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REPORTS FROM EUROPEAN TRAVELLERS ABOUT TBILISI'S POPULATION (THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY)

Abstract

The present article draws upon the personal narratives of European travellers who visited Tbilisi during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These accounts offer insights into the ethno-religious composition of the city's population. The content of this information is derived from travellers' observations in various urban locations, namely the streets, markets and gardens of the city. The Tbilisi market has been termed the 'Babylon of ethnicities and languages', and the clothing and activities of different peoples are described in meticulous detail. The following article presents an overview of the nature and activities of the native population of Tbilisi, which comprises Georgians, Armenians, Tatars, Persians, as well as Russians, Germans, and French who have settled in the city since the beginning of the 19th century. The French diplomat Jules Patennotre is quoted as having described Tbilisi as a "hybrid city", in which diverse elements coexist, but do not amalgamate. As posited by Belgian traveller Carla Serena, Tbilisi can be regarded as a model of the Caucasus, encompassing a multitude of ethnic and cultural groups. Consequently, during the 19th century, Tbilisi assumed a pivotal multicultural role. The coexistence of representatives of different nationalities and religions in this city was a distinctive characteristic that contributed to its cultural and historical significance. While the accounts of European travellers may not be entirely objective, the material preserved in their writings is an invaluable research source regarding Georgia.

Keywords: *European travelers, Tbilisi population, ethnic composition, Spoken languages, population activities*

In the latter half of the 19th century, documentation pertaining to foreign visitors to Georgia, for a variety of purposes, includes a wealth of information regarding the ethnic and religious diversity of the population of Tbilisi. Since the 1930s, the city of Tbilisi has been divided into two distinct areas: the old Eastern and the new Russian-European city (Gilles, Koechlin-Schwartz et al.). Subsequently, from the mid-1880s, Tbilisi was divided into three districts: the old eastern and two European: Golovinsky Avenue with adjacent streets, Eerivan Square and the so-called German Colony (Orsolle, Cholet, Pontevès de Sabran, Drouet). This division of the city is indicative of a heterogeneous population. The French poet Henri Cantel described Tbilisi as the meeting point of Asia and Europe, calling it a 'carefree city nestled on the banks of the Mtkvari River', where people of twenty different religions and nationalities lived together. Travellers have frequently expressed surprise and delight at the city's most interesting contrasts.

Tbilisi as a multinational city. Foreign travellers have provided descriptions of the inhabitants of Tbilisi (Filippi, Freshfield, Tillmann, Boulanger, Carol and others) based on their observations of the streets, markets and gardens. The European aspect of the city of

Tbilisi concluded at the theatre square, otherwise known as Erivan square. In close proximity to this location was the centre of Eastern life, constituted by a market that constituted an essential tourist route for foreigners. Within this milieu, one would encounter the individual at the helm of the Caucasian trade – an Armenian person who was frequently attired in European apparel. The group depicted a cheerful Georgian face; a red-bearded Tatar with a voluminous fur hat; and a tall, thin Persian in a long national robe with a high hat on his head. As observed, a fashionable Russian lady was attired in the latest Parisian style; women from Georgia and Armenia were wrapped in white veils; and a Circassian was clad in traditional Circassian dress. The event boasted a diverse attendance, comprising individuals from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These included well-dressed Ossetians, Dagestanis adorned with turbans and ostentatious weaponry, flattering Jews, sturdy Tush people in black felt hats, Lezgians with sharp profiles and eagle-nosed faces, German colonists in dated suits, Balkan people in traditional foustanella skirts, impoverished Greeks, Turks in wide trousers, Tatars in sheepskin hats, Mingrelians in burkas, Russian uniforms, and European civilian attire. It was observed that there were Tatars and Turkmen from northern Persia exchanging greetings in unfamiliar guttural languages. From dawn to dusk, the market streets were characterised by a perpetual motion of people, goods and vehicles, creating a dynamic and often congested environment. The French businessman Alfred Koechlin-Schwartz was so impressed by what he saw that he wrote: "What types are in this crowd!" The French businessman Alfred Koechlin-Schwartz was so impressed by what he saw that he wrote: "What types are in this crowd! What a selection of colours! You might even want to shout: Give me a palette! But what can we do? It is so beautiful that it cannot be put onto a canvas". The British diplomat Augustus Henry Mounsey described the bazaar as "the Babylon of tongues". The most prevalent languages spoken were Georgian and Armenian, with Tatar being the primary language of the Maidan. The utilisation of the Russian language was observed in small-scale commercial activities.

Foreign travellers described the people of various nationalities they encountered in Tbilisi's streets and markets as mostly seasonal migrants who came in search of work or to trade, and who did not constitute the city's permanent population. The following information on the main composition of Tbilisi is provided by European travellers.

Georgians. Throughout the 19th century, travellers paid particular attention to the clothing worn by Georgian men and women, viewing it as an integral part of their ethnic identity. Many travellers paid particular attention to the thavsacrawi (თავსაკრავი), a type of headdress worn by women. Whether Georgian women were perceived as aesthetically attractive was subjective: some travellers found them beautiful, while others felt that the predominance of classically beautiful faces was monotonous (Leclerc).

