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UMI
FROM DYNASTIC PRINCIPALITY TO IMPERIAL DISTRICT:
THE INCORPORATION OF GURIA INTO THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE TO 1856

by

Kenneth Church

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Doctoral Committee:
Professor John V.A. Fine, Co-Chair
Professor Ronald G. Suny, Co-Chair
Professor Müge Göçek
Assistant Professor Stephen H. Rapp
Professor William G. Rosenberg
With deepest gratitude to my parents,
Allen C. and Jane E. Church,
And in memory of
John D. Morgan
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PREFACE

The origins of this study lie in a prolonged examination of the 1902-1906 Gurian peasant movement. The agrarian revolt engulfed Western Georgia during the 1905-1907 Russian Revolution and resulted in the declaration of the Gurian Republic in 1905 before tsarist troops quashed the rebellion early in 1906. As several scholars have point out, the movement marked the first instance when socialists allied with peasants to overthrow a colonial power.¹ The question that most readily springs to mind is why Guria? Why did the most well-organized and sustained agrarian movement of the 1905-1907 Revolution, indeed, the first anti-colonial peasant movement led by socialists in the world, occur in this peripheral territory of the empire and not in one of the “internal provinces” of Russia nearer the heart of the workers’ movement? And in the context of Georgia itself, located south of the main Caucasus range, why did this novel form of agrarian revolt emerge in Guria and not in neighboring Samegrelo (Russian: Mingrelia) or Imeret’i (Imeretia), also in Western Georgia, or in the Gori or Tp’ilisi (Russian: Tiflis) districts of Eastern Georgia? Why did such a rebellion occur on this particular periphery? Scholars have offered a wide array of answers to these questions that occasionally make at least a passing reference to the tradition of rebellion in this principality.² In an attempt to


²G.V. Xach’ap’uridze (Khachapuridze), Guriskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu (T’bilisi: Zakkniga, 1931): 35; P’. Maxaradze (Makharadze), Gruzia v XIX stoletii: Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk (T’bilisi: Zakkniga,
understand that tradition, I embarked on an investigation of Gurian history which led to the present study of the incorporation of the principality into the Russian Empire.

Rebellions punctuated the process of incorporation and present the historian with a quandary over how to understand the imposition of Russian rule. Beginning in 1819-1820, the Gurians revolted against the new Russian administration once every twenty years or roughly every generation. Thus, they rebelled again in 1841, 1862, 1882, and finally in 1902 (and later in 1924). Close scrutiny of this pattern of revolt, however, reveals a more curious interaction between the Russians and Gurians, one that cannot be simply reduced to terms like confrontation, domination, and resistance. Indeed, alternating with this cycle of revolt is a parallel pattern of allegiance, whereby every twenty years or so, Gurians demonstrated their loyalty to the Russian regime on the battlefield fighting the common Ottoman foe. After rebelling in 1819-1820, Gurians fought under Russian commanders in the 1828-1829 Russo-Ottoman War, in the Crimean War, 1855-1856, and again in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. Rebellions alternated with outbursts of manifest allegiance, confrontation with, accommodation to, and even affirmation of Russian rule. The 1902-1906 rebellion represents the culmination of this pattern because of its links to the previous rebellions and because of how it finally shattered confidence in the autocracy.

The relationship between rebellion and allegiance illuminates the complexity of incorporation and underscores the need to situate this unfolding drama in the larger context of not just the imposition of Russian rule but the interaction between Russians and Gurians (and, by extension, other Georgians as well) in the enterprise of extending the empire to the Ottoman-Persian frontier. This pattern of revolt and allegiance highlights the agency of the Gurians in the process of expanding imperial rule; as a reflection of loyalty professed and withdrawn, it gives expression to a larger process of

negotiation between new imperial rulers and entrenched, local elites who sought to preserve their autonomy in the face of imperial incursions. Therefore, the present study aims to analyze the mode of imperial governance that gave rise to this tradition. It seeks to demonstrate the ways the imposition of imperial rule depended on local participation, what forms that participation took, and how it changed with time.

I frame this analysis in terms of Cyril Toumanoff's concept of dynasticism, which he identifies as the predominant form of political rule and social organization throughout Christian Caucasia (by which he means principally the Georgian and Armenian lands, all lying south of the main Caucasus range). I investigate this concept more closely in the Introduction, but here it is important to stress how rule by a dynastic family, like the Gurieli-s of Guria (or the Dadiani-s of Samegrelo/Mingrelia), was predicated upon an inherent claim to sovereignty over what was perceived by other dynastic houses to be their patrimony: namely, the lands of Guria, however amorphous the principality's borders were across time. Toumanoff ties the emergence of dynastic rule in Christian Caucasia to this region's unique location as a borderland between larger, more powerful empires centered in Persia to the southeast and Anatolia in the southwest. As argued in this study, Caucasia's borderland position generated fractured dynastic rule in Western Georgia especially after the final breakdown of centralized Bagratid royal authority over Eastern and Western Georgia in the fifteenth century. Within Western Georgia, Guria was a peripheral dynastic principality within the borderland. When the Russians entered the competition for hegemony over the Georgian lands in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the question they had to confront without fully understanding what they were doing there was how to respond to dynastic rule in these domains where rulers had looked primarily to the south for political, religious, and cultural associations. For the first half of the nineteenth century the Russians forged a condominium with the dynastic houses of Western Georgia based on their mutual Orthodox Christian faith and Russia's civilizing mission. In the case of Guria, Russia succeeded by 1830 in dissolving the sovereignty of
the Gurieli ruling house and transforming the Gurieli-s into an imperial service nobility—a process that sparked dynastic revolts in 1819-1820 and 1828-1829. Thus, at the same time, the administration was forced to leave intact the dynastic social structure in the face of rebellion and to shore up imperial rule in a domain that was assuming ever greater strategic importance with respect to the Ottomans. Hence, the focus of this study remains on the dynastic rulers of Guria and their supporting princely families. It investigates how they negotiated with the Russians to preserve what autonomy they could while also retaining their prerogative to represent the lower or gentry nobles (Georgian plural: aznaurebi) and serfs of Guria to the new Russian administration. It also examines the rifts between members of the Gurieli family and between Gurieli-s and other princely houses of Guria and beyond Guria. The investigation of these tensions seeks to reveal the strategies deployed by Russians and dynastic families alike to preserve this traditional social structure in the face of sporadic albeit profound imperial reforms culminating in the administrative reform of 1840. The abolition of sovereignty and preservation of the dynastic social structure in Guria illuminates the fragility of the Russian presence in this peripheral territory and the Russians’ dependence on the local elite to sustain that presence amidst continued international conflict and the prolonged campaign to subdue the Caucasian mountaineers to the north.

The focus on the fate of dynasticism prior to and under Russian rule removes attention from peasants and emphasizes the centrality of the condominium between dynastic rulers and Russian overlords as the mechanism for preserving the status quo internally, within Guria. That is, when viewed in terms of this ruling arrangement between dynastic families and imperial administrators, Russian suzerainty in this tiny peripheral domain continued a long tradition of ruling through existing social structures with minimum personnel and limited goals that amounted to mobilizing human and physical resources for annual taxes and when needed for military campaigns. This mode of governance looks similar to the way the Ottomans had previously asserted their
hegemony over Guria. At the same time, rebellion, the need to wrest the eastern Black
Sea coast from Ottoman control, and growing concern for a more effective accounting
and collection of resources led the imperial administration to introduce reforms that were
designed to integrate the principality into the regular administrative system of the empire.
On balance, for the first half of the nineteenth century up through the Crimean War,
relative neglect of Guria prevailed over efforts at systematic reform as were undertaken
more boldly in Eastern Georgia and neighboring Imeret’i. Only after the Crimean War
did Russian administrators feel confident enough to implement a series of policy
initiatives to transform the Gurian economy, landscape, and social order to meet imperial
demands for greater productivity and social uniformity. Thus, this study is intended to
provide the foundation for examining the subsequent history of how Russian policies and
Gurian responses after the Crimean War resulted in a popular revolutionary movement
that sought finally to transform the dynastic social structure into a nationally unified
socialist society.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This study examines the Russian encounter with dynastic rule in the Georgian principality of Guria. Dynasticism had emerged over two millenia as the predominant social structure and mode of governance in Christian Caucasus because of the region's borderland position with respect to larger imperial formations centered in Anatolia and Persia. Guria was an autonomous principality in Western Georgia, ruled by the dynastic Gurieli family and bordering the Ottoman Empire, when the Russians began a concerted effort to gain a foothold south of the main Caucasus range during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774. Following the war, officials of Catherine the Great's government debated the wisdom of remaining south of this formidable mountain range, and international events like the partitions of Poland diverted their attention away from the Caucasus. At the same time, rulers of the various Georgian lands sought an alliance with this northern imperial power as a way of preserving their autonomy in the face of Ottoman and Persian encroachment which became more pronounced in response to Russian moves to oblige their Orthodox Christian allies and to advance imperial geopolitical goals in the Near East. Russian vacillation, Ottoman-Persian aggression, and Georgian division all underscored the uncertain outcome of this three-way competition for control over Caucasus. This study focuses on the role played by the Gurieli-s in Guria to preserve the autonomy of their dynastic rule while Russia manifested ambitions to consolidate the empire's position in the region. It aims to demonstrate how members of Guria's dynastic family responded to Russian advances south of the Caucasus either by forging an alliance with the imperial government that would uphold their precious
autonomy against the Ottomans and rival Georgian dynasties or by allying with the Ottomans to thwart Russian attempts to dissolve their dynastic sovereignty. The principality’s peripheral position, combined with the weakness of the Russian presence in Western Georgia, allowed the Gurieli-s considerable latitude in concluding alliances to maintain at least a semblance of autonomy as the Russian imperial regime sought to fortify its position in the region. In addition, this exposition argues that even after the Russians abolished the Gurieli-s’ sovereignty in 1828-1829, they still had to rely on the Gurieli-s and the structure of dynastic rule to compel loyalty among the principality’s subjects and demarcate an boundary between Russia and Ottoman Turkey. Indeed, the history of the encounter between the Russian imperial enterprise and Gurian dynasticism must be viewed within the framework of a condominium between imperial overlords and their new Gurian subjects that reveals a complex history of negotiation and Russian concessions to the social practices that the Gurians developed to preserve their autonomy. The need to maintain the Gurians as allies slowed the process of reforming the dynastic social structure and launching political and economic initiatives until after the Crimean War.

