a German is in paradise" (Orbeliani, 1861). The components of the "German Paradise" are desirable but not idyllic.

In this list, the author of the letter emphasizes practical life more, he not only avoids the high-value component but he does not see it. Europe is so natural for him - quiet, cozy, neutral ... Such is the portrait of a descriptive average European for him. The quotation is about a German butcher whose wife and children played the piano and danced French quadrille. Grigol Orbeliani does not consider himself a part of European identity, on the contrary, he always emphasizes (mostly humorously) his estrangement: In one letter, he writes: "Our women went to take the carbonated waters; Oh, what can we do with them? This is a European custom. We should not rebuke us – Asians, who cannot comprehend the height of their education" (Orbeliani, 1846). One more: "I got your book from Geneva, and on the 8th, Chilaev wrote to B. Nikolai that he had seen you in Paris. Hmmm! So, you began to wander in Europe, didn't you? Is it clear that you, somehow, are getting out of my tutorship? I protest this!" Also: "You went to the West and my fate took me to the East" (Orbeliani, 1846).

But neither is the Caucasus his native given. When he writes: "The Caucasus! I have had the honour to see this part too, and I do not regret it, though we suffered to get over the huge mountains in the cold and snow, without firewood and fire, walking day and night!" (Orbeliani, 1848) – these words prove that he was far from the Caucasus, the geographic and geopolitical and ethnocultural area. For him, it is the new, recognizable given.

Apart from the abovementioned, in terms of regional identification, one important point is worth noting: Grigol Orbeliani considers Europe as "Zagranitsa" (abroad).

He frequently had to modify the sketches of the contradictory cultural strategies in the non-native geographic and ideological system. In spite of the charm already described above in the European environment, he insists in one of his private letters to his cousin that his son must be taught to speak Tatar and Persian (and not any European) languages ("He won't get by with English" - we read in the quotation), as it was a necessary challenge at that time. As it is seen, his relative followed his advice and Grigol Orbeliani wrote in the next letter: "I am happy that your son is learning Persian."

He advises another close relative to make his son "learn Russian and French, and, if possible, Persian, which will be very helpful."

Marginalization of thinking is a direct consequence of the lack of values and therefore strategies. Grigol Orbeliani's linguistic (that is, political and cultural) priorities are also somewhat contradictory. He has compiled a list of the languages needed for that era (in a more sophisticated way): Latin, French, German, Polish and Russian – 1848; French, German and Russian – 1848; French, German and Russian, and if you are willing - Arabic – 1848; Tatar and Persian, English – 1855.

In the first three earlier paragraphs, the addressee prefers European (French and German) and then Russian languages. Seven years later, these languages were replaced by Eastern languages: Tatar and Persian. This list of desirable languages is dictated by practical purpose – to lead life, to serve the lifestyle, and he has a completely different view for a more general purpose. He writes: "In my opinion, the system of teaching that followed Tiflis (Tbilisi system of teaching), that is, what was taught in Russian, would also be taught in French and thus a lot of time will be wasted. My point is that sciences should be taught in Russian, and literature and poetry - in foreign languages; It will be much better" (Orbeliani, 1864).

Despite Grigol Orbeliani's declarative attempt to portray the Caucasus as a monogenic space, in one of his letters (Orbeliani, 1852) in 1852, he spoke of numerous Caucasian and Persian merchandise taken from Nukhi. This segmentation indicates that in General's consciousness Caucasian is not identical to Russian.

Rarely, but we do find the passages in which multiculturalism is portrayed without contradictions. For example, "snacks, family-run lunches: fowl from sky, ice from the Caucasus, game from the woods, fish from the sea, were being served: Soup from Europe, Georgian barbecue, pilaf from Iran, cold lamb, citruses and others" (Orbeliani, 1853), - this multicultural gastronomic environment is one of the traveling details of Mikhail Vorontsov's visit to Zakatala in 1853. In spite of the great variety of people, places and events, all contradictions in gastronomic multiculturalism, all conflicts were overcome. The desired eclecticism and combination, of course, do not apply to all areas of Caucasian coexistence.

Grigol Orbeliani strives for eclectic circumstances with synthetic, cultural and religious signs (and his personal writings do possess this natural tone). He finds the key to solve problems in such givens. Let's say, among the cultural objects to be visited by the empire's representatives there is St. Nino's 'Zavedenie' (the establishment), the newly blessed Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church and the main Mosque, and even the theatre with Persian songs and others for the glorious ones.

Nevertheless, there are cases when Grigol Orbeliani appears to be overly direct and bold. This especially can be noticed in the letters sent to the viceroys - Alexander Baryatinsky and Mikhail Vorontsov. He writes to one of these addressees, M. Vorontsov, in 1855: "In my opinion, there is no Dagestan, no Chechnya; there is only an enemy and an army of empire who is supposed to resolve the bloody issue of the great fate of the Caucasus" (Orbeliani, 1852). The framework of multiculturalism is completely violated here, and the notion of "tolerance" is left aside; a new portrait of Grigol Orbeliani - a warrior for whom war is not only fun but also passion is brought to the fore. The passion which not only oppresses the light tolerant constructions, in general, towards human beings, but also the notions of the national identity; and, from the field of vision, he raises a fundamental issue – the counterbalanced empire and its army.