The French artist Jean-Pierre Moynet drew parallels between Georgian men and the Apollo Belvedere statue. Georgian noblemen were renowned for their boldness and chivalry. They were passionate about richly decorated weapons, horses and Kakhetian wine. English journalist Walter B. Harris wrote, 'His good looks, good nature and dandyish air seem to make him popular everywhere. No one seems to realise better than he that he has the reputation of coming from the purest stock in the world and of being one of the handsomest". However, their tendency to pursue hedonistic activities often resulted in them spending beyond their means, making them vulnerable to Armenian moneylenders.

The Georgian nobility was predominantly made up of military personnel, some of whom were also employed in government service.

At social events such as parties and balls, the traditional national costume was gradually replaced by European styles. This change in fashion can be explained by the influence of European trends (Lycklama a Nijeholt).

European travellers have predominantly discussed the encounters with upper-class Tbilisians, yet they have also furnished insights into the lower classes. In this particular context, if the man spent his life on the street, the woman was responsible for the care of the family unit. The woman's greatest source of gratification was derived from her weekly visit to the bathhouse, where she would socialise with a multitude of friends and relatives, in addition to partaking in familial celebrations. The life of a Tbilisi family was primarily characterised by three significant events: baptism, marriage and burial (Dingelstedt).

The information regarding religious holidays observed in Tbilisi was provided to us by European travellers. The aforementioned information includes the consecration of water on 6 January, Christmas, St. Nino's Day, and Easter. However, there is a conspicuous absence of reporting on the celebration of Muslim holidays in Tbilisi. It is noteworthy that the influence of Eastern culture in the 19th and 20th centuries is evident in the daily lives of people from all walks of life in Tbilisi.

Armenians. In the 19th century, the absence of an intermediate class between the nobility and the peasantry meant that Armenians occupied this social space (Dingelstedt, De Bey). The Armenian population constituted a significant proportion of Tbilisi's population, and travellers consistently described them as composed, reserved, compliant, intelligent and tenacious individuals. It is an irrefutable fact that they possessed an exceptional aptitude for conducting business. The Armenians exercised control over all trade in Transcaucasia and Tbilisi. It is evident that the individuals in question were cognizant of the pivotal function that financial resources play in the formation of modern society. In their pursuit of this objective, individuals frequently accumulated substantial wealth through diligence and hard work, though on occasion, less ethical methods were employed. Armenian parents placed a high value on their children's education, frequently entrusting their care to European governesses. Armenians occupied prominent roles within the civil and military administration, as well as in industry, trade, and finance.

Despite the prevailing social disapproval of marriage to an Armenian woman among the Georgian elite, many impoverished and insolvent princes still entered into matrimony with the daughters of affluent moneylenders in an attempt to ameliorate their precarious financial circumstances (Orsolle).

Muslims. The Turkic-speaking Muslim population, known to travellers as Tatars, were depicted as being poor, intelligent and hard-working. They were responsible for the transportation of goods via camel and mule between the Caspian Sea and Iran, a task that necessitated the use of heavily laden animals. Some Tatars engaged in agricultural pursuits and kept animals. This was of great significance for Tbilisi, as the Tatars were responsible for supplying the city with wheat, butter, eggs and other essential products.

In addition to merchants, a significant number of Persians from western and northern Iran relocated to the Caucasus and Tbilisi on an annual basis, motivated by the pursuit of enhanced economic opportunities. Within the Persian population, there existed masons of

renown, distinguished by their exceptional proficiency and extensive experience. Some Persians who had become Russian citizens were employed as translators in the Russian army and government.

The German colony. The German colony of New Tiflis was founded on the left bank of the Kura River in 1818. Its inhabitants maintained their language and traditions, married within the community, and spoke limited Russian. Their homes were clean and cosy. They supplied the Tbilisi market with fresh vegetables, meat products, fine wines and beer. There were also skilled craftsmen among them.

The French colony. There was also a small French community in Tbilisi. The French were involved in the fashion trade. Professions represented included jewellers, hairdressers and milliners. Several large hotels in Tbilisi were managed by French people, too. In the Garden of Europe, on the left bank of the city, Napoleon Ney noted that Germans and French people celebrated their national holidays by alternating between singing the Marseillaise and the 'Guardian of the Rhine'.

Russians. The Russian population of Tbilisi comprised families belonging to the military and civil bureaucracy, as well as the families of soldiers. In 1894, Viktor Dingelstedt observed that Russia had effectively Russified the upper echelons of Georgia's former capital, at least with regard to external manifestations. In contrast to the English system, the Russian bureaucracy employed local residents of Tbilisi at all levels of civil and military service. This phenomenon was described as the infusion of new blood into the Russian bureaucracy, with the implication that the most capable individuals were more useful to the government due to their superior understanding of local idioms and customs. Dingelstedt's claim that Russia was entrusted with the task of assimilating the heterogeneous peoples of the Caucasus, in a manner analogous to the manner in which Ancient Rome had effectively achieved this in its conquered provinces, is a noteworthy point.

Conclusion. The French diplomat Jules Patenôtre described Tbilisi as a 'hybrid city', a place where different elements coexist without blending together. According to Belgian traveller Carla Serena, Tbilisi was the model for the Caucasus map due to the diversity of its people. The French writer Gaston Sanson is quoted as describing Tbilisi as a distinctive city — a kind of huge caravanserai where Europe and Asia meet.

As demonstrated in the preceding section, it can be posited that during the 19th century, Tbilisi functioned as a significant multicultural centre, wherein individuals of diverse nationalities and religious affiliations coexisted harmoniously. This was a significant characteristic of the city.