I. The Structure and Aims of the Study

The three principal components of this history of the changing condominium between the Gurieli-s and Russians are the nature of Caucasia as a borderland and Guria’s unique location within it; dynasticism as a mode of governance and a social structure that evolved in this borderland zone especially in Western Georgia; and the vulnerability of Russia’s position as an imperial presence in Caucasia and specifically Western Georgia through much of the first half of the nineteenth century. The exposition of these three components and the relationship between them necessarily spans the chronological divide between the pre-Russian and Russian periods of Caucasian history that historians
conventionally date with the 1801 annexation of the Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i in Eastern Georgia. Each period receives fuller attention in later chapters, but the pivotal concept for viewing the Gurieli-s relationship with the Russians is the condominium that they fashioned to secure their interests.

The argument underlying the present study is that an integral component of the Russian absorption of the Georgian lands, beginning in the late eighteenth century, involved the forging of pacts or alliances with the rulers of the various Georgian lands. These pacts were intended to inspire the inhabitants’ loyalty to the imperial mission of conquering the nomadic and Muslim mountaineers and ousting the infidel Ottomans and Persians. The core of the pacts was the recognition by Russians and Georgians alike that they were allies because of their common Orthodox Christian faith. This understanding had served as the foundation Russian-Georgian relations extending back at least to the sixteenth century, when rulers of the various Georgian domains began to exchange embassies with the tsars of Muscovite Russia. When in the latter half of the eighteenth century Russia exhibited the military strength and imperial determination to cross the Caucasus for good, Christianity remained the bedrock of the alliances forged with the various Georgian sovereigns, but the justification for accepting imperial protection contained an additional understanding that all sides affirmed. This was the assertion initially espoused by Catherine II (1762-1796) that Russia was the purveyor of Enlightenment in Caucasus, bringing “European civilization” to a highly fractious, backward borderland that had suffered through the centuries to the debilitating influences of Islamic rule under the Persians and Ottomans. The dual nature of this conquest ideology, stressing Orthodox Christian faith and Enlightened imperial rule, converged in the conviction that Russia was saving the Georgians from extermination. I call this the “Extinction Thesis.” By the end of the eighteenth century, so this idea goes, the Georgians living in the united Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i in Eastern Georgia faced imminent peril, a condition that Agha Muhammad Khan of Persia demonstrated in 1795
by his brutal invasion of the kingdom and his sacking of Tp’ilisi (or, modern orthography: T’bilisi; in Russian, Tiflis). By annexing the kingdom in 1801, Russia saved these Georgians from physical extermination as a people. Similarly, though using a less urgent tone, the Russian regime turned its gaze to the domains of Western Georgia after 1801 not necessarily to save the inhabitants from imminent physical extinction but from prolonged moral depravity, cultivated by the long Ottoman suzerainty over the region. Russia was saving these Georgians from stagnation and decadence as well as a long drawn-out depletion of population manifested most clearly by the on-going slave-trade. All sides subscribed to this idea in Russia and in Western and Eastern Georgia, or at least proclaimed that they did in many of their various official statements and oaths sworn to one another. This idea of extinction, of Russia acting in a selfless manner as the savior of the Georgian peoples became the bedrock of the imperial ideology over the next century and provided the imperial enterprise with a kind of missionary zeal.

Historians generally do not interrogate the terms and development of this understanding. Most accept it at face value, that in fact Russia saved Georgians from extinction. This kind of acceptance justified the reintegration of the Georgian lands into the new Soviet Union in 1921 and became the foundation in the Soviet period for the idea of druzba narodov or, “the friendship of peoples.” In actuality, most scholars of this period of incorporation ignore the ideological dimension of the process. Instead, they focus on the politics of incorporation and its socio-economic impact. If ideology figures into their calculations, it often takes the form, at least among western scholars, of a kind

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of inexorable march to Russia’s natural frontiers: Russia could not but conquer Caucasia because of the expansionist nature of the Russian autocracy.  

Another approach that has won wide acclaim is the idea that Russia fell into the Caucasus by fits and starts and embarked on the conquest of the region with no general plan of action.  This approach has shed much light on the participants and terms of the debate that often erupted in the various ministeries of the imperial administration, resonating from Tiflis/Tb’ilisi to St. Petersbourg during the reigns of several imperial rulers. We can trace this debate at least from the 1760s into the 1830s.

Several Georgian scholars have endorsed one or another version of the Extinction Thesis, arguing with Ilia Chavchavadze that the best choice facing the various Georgian rulers was to turn to Orthodox Russia to save the Georgians from “such unexpected misfortunes” as those facing the Georgians under the last king of K’art’li-Kaxet’i, Giorgi XII (1798-1800), from Persian and Ottoman depredations. Scholars writing during the Soviet era were quick to cite Russia’s larger geo-political ambitions beyond Caucasia and to criticize the harshness of autocratic policies as exemplified by the abolition of kingship in Eastern Georgia and the outright annexation of that realm in 1801. From the vantage point of the Great October Revolution of 1917, however, they saw Russian expansion

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4 One of the best accounts of the debate over whether or not to annex K’art’li-Kaxet’i in 1801 is provided in David Marshall Lang, The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1638-1832 (New York: Columbia UP, 1957): especially chapter 12. Gvosdev emphasizes the longevity of the debate in government circles, though his narrative stops with 1821.

5 Quoted in G. Khachapuridze (Xach’apuridze), “K voprosu o kul’turnykh sviaziakh Rossii i Gruzii v pervuiu polovinu XIX veka,” VI, 5-6 (1946): 77.
into the Georgian lands as a necessary historical event because of the imperial rivalry over control of Caucasia, the Russian desire to secure trade-routes through Persia to India, and the desperate plight of the Georgian peoples by the turn into the nineteenth century.⁶

While many of these perspectives remain sound, I argue that these approaches do not give adequate attention to the understanding among these participants that because Russia was constantly in a precarious position in Caucasia, it needed to form durable alliances with its Christian compatriots in the region. Russia did not have the resources, the consensus, nor the international endorsement of its expansion south of the Caucasus into the region they called Transcaucasia (Zakavkaz’ë). Indeed, because Russia’s expansion was such a precarious undertaking, those involved in securing a presence there sought to create enduring alliances with the various Georgian rulers. The mutually recognized justification for this alliance became the ideological form of the Extinction Thesis. Incorporating Caucasia into the Russian Empire was a gargantuan task. The region had traditionally been oriented to the southern “agrarianate citied societies” of Persia and Anatolia.⁷ For nearly all of the long history of Caucasia, Russia had been distant from the political and cultural aspirations of the rulers of the Georgian lands. Once Russia embarked on the incorporation of the region in earnest in the latter half of the eighteenth century, all parties that supported this undertaking needed a discourse or conceptual framework that gave it credence. Indeed, it is this ideological foundation that largely explains scholars’ use of the term incorporation, when looking at the Georgian


lands, and not conquest; few referred (and even now refer) to these lands as colonies. Incorporation was a mutual undertaking, for the most part, to which participants swore allegiance as fellow Christians and as co-dependents standing in a hierarchical relationship to one another. The Russian emperors were the sovereign rulers while the various Georgian kings and dynastic princes assumed the position of vassals. But all professed loyalty to the enterprise of extending the Russian Empire south of the Caucasus to a yet-to-be determined border with the Persians and Ottomans.

When one turns to this ideological dimension of the conquest, one is struck by the consistency of this rhetoric in the midst of great vacillation in imperial policy and turbulence in the imposition of imperial rule. If the political, military, economic, and social history of incorporation was not an inexorable march to Russia’s natural boundaries but a contentious process of empire-building in an extremely diverse region, the ideological justification for Russia’s “commitment” to the Georgians remained consistent. A major theme of this study is the examination of this ideological justification as the framework for the alleged alliance between Russia and the Georgian peoples.

I investigate the formation of this imperial alliance’s effects in the principality of Guria. The questions that arise, then, are: if Russians viewed the Gurieli princes as potential allies, how did the Gurieli-s and other princely families of Guria view an alliance with Russia? What strategies did the Russians employ to inspire loyalty in the ruling Gurieli family, and how, if they did, did the Gurieli-s preserve their autonomy within the imperial alliance? Furthermore, how are we to understand the pattern of rebellion and allegiance that came to characterize the process of incorporation of this

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8In their history of Georgia, Berdzenishvili, Javaxishvili, and Janashia do conclude the volume by calling Georgia “a colony of tsarist Russia,” but the best of many evils especially, in their estimation, because incorporation into the Russian Empire led to emancipation under the Soviets. *Istorii Gruzii*, vol. I, p. 450.
peripheral principality? Given Guria’s border position next to the Ottoman Empire, how did the joint enterprise of saving the Gurians from Ottoman influence by constructing Russian sovereignty result in a series of rebellions? What do these rebellions tell us about the Russian imperial enterprise in Guria and what does it tell us about Guria’s position in the Russian Empire?

The answer to these questions constitutes the bulk of this study. In order to elaborate an answer that highlights the history of Guria’s incorporation as a result of a mutually conscious alliance, I embark on a long look at Gurian history prior to the advent of Russian rule. This perspective is imperative for the present study because of the need to illuminate the unique position that Guria occupied in the borderland zone of Caucasia and Western Georgia in particular. I undertake a longer view of Gurian history in an attempt to bridge the divide that, I argue, artificially separates the pre- and post-Russian imperial periods in Western Georgia. This study seeks to demonstrate how the first fifty years of Russian rule in Guria (1804-1856) had as much continuity with the pre-Russian period, in the sense of how the region was governed and the preservation of autonomy, as it had disjuncture. In addition, this perspective brings Guria into clearer focus as a specific domain that came lay on the periphery of the Russian Empire. As a newly constituted part of the empire, this tiny principality assumed a prominent position in early-twentieth-century Russian revolutionary and Georgian national history. The Gurian peasant rebellions of 1841 and 1902-1906, and the fact that Guria has produced two out of Georgia’s three presidents since 1918 (Noe Zhordania and Eduard Shevardnadze) as well as a number of other prominent national leaders, make Gurian history a critical domain for studying the long process that marked Russia’s incorporation of the principality. In the English-speaking world, Guria is largely neglected as a subject of study.