Among the effects of the projects planned and implemented by these addressees in the letters to the aforementioned addressees, one of the main benefits for the Caucasians is that "by teaching them labour they mitigate their morals and customs, they connect them to us by means of profitability of trade and thus prepare us for spiritual changes."

It is very difficult to determine, what other essential reasons there were for author to exclude "us" from the pronoun "them", why "we" became exclusive. What degree of identity he left us with? Any discussion of Europe, the Caucasus, Iran, broadly speaking, implies thoughts about Georgia as a geographical part of the Transcaucasia, a politically Russian empire-bound country, subject to the influence of two culturally global regions - the East and the West. The most important issue, however, is to find its own place in this region and to properly and timely evaluate the ever-changing geopolitical flows along this path.

In 1855, the General wrote to Mikhail Vorontsov about the Caucasian perception of the Russian-Turkish War: "the whole Caucasus as well as the entire world is looking with astonishment at the fierce struggle of our heroes in the Crimea; And the mountain-dwellers, who had known only Istanbul, Kizlar and Siberia, now talk about the English, the French and the Germans. So, the war has its good side too! Shamil is also keeping a greedy eye on the flow of the war, and, frustrated by the strength of the Sultanate of Turkey, he is not too keen to see the might of the Russian emperor" (Orbeliani, 1855) – It was Grigol Orbeliani, on the one hand, who emphasized the expansion of the Caucasian outlook and, on the other hand, the favorable geopolitical given brought by the war, that was advantageous for the Russian Empire.

In his personal correspondence with his close circle, Grigol Orbeliani talks extensively about his work stories, processes of the development in the Caucasus, and discusses these issues in several angles. There are times when he gets tired with all this and he passes on to personal stories. For example, in one letter he ceases abruptly the topics discussed at the beginning and moves on to another topic: "Let's finish with this and go back to the news: Babo had a daughter; Mamia Gurieli got married to Korkhmaz Melikov's daughter; I and Terezia were their foster-parents. Salome, that is baroness Saken, went to Kutaisi with the family..." Here, Grigol Orbeliani took off his uniform of the General of Empire; he has other stories to tell his friends, sometimes even to himself. A military man with such experience cannot hide his admiration for seeing the Bethany church and he advises his loved ones to visit it. He himself dedicates a lyrical masterpiece of high artistic value to a fresco seen in this temple of a woman, Georgian King.

**Discussion:** As we already saw, multicultural environment for Grigol Orbeliani, as well as for many other officials standing by his side is a big opportunity and big burden at the same time. They have opportunity, because national or ethnic interests of main actors of the period are somehow limited and balance of power creates some kind of stability and they receive freedom of action. But the authentic part of the environment can not feel this opportunity, this chance of action. It's still busy with retention of its own energy. Only someone else, the observer, can feel this. It is worth to mention that Grigol Orbeliani is not the authentic part of the environment. He is the observer, the analyst of environment and therefore takes part in modeling it. Very often he uses this space, freed up as a result of tension between other actors of events, as well as his own good knowledge of inner political reality of the Empire, unpredicted circumstances and does good deeds for himself and the wellbeing of his country. Good examples for this are his letters, in which he advises his closest circle to address heads of the empire with necessary projects (and names projects himself), because it's a good time now. He is a very pragmatic figure in this regard. He uses goodwill of the government for his goals. With his marginal nature, Orbeliani perfectly fits in given circumstances and easily fights rough passions inside him, like passionate protection of national identity, even though this is a part of his nature. With this kind of retreats, this kind of atrophy of values, he manages to arrange multiple infrastructural projects in Georgia (telegraph line, railway and etc) and helps carriers of many private figures.

One thing must be mentioned: despite of fact that Grigol Orbeliani initiated and brought to life many Georgian projects (publishing of old Georgian manuscripts, recovery of old Georgian chants, philanthropy...) up to this day his image is not

unconditionally positive in Georgian society. Even though his person was honored in life and after his death (his written legacy is still published, researches of his public and literature works are funded), trace of his dual life is still seen on the portrait of Grigol Orbeliani. Today we still hear the question: who was he – a traitor or a patriot. This question can be considered as anamnesis of Georgian society as well as the reflection of Georgian-Caucasian perspective.

**Conclusion:** The Caucasus, as a cultural and geopolitical area, is one of the main objects of Georgian thinking. The so-called Caucasus "Georgian perception", of course, is not unambiguous. The issue of the Caucasus is constantly accompanied by a kind of awe, delicacy, which is why it falls within the framework of strictly regulated political and cultural correctness. The circumstances and often unconscious conflicts reflected in Grigol Orbeliani's personal writings create a very narrow, specific, but important perspective for the dialogue of cultures. A combination of these sources offers a generalized portrait of a person working in difficult geopolitical environment. It is a portrait of a person with severe pressure and at the same time a unique opportunity.

**Acknowledgement:** This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSF) [Grant No. FR17\_229 - "New Textual Scholarship Investigations and the Chronology of Grigol Orbeliani's Life and Work (Bilingual Edition)"].

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