Furthermore, with relatively few exceptions, scholars often write about “Georgia” from the vantage point of Eastern Georgia (K’art’li-Kaxet’i) and treat Western Georgia as
an afterthought, as an additional set of Georgian lands in which the processes illuminated in Eastern Georgia occurred either at a later date or in a skewed form. As we shall see in the discussion of sources, the medieval scholars who composed, compiled, and copied the principal corpus of chronicles for ancient and medieval Georgian history, K’art’lis c’xovreba (literally, The Life of K’art’li), viewed Western Georgia as largely affiliated with Eastern Georgia in a common political enterprise with K’art’li at the core of that enterprise. This study aims to uncouple Western Georgia from Eastern Georgia and to view the former in terms of its predominantly western orientation. To be sure, the lands of Western Georgia, including Guria, Samegrelo (Russian: Mingrelia), Imeret’i (Imeretia), Ap’xazeti (Abkhazia), Svaneti (Svanetia), and part of Samc’xe (or Upper K’art’li, in Georgian: Zemo K’art’li) evolved substantial commerical, political, and kinship ties across several millenia with inhabitants of Eastern Georgia (centered around K’art’li, Kaxeti, and Samc’xe). Those domains also became territories of a united kingdom in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries. But for most of their history, from the time of Greek settlement in the seventh-sixth centuries, B.C., the lands of Western Georgia constituted separate polities that existed for the most part independently of Eastern Georgia. The Surami mountains that divide Eastern from Western Georgia acted as a barrier between the two principal domains of Georgia, a point to which I return below. Finally, uncoupling Western Georgia from Eastern Georgia allows closer scrutiny of how the dynastic families ruling the lands in Western Georgia sought to uphold their autonomy, particularly after the final break-up of a united Georgian kingdom in the fifteenth century. This inquiry highlights the special borderland position of Guria among

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9 This statement is in no way intended to undermine the labors of myriad Georgian scholars who have produced an abundant literature on Western Georgia. Still, in looking at nineteenth-century Georgian history, I am struck by the preponderance of works on "Georgia" that are predominantly about Eastern Georgia. Cf. Akaki Surguladze and Paata Surguladze, Sak’art’velos istoria: Sak’its’avi cigni. 1783-1990 (T’bilisi: T’bilisis saxelmcip’o universtiteti, 1992). This assertion rings even more truly for works in English.
the Georgian lands. Understanding this borderland position in turn sheds light on the socio-political institutions and practices that evolved in that principality and that preserved Guria’s autonomy.

Accordingly, Chapters Two and Three examine Guria prior to the principality’s absorption into the Russian Empire. They constitute Part One of this study. Chapter Two situates Guria in a special position among the Georgian lands and in Caucasia as a border territory within the larger borderland of Caucasia itself. The chapter provides a structural view of Western Georgia as a distinct region and focuses on Guria’s peripheral location within that territory. A cursory view of Gurian history reveals how autonomy derived from the fact that the principality, along with all the other Georgian territories, existed in a borderland zone between pre-modern empires, specifically Ottoman Turkey, Safavid-Qajar Persia, and Muscovite Russia. While this observation may be obvious for “Georgia” and even Caucasus as a whole, Western Georgia and Guria in particular manifested this condition in ways that differed from Eastern Georgia. Most importantly, at least for the three centuries preceding the Russian annexation, kingship remained a weaker institution in Western than in Eastern Georgia. Western Georgia was divided into multiple autonomous or semi-autonomous polities whose independence was cultivated by the region’s general western orientation and proximity to the Ottoman Empire.

In the case of Guria, the ruling Gurieli family managed to preserve the independence of their princely house only by accommodating themselves to the overlordship of a neighboring power, be it the Ottoman sultans, the kings of Imeret’i, princes of Samegrelo, or at ‘abagi-s of Axalc’ixe (Turkish: beg). That is, autonomy entailed a kind of compromised or conditional sovereignty that vacillated between full independence, tributary status, and outright submission to foreign control of external affairs with troops posted inside its borders. Furthermore, to emphasize Guria’s special borderland position, the Islamicization and extension northward of Ottoman suzerainty through the local lords (Turkish: derebey-s) of the mountainous regions of southern Guria
(what was also known as Achara and Kobulet’i) effectively moved the principality’s borders northward from the sixteenth century. By the beginning of the Russian period, Guria was about half the size that it once had been. This is a structural depiction of Guria’s autonomous status within the large borderland of Caucasia.

To elaborate more fully on how Guria actually maintained its autonomy within this precarious borderland location, the chapter also draws on the work of Cyril Toumanoff and his notion of *dynasticism*. According to Toumanoff, dynasticism was the distinguishing socio-political institution of Caucasia. Toumanoff contrasts dynastic rule that prevailed in the small polities of Caucasia with what he describes as feudai rule in larger imperial formations like Byzantium and Russia. In effect, dynasticism concentrated political power in the hands of dynastic families controlling small territories that all regarded as the inalienable patrimony of those families; the antiquity of these families’ claims to their lands constituted their right to rule and defined their identities.

Thus, in the case of Guria, the *Gurieli* name designated both the title of the ruling family and their family name: the family was Guria by virtue of their name and the rights to rulership that inhered in the name. In the early nineteenth century, a member of the Gurieli family, Vaxtang Gurieli, expressed this link between rulership and land in a letter to the Russian administration: “No one besides me, neither before nor at present, has possessed *Guriel-ness* [Georgian: *Gurieloba*; Russian: *Guriel'stvo*] and power over these coastal places.”

Here Vaxtang claims that he possesses *Gurieloba* as his inherent blood right, and that this state of being a Gurieli gives him the irrevocable right to claim possession of the coastal fortresses that fell within his patrimony and the right to rule the area around them. At the same time, within Guria itself, as in other dynastic domains, the principle of dynasticism extended to other families as well. Princely families like the

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Machutadze-s, Nakashidze-s, and Erist'avi-s could make similar claims about their family estates and their jurisdiction over them, though these families recognized that within the principality of Guria they were subservient to the Gurieli family. Hence, dynasticism was a system of rule and a social structure that was hierarchical but that endowed all princely families and their individual members with considerable latitude to run their own affairs. This latitude extended to the gentry nobles below the princely families and to the serf population as well.

Chapter Two, then, elaborates the connection between Toumanoff's notion of Caucas as a borderland civilization and dynastic rule as it evolved in Western Georgia. The chapter demonstrates the ways that Guria was a particular example of dynastic rule arising from the principality's relatively recent origins in the eighth-ninth centuries. As exemplified by Guria and the other lands in Western Georgia, this configuration of power perpetuated the fragmentation between polities and frustrated attempts by outside powers to subordinate the autonomous domains in Western Georgia to their rule. At best, for most of the history of Western Georgia, outside powers could manage only to install a ruler of Guria, Samegrelo, or Imeret'i who was favorable to their interests. Over the centuries, the historical record shows that the lords of the Western Georgian domains transformed this practice of forming expedient political alliances into an integral component of rulership. Consequently, the dynastic houses retained their autonomy across centuries, and unlike the case in Russia, no royal house was able to transform the dynastic lords into a service nobility.

Chapter Three investigates the political, social, and economic ramifications of this system of dynasticism in Guria. Guria's borderland location entailed a highly precarious existence for all inhabitants, and the structure of dynastic rule fostered to varying degrees the autonomy of families up through the social structure of the principality. Indeed, dynastic rule in Guria both depended on and was threatened by the ability of the principality's families to preserve their autonomy. The preservation of autonomy
depended on social practices that inspired local loyalty to preserve the hierarchical relationship among families at all levels of society. It depended on the ability to forge alliances among family members, among families, and across borders. In addition, the precariousness of life in this borderland region generated a series of “self-help” or survival strategies by which families sought to maintain the integrity of person and household. Thus, the chapter investigates these practices that upheld the autonomy of families and that also inspired loyalty to the Gurieli family. While the chapter focuses on the alliances forged by the Gurieli family to preserve the autonomy of their principality, it also investigates the practices employed by the other inhabitants of Guria that upheld at times and threatened at others the political and social order. An integral aspect of these practices was a code of honor by which Gurians enforced loyalty, adjudicated disputes, and forged alliances.

Honor (Georgian: pativi) comprised the set of practices and values that inspired loyalty to the dynastic prince, when need arose, but that also kept identities local, indeed centered in the family, and allegiances fluctuating. Honor linked several related values and practices, like vengeance, justice, generosity, shame, marriage and martial alliances, and the fulfillment of service obligations for the preservation of family autonomy. The notion of blood vengeance provided the moral and legal foundation of this code of honor, but in the Georgian lands blood vengeance was regulated by a legal code that precisely defined the amount of “blood-price” or sixili that any given crime “cost.” Unfortunately, as described more fully below, sources for analyzing how honor functioned in Guria are scarce largely because justice was rendered for the most part orally, without written documentation to record the resolution of disputes and other crimes. Therefore, until I can conduct a fuller investigation of source materials, I can only sketch the contours of this code of honor as they appear in the sources at hand (largely chronicles, charters, and the extant law codes like the early eighteenth-century code compiled by King Vaxtang VI). A separate section of the chapter uses travel accounts to address how outsiders
perceived life in Guria. This section aims to reveal the emergence of a largely European view of Gurians as backward and morally corrupted by their proximity to the Ottomans, a view that the Russians cultivate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Part Two of this study (Chapters Four and Five) examines the forging of an alliance with the Russians and the incorporation of Guria into the Russian Empire. Chapter Four turns to the confrontation between the Russian imperial enterprise and dynastic rule in Western Georgia. It focuses primarily on the eighteenth century as the backdrop to the actual incorporation of these domains. A primary focus of this chapter is the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 that marked a turning point in Russia’s commitment to establish a presence in Transcaucasia. It was the first time that Russian troops actually crossed the Caucasus, and it marked the debut of the proclamation of the Extinction Thesis as the foundation of the military alliance Catherine the Great made with Kings Erekle II of K’art’li-Kaxet’i and Solomon I of Imeret’i. The war provides the context for examining the terms of the emerging alliances forged between Georgian sovereigns and Empress Catherine and her successors. The chapter then looks at how all sides understood the alliances being forged and the obligations they entailed. It also highlights the dual nature of the Russian alliance with their co-religionists: to save them from persecution and to enlighten them. Both missions placed certain obligations on the rulers of the Georgian lands that would take on increased importance as the Russians established a foothold south of the Caucasus. These obligations included the provision of troops, revenues, and foodstuffs, on the one hand, but also information of all kinds and the acknowledgment of the emperor as the supreme sovereign, on the other. Submission to Russian sovereignty and fulfillment of imperial demands represented expressions of loyalty and active endorsement of the extension of empire into Georgian dynastic domains. This investigation, therefore, provides the background for viewing the emerging confrontation between dynastic and imperial rule in Western Georgia in general and Guria in particular.
Chapter Five examines the actual incorporation of Guria following the annexation of Eastern Georgia in 1801. It analyzes this process as part of the imperial administration’s move into Western Georgia to oust the Ottomans from the region. It investigates the ways in which Russians sought to transfer dynastic allegiances to the emperor. This step involved dissolving sovereignties, but it did not entail abolishing dynasticism. Rather, the Russians worked to channel the loyalty of the Gurians through their dynastic lords to the emperor. This was an unusual condominium insofar as it retained the social structure that supported dynastic rule while eventually dissolving dynastic sovereignty and thereby creating a dynastic-service nobility. The chapter interprets this process of inspiring and coercing loyalties as an attempt to define honorable conduct as demonstrations of loyalty to the empire in accordance with the oaths of allegiance sworn by lords to the Russians based on their common Christian faith.

It was an odd condominium in Guria, in particular, because of the principality’s peripheral position in Western Georgia. The imperial administration neglected the region for much of the first half of the nineteenth century, and therefore sanctioned the preservation of dynastic prerogatives, while sporadically introducing fundamental reforms intended to incorporate the territory into the empire as an integral administrative unit. The Russians left intact Vaxtang VI’s law-code as the basis of the legal order in Guria, and they honored the princely families’ rights over their subjects, both lower nobles, clergy, and serfs. Furthermore, they did little to close the traditionally porous boundary with Ottoman domains to the south; thus, they tolerated the trade in contraband and even slaves across the border through much of the first half of the century. Finally, they did little to develop the economy in Guria, which remained largely oriented toward Guria’s southern neighbors; the use of Ottoman currency through most of the first half of the century underscored this orientation and the lack of an imperial presence. The poor state of knowledge about Guria, even into the 1840s, reflected the general neglect with which the Russian administration regarded this border territory. This relative neglect
gave the Gurieli-s considerable latitude in running the internal affairs of Guria provided they demonstrate their loyalty to their new overlords in the appropriate ways.

The extension of protection over Guria obligated the Gurielis and the other princely families — and, by extension, the gentry nobles (aznauri-s), clergy, and serfs — to demonstrate their unconditional loyalty to the emperor in exchange for the preservation of princely rule. Demonstrations of loyalty consisted of supplying troops for campaigns, whether in wars against the Ottomans or in retributive strikes against the recalcitrant Imeret’ian king, Solomon II. They required ending all political alliances with the at’abeg-s of Axalc’ixe, the beg-s of Kobulet’i and Achara, and the serasker-s (or military governors) of Erzurum — in short, curtailing political association with the Ottomans. This requirement would change the nature of the border, heralding the creation of a clearly demarcated political boundary between two empires. Finally, imperial loyalty required that Gurian nobles provide local knowledge on demand and submit to Russian administrative practices, first in ecclesiastical affairs (from 1817) and then in government (from 1828 but especially after 1840).

I elaborate this process of incorporation through an examination of several episodes in the history of the region. These are the dissolution of kingship in Imeret’i in 1810, the 1819-1820 Rebellion in Imeret’i and Guria, the abolition of princely rule in Guria in 1828-1829, and the 1841 Rebellion in Guria. The abolition of kingship in Imeret’i illustrates how the reigning Gurieli, Mamia V, won imperial protection over his principality by providing support to the imperial administration in its effort to bring Solomon II to heel. That is, in exchange for allying with Russia to abolish kingship in neighboring Imeret’i, Mamia V won imperial protection over his principality. This episode brings into bold relief how the arrival of the Russians signified to the Gurieli-s a new opportunity to forge a traditional alliance to uphold their autonomy, even if it meant the end of kingship in a neighboring Georgian land. The rebellion of 1819-1820 demonstrates how the Guriel-s and their supporters in Guria responded to the first attempt
by the Russians to introduce significant reform in their territory. The regime aimed to bring the Church in Western Georgia under imperial control, following the example of revolt in Imeret‘i, several Gurieli-s (but not Mamia V) rebelled against what they saw as a direct threat to their dynasty’s authority to run their own affairs. At the same time, this incident shows how the Russian administration interpreted rebellion as an expression of discontent by allies and functioned to expedite the deepening of the Russian presence in the region. The abolition of princely rule in 1828-1829 illustrates how the imperial demand to fight the Ottomans caused a rift in the Gurieli house that resulted in the dissolution of princely rule and the demonstration of loyalty to Russia in its campaign to oust the Ottomans from Western Georgia. In effect, the war clarified the line between treachery (that is, loyalty to the Ottomans) and loyalty, thereby underscoring the need to demarcate more boldly the boundary between the two empires. The 1841 Rebellion in Guria occurred in response to the introduction of the Caucasus-wide administrative reform of 1840. This dramatic alteration in administrative practices in Guria sparked a major rebellion against Russian rule that highlighted that government’s neglect of Guria and the principality’s close ties with the semi-autonomous “lords of the valley” (Turkish: derebeyler) of Kobulet‘i and Achara. Nicholas’s merciful treatment of the rebels revealed the regime’s acknowledgement of the Gurians as allies whose loyalty as fellow Christians was important in the larger effort to conquer the mountaineers and seal the border with the Ottomans. It also heralded the establishment of an idiom of revolt among the lower echelons of Gurian society, particularly the gentry nobles and serfs.

In the Conclusion (Chapter Six), I look briefly at the Crimean War in Guria as a turning point for the consolidation of Russian rule in Guria insofar as Gurian allegiance to the imperial cause demonstrated that the regime had won an abiding loyalty among Gurians to the imperial enterprise. The loyalty displayed by the Gurian militia in the Crimean War proved that the fifty years of Russian rule had finally effected an enduring relationship that would facilitate the transformation of the region into a more productive,
fully standardized imperial district in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The war also highlighted the degree to which the boundary between Islamic Ottoman Turkey and Christian Russia had become a boundary demarcating different empires and civilizations (the Orient from the Occident, more generally).

In the final analysis, this study argues that the durability of this alliance derived from the recognition by both sides that they had obligations to fulfill to uphold the integrity of the imperial enterprise in Transcaucasia. Russia needed the voluntary loyalty and active participation of the Gurians (and Georgians more generally) to secure its hold over Caucasia. The Gurians needed Russian protection and respect for internal autonomy manifested through the preservation of the dynastic social structure. Rebellion, as an expression of offense at the transgression of the administration’s obligations, became an integral component of the alliance insofar as the Russians saw it as the expected behavior of still-uncivilized, morally depraved Christians who had long been under Ottoman influence. The Russians also acknowledged it as an admission of their own shortcomings in the region — lack of resources, competent personnel, and knowledge, specifically —, in the increasingly important border region of Western Georgia. Thus, through the first half of the nineteenth century we see rebellion alternate with displays of ardent loyalty in military campaigns, attesting the Gurian nobility’s recognition that they had submitted to the extension of the Russian Empire in their domains in return for imperial endorsement of their continued control over most internal affairs.

II. Sources

The sources available to the scholar of Western Georgia underscore the different historical trajectories of the region from that of K'art'li-Kaxet'i. As my intention is to provide only a sketch of the history of Western Georgia and particularly the principality of Guria as a background to the establishment of Russian rule, I refrain from including a
comprehensive commentary on the historical sources available for the study of these lands. Nonetheless, it is worth underscoring a fundamental point about these sources. From antiquity up to the eighteenth century, they illustrate how Western Georgia lacked the tradition of kingship that evolved in the more centrally located lands of K'art'li-Kaxeti. Western Georgia fell under the shadow of either of the imperial powers governing Anatolia or K'art'li itself. As we shall see, royal authority arose in various incarnations in Western Georgia beginning with the Kingdom of Colchis-Egrisi (seventh century, BC-third century AD) and extending through the Kingdom of Lazica (third-sixth centuries, A.D.), Ap'xazeti or Abasgia (eighth-tenth centuries), and finally the Kingdom of Imereti (1463-1810) under a Bagratid dynastic royal family. But despite this local succession of kingdoms in Western Georgia, the region did not develop an indigenous tradition of historical writing in any of the local languages to record the exploits of the various rulers. Indeed, the relationship of a perceived center to its peripheral areas is no more apparent than in the historical sources themselves, insofar as the history of Western Georgia is represented through the K'art'velian historical tradition or through foreign (largely Greek, Roman-Byzantine, Ottoman, and Russian) sources.

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11David Braund analyzes the mythological references in Greek literature to a powerful, unified Kingdom of Aeetes dating allegedly back to the second millennium, B.C. In weighing the evidence for such claims, Braund discredits the existence of such a unified polity and instead stresses the fragmentary nature of the political organization of that region up to and including the Greek period. David Braund, Georgia In Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC-AD 562 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994): 90-92.

12In his masterful study of the Georgian historical tradition, Stephen Rapp demonstrates that this tradition centered around the history of K'art'li (or Eastern Georgia), as represented first and foremost by the rise of kingship through several dynasties, beginning with the P'arnavazids of the third century B.C. and culminating with the rise of the Bagratids in the ninth century and their unification of the Georgian lands in the early-eleventh century. And as a further indication that Georgian historical writing revolved around kingship, he points out that only one work from this tradition, the fifteenth-century Monument of the Erist'avi-s (Dzegli erist'avi'a), which was not a constituent text of K'art'lis c'xovreba, is explicitly written from the vantage point of the provincial erist'avi-s (or govenors, in this case the erist'avi-s of K'sani). This contrasts markedly with the Armenian historical tradition in which "numerous histories were composed to glorify noble families." Rapp, IHC, pp. 12-13, 56, 103, 220, 481, 494, 517; and also, C. Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature," and his SCCH, pp. 11-29.
In contrast to K’art’li, which boasts the corpus of chronicles known as K`art’lis c’oxvreba, or The Life of K’art’li, no “Life of Ap’xazet’i” exists and no local historical tradition for Western Georgia finds expression in extant medieval sources except for two brief works. These are The Divan of the Kings (Divani mep’et’a, 1008-1014) and The Chronicle of the Kings of Abasgia (Ap’xazt’ mep’et’a k’ronika, thirteenth century), both of which chronicle the lives of the kings of Ap’xazet’i. As the name of the first work implies, the divan or “account-book” in Persian is actually a list of kings. This dearth of local sources is true particularly for the first millennium and a half of written history about the region, embracing the period of Greek settlement (seventh-sixth centuries BC) up through the emergence of Ap’xazet’i at the end of the eighth century AD. Several authors comment on the paucity of sources for the study of this extensive period. To be sure, the Georgian chronicles found in K`art’lis c’oxvreba contain much useful information on all regions of Western Georgia, but the point is that this information must be read through the lense of K’art’velian history. These claims about Western Georgia must in turn be evaluated against evidence from Greek-Roman-Byzantine, Persian,

13As a source, the Divan is a terse list of the kings of Ap’xazet’i extending from around the fifth century to Bagrat III’s reign (d. 1014) with no details about any of the “lives” of the individual kings. On the other hand, The Chronicle of the Kings of Abasgia has not yet been published and in light of the brief source description provided by Toumanoff, it appears to be a minor and late source for the pre-unification period to which it pertains. In fact, Stephan Rapp has informed me in a personal communication that he doubts the existence of the source at least in its thirteenth-century incarnation as he has not located any reference to it other than Toumanoff’s. C. Toumanoff, “Medieval Georgian Historical Literature,” pp. 153-154, 157; and his “Chronology of the Kings of Abasgia,” pp. 77, 79; Thomson, RCH, fn. 32, p. 267; E. T’aqaishvili (Takaşaçıvili), “Les Sources des notices du Patriarque de Jérusalem Dosithée sur les rois d’Aphkhazie,” Journal Asiatique CCX: 2 (Avril-Juin 1927): 357-368. Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 9-10, 14, 96; Sh. A. Mesxia (Meskhia), “Krattii obzor iistochnikov,” in Ocherki istorii Gruzii, vol. II: Gruzia v IV-X vekakh (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1988): 23, 26-27; Nodar Lomouri, “Zapadnaia Gruzia-Egrisi (Lazika) v IV-V vv,” ibid., p. 131; and Ot’ar Lordkipanidze who stresses the mythological dimension of Greek sources in his Nasledie drevnei Gruzii (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1989): 26-27. Finally, I should note that scholarly works by Georgians in the eighteenth century, exemplified by Vaxushi Bagrationi’s Description of the Kingdom of Georgia (Aghcera samep ‘osa sak’art’ velosa, completed in 1745), represent the first modern attempts to compose a more comprehensive and integrated history of the Georgian lands, albeit, again, from the vantage point of K’art’li. The critical edition of Vaxushi’s work is Quach’ishvili’s edition, comprising volume 4 of K`art’lis c’oxvreba: Batonishvili vaxushti aghcera samep ‘osa sak’art’ velosa (T’bilisi: Sabchot’a sak’art’velo, 1973).
Ottoman, and Russian sources (to name only the most prominent ones) in order to obtain a more balanced and comprehensive view.\textsuperscript{14} Again, the prominence of foreign sources, mostly composed by one or another Anatolian power demonstrates how much the region fell under the shadow of those powers. Indeed, N.T. Nakashidze notes about the late medieval and early modern periods that no Georgian-language histories have reached us from fifteenth, sixteenth, and first half of the seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{15} In the discussion of Gurian history, this theme receives greater clarity.

If Western Georgia lacked an indigenous historical tradition for much of its history, then the study of Guria in the pre-Russian period is even more elusive with regard to the paucity of sources. This difficulty is a reflection of the peripheral, frontier position occupied by the principality even within Western Georgia. For instance, in his study of judicial codes and practices in the Georgian lands, Mixeil Kekelia lamented that in comparison with other regions, including the Kingdom of Imeret’i and principality of Samegrelo in Western Georgia, “a smaller number of testimonies that reflect the activity of the Gurian legal order and court system have come down to us, and the existing documents provide information only on individual issues.”\textsuperscript{16} Kekelia asserts that though the court system in Guria mirrored that of the Kingdom of Imeret’i, we lack documents relating to its actual organization and have little more than meager references to a few of its senior officials.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to the relatively few documents generated by the small

\textsuperscript{14}It should be stressed, as Ivane Javaxishvili does in his study of ancient Georgia, that the scholar of K’art’li itself must rely heavily on foreign sources to supplement and corroborate (or refute) the information provided in the indigenous k’art velian sources. See the introduction to his Gosudarstvennyi stroi drevnei Gruzii i drevnei Armenii, esp. pp. 4-7.


\textsuperscript{16}M. Kekelia, Drevnegruzinskie zakonodatel’stvo, sud i sudebnyi protsess (T’bilisi: Izd-vo Tbilisskogo universiteta, 1986): 105 and also pp. 106-112.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., pp. 107-108.
administration of the Gurieli-s’ princely court, the study of Gurian history is also
hampered by the scant number of travellers who passed through the principality. Thus,
for example, Jean Chardin (1643-1713), the jeweler and commercial agent who traveled
through the Caucasus en route to Persia and India, leaving us one of the most influential
travel accounts written about Caucasia in the seventeenth century, failed to stop in Guria
during his passage through Western Georgia.18 The map of Western Georgia that he
included in his account illustrates the general lack of knowledge about Guria (see a copy
of his map at the end of this chapter). Like Chardin, most travellers focused on
Samegrelo and Imereti, the former for its ports and the latter because the kings of
Imereti held the highest position of any potentate in Western Georgia and usually
claimed jurisdiction over Guria. Indeed, none of the Russian embassies to the various
kings of the Georgian lands was dispatched to Guria in the sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries.19 Moreover, in his comments on the eighteenth-century Georgian scholar
Vaxushri’s geographical description of Western Georgia, W.E.D. Allen surmises that
Vaxushri most probably never visited Guria, which would account for the errors about the

18 Chardin sailed past Guria to Gonia, which at one time marked the southern boundary of Guria but which
at the time of his trip was under Ottoman rule. More generally, see his comments explaining that he left
blank space in his rendering of Western Georgia because of the illiteracy of the inhabitants (especially the
Ap’xaz) who could not provide him with sufficient data. Jean Chardin, The Travels of Sir John Chardin
into Persia and the East Indies, (London: Printed for Christopher Bateman, 1691): 76-77, 105. Indeed,
fev travellers ventured south of the Rioni River through Guria into the Pontic Alps of Lazica. Anthony
Bryer states that if between 1240 and 1471 twenty travel accounts exist for the Pontos region, between
1472 and 1795 only fifteen have come down to us. Anthony Bryer, “The Tourkokratia in the Pontos:
precisely, Allen claims that until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, no European travellers left us a
description of the triangular stretch of land extending from the Choroxi River northeast to the Achara-
Gurian range and southeast to the Arsiani or Yalnuzcam mountains between Artanuji and Ardahan.

19 Brosset provides a chronology of the embassies and letters exchanged between the Russian court and the
various Georgian polities up to 1770. M.-F. Brosset, “Perechen’ proizhestvii,” Perepiska, na
inostrannykh iazykah gruzinskikh tsarei s Rossiiiskimi gosudariami, ot 1639 po 1770 (SPB: I.A.N., 1861).
principality. Interestingly, Johann Gülstenädt (1741-1781), who undertook the first scientific expedition of the Caucasus under the auspices of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences, did visit Guria and left a terse but informative description of the territory. On the other hand, few followed his initiative and the neglect of Guria carried well into the Russian period. The eminent scholar of Georgian history, Marie-Félicité Brosset refused to visit Guria during his trip to Samegrelo in 1848 because “the little information furnished by Georgian authors only inspired in me a feeble attraction for a country so little known, of which the history, exclusively modern, would only have given me that which I thought, a small quantity of information concerning the origins of Georgia.”

For the most part, Guria produced relatively few documents, lay off the path of travellers

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22 Gülstenädt’s trip initiated a series of similar studies about the Caucasus by mostly German scholars, including P.S. Pallas (1768-1774, 1793-1794), F.K. Biberstein (1797-1798), the Pole, Jan O. Potocki (1798), Jacob Reineggs (1779, 1782-1783), and J. Klaproth (1807-1808). None reached Guria. M.O. Kosven, “Materialy po istorii etnograficheskogo izucheniiia Kavkaza v russkoi nauke,” Kavkazskii etnograficheskii sbornik I (1955): 286-288, 291; and M. Polievktov, ibid., pp. 155-158, 162-168.

23 Cited in D. Bak’radze (Bakradze), Arkeologicheskoe puteshestvie po Gurii i Adchare (SPB, 1878): xvii.
and scholars until the latter half of the nineteenth century, and appeared to be an “exclusively modern” creation in the first place.

Given these gaps in the source base for the study of Gurian history, one must look to a variety of Georgian and foreign sources to piece together a political history of the Gurieli-s and a broader social history of dynastic rule in Guria. In Part One, I rely mainly on the Georgian chronicles contained in *K`art`lis c`xovreba*, on the monumental geographical and historical study of the Georgian lands by the eighteenth-century scholar, Vaxushti Bagrationi, and on the charters and inscriptions recorded by Dmitri Bak’radze during his sojourn through Guria in 1873. As implied by the name, *K`art`lis c`xovreba* (or *Life of K`art`li*), this corpus of chronicles was composed from the vantage point of K`art`li in Eastern Georgia. Nonetheless, as Chapter Two makes explicit, it is invaluable for uncovering the early history of Guria and its emergence as an autonomous principality.

Vaxushti’s geographical and historical survey of the Georgian lands provides a crucial chronology of the political history of Western Georgia for the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. His rendition of this history is important not just for the way he illuminates the myriad alliances forged by various Gurieli-s with their neighbors, whether Georgian or Ottoman, but also because he imbues his narrative with references to a code of honor that seems to him to motivate many of the acts of these sovereign rulers. Again, without further source materials, it is difficult to extract a code from Vaxushti’s history, but his use of an idiom of honor and dishonor seems intended to reflect an actual code of honor that would have been familiar to his eighteenth-century readers. Composed in Moscow during his long exile away from his native K`art`li, Vaxushti’s study represents a turning point in Georgian historical scholarship. Indeed, Vaxushti occupies a position mid-way between what Cyril Toumanoff calls “the national historians,” who composed the medieval chronicles and who belong “organically to [an earlier] Georgian culture,” and Georgian historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (like Platon Ioseliani,
Ivane Javakhishvili, M.G. Janashvili, Korneli Kekelidze, and Toumanoff himself), who belong more to “the general Western scientific endeavor.” In the breadth and systematic exposition of his geographical-historical descriptions of the Georgian lands (including the composition of maps; see maps below) and his devotion to a vision of a unified Sak’art’velo we discern the modern historian, “the Georgian Gibbon,” as Toumanoff affectionately calls him, elaborating an Enlightenment history of “Georgia” broadly construed. And yet, as “the discontented and illegitimate scion of the eldest, Iberian line of the Bagratid dynasty,” whose members in his day were mostly exiled to Russia and superceded in prominence by the Kaxet’ian and even Imeret’ian lines, Vaxushti was prone to genealogical biases. Hence, the challenge in reading Vaxushti is to recognize the ways in which he uses clearly older values of conduct to articulate a new vision of a united Georgia which remained miserably divided in his day (depending on when he died!).


Law codes also provide some evidence for the existence of a code of honor operating in the Georgian lands. King Vaxtang VI (1675-1737) and his assembly of "learned men" compiled the most important law code for these lands during the years, 1703-1709. This same group of individuals also edited a new redaction of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* during this period. Vaxtang's code is particularly important as it includes several different collections of laws, including Biblical, Armenian, Byzantine, and early "Georgian" codes like that of Giorgi V (1314-1346). Evidently, the code was used throughout the Georgian lands to adjudicate disputes and settle criminal cases through the eighteenth century. In addition, the Russian administration relied on this code to settle civil cases for several decades in the nineteenth century. The existence of several copies of Vaxtang's Law Code in Guria attests its use in settling judicial cases, though, again, actual documentation of how cases were settled by the Gurieli-s or their judicial officials remains scarce. As much as possible, I draw on these sources to suggest the role honor might have played in Guria at all levels of society as part of the self-help strategies employed by families to uphold the autonomy of their households.

Other contemporary sources used in this study include the charters and inscriptions recorded by Dmitri Bak'radze. Bak'radze collected numerous charters from private libraries in Guria, and he published them in a chronological order corresponding


to the particular Gurieli who reigned at the time. These offer precious insight into the social structure of dynastic rule in Guria, the Gurieli-s’ administration, lineages, princely landholdings, Islamicization, and the shrinking boundaries of the principality, among other subjects. I also refer to travel accounts that reveal information about such disparate but important topics as the slave-trade, economy, and folk practices.

Finally, sources that are not contemporary with the period in question include official inquiries made in the first half of the nineteenth century by officials in the tsarist administration about such issues as population, landholdings, the organization of the Church in Guria, and noble families. These reports help to piece together the way people believed dynastic rule functioned in the principality before and after the arrival of the Russians. In general, these records were generated by particular reforms or requests for information about Guria which imperial officials sorely lacked well into the nineteenth century. On occasion a journalist would publish a summary or survey of the social structure of a principality like Guria, and this kind of information is useful when corroborated by other sources. Lastly, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, scholars, journalists, and others embarked on a more concerted effort to record the folklore and local customs throughout the Caucasus, including Guria. These local studies were published in imperial journals like Sbornik materialov dlja opisaniia mestnosti i plemen Kavkaza (SMOMPK). Admittedly, because this type of information was collected well after the arrival of the Russians, it runs the risk of presenting a skewed picture of local customs and beliefs in Guria before the Russian period. Despite this shortcoming, these surveys shed some light on this important dimension of the social life of Gurians and are therefore used to supplement information gleaned from contemporary accounts.

For Part Two of this study, I use the relevant charters collected and recorded by Bak’radze, mentioned above, as well as official correspondence, treaties, oaths of allegiance, and other reports compiled in response to military campaigns, reforms, rebellions. These sources appear in published collections like the multi-volume Akty.
sobrannyje Kavkazskoiu arkheograficheskoiu komissiei (AKAK), which offers a wide range of source materials for Guria during the Russian period. Again, travellers’ accounts offer insight into the Gurieli-s’ encounter with the Russian imperial regime, beginning with Johann Güldenstädts account of the 1770s, although, as mentioned, not as many travellers made it to Guria as one would have hoped. Finally, articles in early periodical publications, particularly from the 1840s and 1850s, supplement much of the information provided in official documents from the administration.

III. The Lay of the Land and Names in Western Georgia

At the time that the Gurieli-s sought protection from the tsarist administration in 1804, the principality may have comprised approximately five thousand peasant households and another several hundred noble households. As will become evident in subsequent chapters, tsarist administrators knew little about this principality and had to rely on conjectures about its population and even boundaries. The first actual census of Guria occurred only in 1831 as a “periodic revision” (or kameral’noe opisanie).

According to the results of this census, 36,700 individuals lived in Guria in

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approximately 4,300 homesteads, for an average of 8.4 residents per homestead.³¹ On the eve of emancipation of the serfs in the Georgian lands in 1864, the population had grown to 48,796.³² Though the boundaries with the Ottoman Empire were not yet demarcated for much of the first half of the nineteenth century, Guria had contracted to a small territory covering about forty miles square.³³ Equally unclear is the number of “villages” or settlements in the principality. Bak’radze places their number at 594, while an earlier Russian report states there were 126.³⁴ The large discrepancy reflects the ambiguity that Russian officials faced in trying to ascertain what specifically constituted a village in this densely forested, diverse landscape. We shall return to this point in Chapter Three as it relates to survival strategies employed by Gurians of all social groups who preferred to live in isolated homesteads of extended families dispersed through the countryside as a way of defending against raids and invasions and preserving the autonomy of their households.

Thus, as described through rudimentary statistics of the era, Guria appeared small, fragmented, and vulnerable as a principality that straddled the Russian and Ottoman Empires. This brief description highlights the complexity of a borderland region like

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³³ “Ozuretskii uezd,” Geograficheskii-statisticheskii slovar’ Rossiiskoi imperii, p. 605, where the figure of 1934 square verst is given (one verst equals 3,500 English feet or 1.05 km.). Interestingly, a Russian report from the late 1820s or early 1830s states that the principality occupied some 3,000 square verst-s, or about sixty square miles, but it also includes in that figure “Turkish Guria,” or the part of old Guria that included a portion of Achara and Kobulet’i. By 1830, these areas had long been under Ottoman suzerainty.

Caucasia. Though this theme receives greater attention in Chapter Two, it is important to emphasize here that one assumes a great risk in narrowing the focus of scholarly inquiry to a specific territory, say, to the Georgian lands, let alone to a smaller principality like Guria among those lands. Overlapping jurisdictions, especially in the marchlands, a strong tradition of cosmopolitan governance, and socio-economic and political interaction between the peoples of Caucasia, as well as active ties of trade, kinship, and warfare with larger powers beyond the domains of Caucasia, all require that one constantly consider the influence of neighboring areas on the immediate subject of study and that one avoid artificial distinctions between lands, cultures, and peoples.35 One of the most striking features about the way scholars view Caucasia is the apparent autochthonous nature of the languages and cultures of many of its peoples, including the Georgians.36 If such claims demonstrate the antiquity of their existence on the territories that they presently inhabit, this does not mean that their autochthonous natures signifies some kind of essential cultural identity that transcends time and place and renders them distinct peoples through time. Rather the processes of syncretism or, in the words of one scholar, “cultural osmosis,” so apparent in a borderland zone like Caucasia, force the diverse inhabitants to


36 I qualify “autochthonous nature” with “apparent” because this assertion is by no means proven and at any rate remains vaguely defined. Georgian scholars developed notions of Georgia’s autochthonous culture and language beginning mainly in the nineteenth century in part as a way of defining their national identity. I have written about this scholarly inquiry in a paper entitled “The Scholarly Reconstruction of the Georgian Nation, the First Phase,” presented originally at the annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS), Seattle, 21 November 1997.
reproduce and adapt their cultures to outside forces. Put another way, in undertaking a study of one small part of this borderland zone, the principality of Guria, we are not dealing with an area of autarky, such as scholars of the Russian peasant world sometimes emphasize in their studies of peasant communities. Rather, Guria was a region that overlapped with and maintained profound and continual contacts with neighboring peoples. Hence, to grasp the vulnerability of Guria's location and the impact of this location on its history, Guria must be seen as part of the larger histories of the Georgian-Armenian lands, Caucasia, and the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian Empires.

An elaboration of the historical geography of Caucasia and the Georgian lands in particular begins the process of setting the context for the narrower study of Guria. In its simplest configuration, Caucasia comprises the isthmus lying between the Black and Caspian Seas with the Great Caucasus Mountain Range as its chief distinguishing feature. This mighty range runs in a southeastern direction for 700 miles from the Taman peninsula in the Sea of Azov to the Apsheron peninsula on the Caspian Sea. Some ninety miles from the Black Sea stands the highest peak in western Eurasia, Mt. Elbruz (over 18,500 ft., or 5642 m.), as well as several peaks over 15,000 feet.

"Caucasia" contains the lands on both sides of this range. In the north the region extends roughly to the Kuban and Terek (Georgian: T'ergi) Rivers marking a natural boundary with the Don-Volga steppe in the north. South of the Great Caucasus Range it extends in a semi-circular fashion to the eastern spur of the Pontic Alps on the south coast of the

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Black Sea in the west, across the plateaus of Armenia in the center, to the western mountains of the Elburz chain that runs through northern Iran along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea in the east. Throughout this study I refer to this region either as Caucasia or the Caucasus. Defined this way Caucasia is contiguous with eastern Asia Minor (or eastern Anatolia), Mesopotamia, and Iran, as well as the vast steppe north of the main chain. As a borderland, then, Caucasia was situated between the three worlds of Persia, the Mediterranean civilizations of Greece-Byzantium and Ottoman Turkey, and the nomadic confederations of the steppe (incorporated into the Russian Empire).

The main chain of the Caucasus divides Caucasia into two broad areas, north and south Caucasia. As this study is principally concerned with the lands of south Caucasia, I turn our attention there. South Caucasia, also called cis-Caucasia, included all the lands of Caucasia lying to the south of the peaks of the Great Caucasus Range. The principal "unitive formations" in the southern Caucasus for most of its recorded history were located in the lands of Armenia and Georgia. The core areas of these polities were the river valleys of the Araxes for Armenia and the Mtkvari (to the classical world, Cyrus and

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39 Hence, Toumanoff explicitly includes Armenia within the boundaries of Caucasia. C. Toumanoff, "Caucasia and Byzantium," Traditio 27 (1971): 112.

40 North Caucasia can be be further divided into its western and eastern parts. The western sector is defined by the basin of the Kuban River (to the classical world, Hypanis; also Kup' is or Kup' i), while its eastern sector centers on the Terek River (T'ergi in Georgian). Robert Hewsen, The Geography of Ananias of Shirak (Ashkarhac 'oyc'). The Long and Short Recensions, Robert Hewsen, trans. & ed. (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992): 107, 110. It should also be noted that this division of Caucasia into northern and southern regions is a modern construct. According to a medieval view of Caucasian geography, south Caucasia refers to the lands of northern Persia and Armenia, and the Georgian lands fall into central Caucasia. For the sake of simplicity, I subsume these two broad areas — south and central Caucasia — into South Caucasia.

41 I develop this point below, but here, again following Toumanoff, it is worth pointing out that in late antiquity, Albania also existed to the south and east of the Georgian lands in what is present-day Azerbaijan. Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia," p. 593. Largely because of the Christianization of the Armenian and Georgian lands, Toumanoff designates this core region of cis-Caucasia "the north-eastermost part of the Mediterranean world." Toumanoff, "Caucasia and Byzantium," p. 112. I have also borrowed the phrase "unitive formation" from him. Toumanoff, "Chronology of the Kings of Abasgia and Other Problems," Le Muséeon LXIX:1-2 (1956): 1.
Kura) and Rioni (Phasis) for the Georgians. Here it is important to differentiate the terms cis-Caucasia and Transcaucasia. Toumanoff intended cis-Caucasia to be a more precise and less politically charged designation for this region, though he admits that it is "cumbersome." Transcaucasia reflects a Russian point of view insofar as it conjures up the perspective of the northern metropole of tsarist Russia looking south across the Caucasus mountains. In addition, because the Russians did not enter this area in earnest until the end of the eighteenth century, this term expresses a recent point of view. In light of Caucasia's largely southern orientation for most of its history, the term Transcaucasia is simply an erroneous designation. Nonetheless, when this study turns to the period of tsarist rule in Caucasia, I use the term Transcaucasia (Zakavkaz'e, in Russian) as it appears in contemporary sources in order to express the Russian point of view and the reorientation of Caucasia toward the north during the nineteenth century.\(^{42}\)

To further train our gaze on Guria, we need to distinguish the various Georgian lands. These lie primarily in the central and western sections of the depression running south of the main Caucasus chain between that great range and the Pontic Alps, the Armenian plateau country, and the Elburz mountains extending across northern Iran. At the apogee of Georgian unification in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, these lands extended beyond the boundaries of present-day Georgia and contained numerous principalities (mt'avar-ates), dukedoms (erist'av-ates), and non-Georgian polities, all reflecting the landscape's immense diversity. The territory of sovereign Georgia today encompasses an area roughly the size of South Carolina and yet contains some of the highest peaks in western Eurasia, subtropical forests, desert regions, and verdant river

\(^{42}\)Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 11-12; Hewsen, The Geography of Ananias of Shirek, pp. 106-107. Interestingly, in order to remove themselves from the period of Russian-Soviet rule, many scholars and government officials in the countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia refer to their region no longer as Transcaucasia but the Southern Caucasus, or Southern Caucasia, to be sure, a more neutral designation.
valleys. Regardless of the extent of various kingdoms through history, however, the Georgian lands comprise two basic areas.

The first, core area is that of Eastern Georgia, known to classical writers as Iberia (or Hiberia). Inhabitants of the Georgian lands called the principal domain of this region K`art`li and also the territory adjoining it in the east, Kaxet`i. Tp`ilisi (modern orthography, T`bilisi) was the capital of K`art`li from the time of Vaxtang Gorgasali (ca. 447-522), although the Georgian Church was founded in the previous capital of Mc`xet`a at the confluence of the Aragvi and Mtkvari Rivers not far upstream from Tp`ilisi.

Kaxet`i contained several mountain principalities located in the main Caucasus chain, including Tushet`i, Xevsuret`i, Pshavet`i, and Mt`ieut`i. As a further indication of how mountains and rivers fragmented the domains of Eastern Georgia, K`art`li itself was divided into several constituent areas, including Inner, Lower and Upper K`art`li (or, shida, k`vemo, and zemo K`art`li, respectively). Of particular interest to this study is Upper or zemo K`art`li occupying the lands of Samc`xe or Mesxet`i. Lying to the southwest of K`art`li and directly south of Western Georgia, Samc`xe-Mesxet`i is a mountainous land, the south and western sections of which have constituted the marchlands with Armenia, and the various powers ruling Anatolia. I return to this area in my discussion of Gurian history, but for the moment it is sufficient to point out that Mesxet`i was in close enough proximity to both Eastern and Western Georgia and pivotal

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43 Hewsen provides a useful overview of the terminology employed by various peoples for the lands of Eastern Georgia. Geography of Ananias of Shirak, pp. 128-129.

44 Hewsen notes that Kaxet`i was also considered East K`art`li. Ibid., p. 132.

in the history of both regions to be considered almost a third region by itself, or a constituent area of either Eastern or Western Georgia.\textsuperscript{46}

The second principal area is Western Georgia. The topography of this region is mountainous. As one commentator observed at the beginning of the twentieth century, "In order to present an approximate image of Kutais Province [the Russian administrative designation for Western Georgia], it is possible to compare it...with a wide, deep [three-sided] tea-cup, bordered by mountains and opening on one side to the sea."\textsuperscript{47} The mountains of this cup include the Greater Caucasus range with Mt. Elbruz looming overhead in the north, the Surami or Lixi (Likhi) mountains to the east, separating Eastern and Western Georgia, and the southern spur of the Surami mountains connecting to the Yalnuz Çam and Pontic Alps in the south close to the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{48} The southern spurs of the Surami mountains are also known as the Little or Lesser Caucasus. This range includes the Meszet’ian mountains, dividing the basins of the Rioni and Mtkvari rivers, that constitute the mountainous terrain of the Meszet’ian or Same’xe marchland.\textsuperscript{49} Of course, the respective heights of the mountain chains forming the three sides of this cup are greatly disproportionate in height to one another. Thus, the peaks of the Greater Caucasus soar above 18,000 feet. Indeed, the most accessible route over the Main

\textsuperscript{46}Thus Toumanoff states that Upper K’art’li could “be classed with either East or West Georgia,” adding that geographically it lay directly to the south of Western Georgia and therefore could be considered an intrinsic part of it, and yet “from times immemorial formed one ethno-political whole” with Eastern Georgia or K’art’li so that it came to be known as Upper K’art’li or Meszet’i (Meschia or Moschia in Latin). \textit{SCCH}, p. 437. See also Robert Hewsen, “Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography IV: The Vitaxates of Arsacid Armenia. A Reexamination of the Territorial Aspects of the Institution (Part One),” \textit{RÉArm} n.s., vol. 21 (1988-1989): 271-319; and Part Two: “The Vitaxate of Moskhia: (The Iberian March),” \textit{RÉArm} n.s., vol. 22 (1990-1991): 147-183.


\textsuperscript{48}Hewsen remarks that this range was also known as the Gado, Arsiani, Arguet’i and Moschic (or Moskhian, Meskhian) mountains, depending on where one was located along the chain. \textit{The Geography of Ananias of Shirak}, p. 126; also Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, p. 437.

Caucasus range connecting Western Georgia to Russia (K’ut’aisi to Vladikavkaz) was through the Mamisoni Pass (lying at 9390 ft.), otherwise known as the Ossetian Military Road. On the other hand, the Surami mountains dividing Eastern and Western Georgia have an average height of only 3,000-4,000 feet, and the pass linking the two principal domains of Georgia was only 3,027 feet. The peaks of the Lesser Caucasus range farther south reach nearly 10,000 feet.

This teacup opens in a broad plain to the Black Sea in the West. For the most part, the Rioni River commands this plain, which assumes the shape of a triangle, the base of which was the Black Sea coast and the tip was the Surami mountains. Up until the Soviet period, the marsh and swamp lands on both sides of the Rioni Delta, particularly on its southern side in Guria, presented a formidable obstacle to habitation especially because of the prevalence of malaria. Away from the delta on both sides of the river, rich alluvial soils extended north and south and for a considerable distance inland, providing some of the most fertile soils for cultivation in the entire Russian empire.

Many rivers and streams have their sources in the mountains and water this triangular-shaped lowland plain. The predominance of the mountains, however, is reflected by the fact that these rivers and streams reach the lowlands through gorges and canyons rather than valleys. The lowlands give way to foothills, and quickly the foothills become mountains. Thus, only fifty percent of the lands of Western Georgia lie below 2,000 feet.

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50In 1886-1890 the Russian administration constructed a railroad tunnel that made the passage between Eastern and Western Georgia significantly easier. V. Miller, “Kavkazskii krai,” Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, p. 822.

51The Rioni River basin comprised roughly thirty percent of the area of Kutaisi Province which was more or less coterminous with Western Georgia. V. Masal’skii, “Kutaisskaia guberniia,” Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, vol. 17, pt. 1 (SPB, 1896): 130.
with an additional thirty-five percent between 2,000-7,000 feet, and fifteen percent above 7,000 feet.52

Western Georgia belongs to the more humid Black Sea or Pontic ecological zone, Eastern Georgia to the drier, more continental zone of the Caspian. Along the Black Sea coast the climate is rainy and temperate with frosts typically occurring only in January, February and sometimes March. Bat'umi was considered the rainiest spots in the empire as well as in all southern Europe, averaging well over two meters of rainfall per year. According to weather statistics at the end of the nineteenth century, most of the eastern littoral of the Black Sea received an annual average of one to two and a quarter meters of rain (39 to 89 inches), while Tiflis (Tp'ilisi) averaged 489 millimeters (or about 19 inches) and Baku, 247 mm. (less than ten inches).53 Hence, the lands of Western Georgia harbored lush subtropical forests, and in fact, up through most of the nineteenth century, these lands were renowned to travellers for their diverse vegetation and thick forests which were still considered primordial forests.54

Guria lay in the southern reaches of this zone. Like all of Western Georgia, Guria too can be divided into lowland, hilly, and mountainous zones. Up on its northern border along the Rioni River, it was swampy and heavily forested particularly around Lake Paleostomi which lay next to the town of Pot'i just south of the Rioni River Delta by the Black Sea.55 Moving inland to the southeast, however, one ascended quickly into

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54Ibid., p. 834.

55Much confusion surrounded the issue of which territory, Samegrelo or Guria, could claim jurisdiction over Pot'i and Lake Paleostomi. Early commentators, such as J.A. Güldenstädt and Orest Evetskii counted Pot'i as a port in Guria. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the Russians considered it a town in Senakskii (Georgian: Senak'i) district which was itself a constituent part of the former principality of Samegrelo (Mingrelia), even though the town fell on the south side of the Rioni River. Similarly, Evetskii remarks that the sovereigns of Guria and Samegrelo debated the jurisdiction over Lake
precipitous hill country and eventually entered the mountainous area of southern Guria defined by the Achara-Axalc’ixe range with its 9,000-foot peaks, which, as a spur of the Lesser Caucasus mountains, separated Guria from the region of Axalc’ixe (Russian: Akhaltsikhe) and Same’xe more generally.\(^{56}\)

According to Dimitri Bak’radze, the best spot for viewing this tea-cup configuration of Western Georgia, indeed, the best panoramic view in all Caucasia, was in Guria itself, on top of Mt. Jumat’i (Russian: Dzhumati), which stands apart from the Achara-Axalc’ixe range not far from the lowlands of the Rioni. Thus he wrote:

I have travelled around nearly the entire krai and must confess that nowhere in all the Caucasus can I point out such a broad horizon as I contemplated here in the summer of 1873 in the course of two days.... Before me lay...all the western Caucasus: to the north the gigantic central range with all its eternally snow-and-ice-capped peaks, beginning with Elbruz and ending with Qazbegi...; in the east — the Georgian-Imeret’i-an ridge, and in the south, the Acharo-Axalc’ixe range...and beneath them all the undulating surface of Guria; and beyond the bay of Bat’umi, and far behind Bat’umi the place of Trebizond, and farther, the whitened mountains of the Pontic or Lazistan range; in the west, all the eastern coast of the Black Sea with its promontories and bays and its new coastal city of Pot’i near to Paleostom,— a city so precisely rendered that it was possible to count all its streets and houses. The Black Sea was visible to a great distance....Such is the panorama of Jumat’i.\(^{57}\)

Western Georgia was known to classical writers as Kolkhis (for the Greeks) or Colchis (Latin), and then under the Byzantines as Lazika (Lazica), from the third to

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\(^{57}\)D. Bakradze, “Kavkaz v drevnikh pamiatnikakh khristianstva,” *Zapiski obschestva liubitelei kavkazskoi arkeologii*, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1875): 63. Forty years before, the French traveller Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux found not only similar vistas from nearby peaks but plain poetic inspiration—“O patrie!” Montpéreux, *Voyage autour du Caucase*, vol. III pp. 103-104, 110.
eighth centuries AD.\textsuperscript{58} To the indigenous inhabitants of the region, including the Kʻart'velians, it was called Egrisi (up to the eighth-ninth centuries) and then Ap'xazet'i (Abasgia to Byzantine sources), which, under the kings of Ap'xazet'i beginning in the 790s, included all the domains of Western Georgia. Thus, the name of this region changed in foreign sources in accordance with changes in foreign domination or intervention (Colchis-Lazica-Abasgia). In Georgian sources, too, it changed from Egrisi (in pre-Bagratid, or eighth-ninth century sources) to Ap'xazet'i during Bagratid rule.

At the same time, in the period of dynastic unification of Eastern and Western Georgia under the Bagratids during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, a new term, Imeret'i, came into existence for Western Georgia. It was derived from the root word imier, meaning “on that side of” and referred to the territories lying “on the far side of” or to the west of the Surami mountains that divided Eastern and Western Georgia.\textsuperscript{59} As these new designations suggest, during this period, Imeret'i or Western Georgia at large was ruled by the Kʻart'velian branch of the Bagratid dynasty centered in Kʻart'li.

\textsuperscript{58}The terms Kolkhida and Kolkhoi first appear in Greek writings (Eumelus) in the seventh century BC. As G. A. Melikishvili points out, it is quite possible that the Greek appellation derived from the names Kilkhi (or Gilkhi) and Kulka (Quha) that are mentioned in Assyrian and Urartian inscriptions respectively. The earliest extant reference to Kilkhi in Assyrian inscriptions dates to the end of the twelfth century BC, while Kulka first appears in extant Urartian inscriptions in the mid-eighth century when the Urartian King Sarduri II (764-735) invaded this northern land taking its capital of Ildamusha. The region encompassed by this name roughly corresponded to the area defined by the valleys of the Chorooshi (Acampsis or Apsarus), upper Mtktvari (Kur/Kura), and Rioni (Phasis) Rivers thus extending along the south-eastern and eastern Black Sea littoral. This meant that it included some of Same'xe as well as Chanet'i or Lazistan along the Black Sea littoral. A. Gugushvili, “Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia,” p. 56; G.A. Melikishvili, Nairi-Urarta, pp. 28, 62-63, 263-264, 412-413. Maps in Toumanoff, in the back-matter of SCCH, and Hewsen, The Geography of Ananias, p. 60A, clearly place Colchis in the Rioni River valley and correlate it with the region known in Georgian as Eger or Egrisi (p. 125); also, Ot’ar D. Lort’k’ip’anidze (Lordkipanidze), Gorod-khram Kolkhidy (Istorinia archeologicheskhikh paskopok v Vani) (Moscow: Nauka, 1978); and his “Vani: An Ancient City of Colchis,” Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 32:2 (Summer 1991): 151-195.

\textsuperscript{59}A. Gugushvili, “Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia,” p. 58. Thus, Gugushvili points out that the full relational designations were Lixi’ Imeret’i and Lixi’ Ameret’i, meaning “the land on the far side” and “the land on the near side” of the Lixi or Surami mountains.
Following the period of Georgian unification up to the establishment of Russian rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the constituent domains of Western Georgia included the Kingdom of Imeret’i, and the principalities of Ap’xazet’i, Samegrelo (also, Egrisi proper or Odishi; Mingrelia in Russian), Guria, and Svanet’i (old form, Suanet’i), which lay in the mountain valleys of the Greater Caucasus. Some of these territories fragmented still further into smaller domains, like Upper and Lower Svanet’i, and Lech’xumi (also called T’akuerti), Racha and Argvet’i (or Margvet’i) in Imeret’i. In relation to Guria, Samegrelo lay immediately to the north of Guria, across the Rioni River, and the Kingdom of Imeret’i to the northeast and east. Samc’xe (or Mesxet’i) lay to the east and south. But as we shall see, beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ottomans claimed these southern lands of Mesxet’i and, indeed, parts of Guria itself thereby cutting the size of the principality in half.

The inter-connectedness of the territories and inhabitants of this borderland zone is conveyed by the fact that many of these designations have both a broad and narrow meaning. Thus, Egrisi, Ap’xazet’i, and Imeret’i in their turn referred to all of Western Georgia as well as to specific domains within that large region (i.e. Egrisi proper or Samegrelo).\(^60\) This elasticity of terminology was even more pronounced in the case of K’art’li, which prior to the period of unification possessed a broad sense encompassing K’art’li and Kaxet’i and in the period of unification lent its name to the all-Georgian kingdom of Sak’art’velo.\(^61\) Sak’art’velo literally means “the land where the K’art’velians, or inhabitants of K’art’li live,” but in this period it encompassed the inhabitants of all the Georgian lands, East and West. Although it first appears in extant Georgian sources in the ninth century, just prior to the unification of the realm, this

\(^{60}\)Gugushvili pays particular attention to this elasticity in the terminology of the Georgian lands. *Ibid.*

designation came into currency only with the unification in the eleventh century, and even then, it appeared relatively rarely in contemporary medieval sources.\textsuperscript{62}

This brief overview of the terminology, culminating in the appearance of Sak`art`velo as the name of the unified realm, highlights a crucial assumption underlying this study. That is, for most of the history of the Georgian lands, a fundamental division existed between the various polities in Eastern and Western Georgia. As noted, this division is demarcated topographically by the Surami mountains. These mountains curve in a southwesterly direction and join the Great Caucasus range in the north to the Armenian plateau and Pontic Alps in the south. At the same time, numerous scholars have emphasized the importance of this topographical division in effecting a socio-historical division between the inhabitants occupying the lands falling on either side of this range. At issue for the evaluation of the differences between these two regions is how to interpret the role played by the Surami mountains—whether to see this geographical division as a temporary barrier impeding the all but inevitable re-unification of the Georgian tribes into a nation (after the alleged initial unification under P`arnavaz in the third century, BC). Or, alternatively, as argued here one can view the Surami mountains as a persistent obstruction accentuating the difficulty of any long-term unification at all and deeply influencing the course of the unification that occurred for the first time only in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, again temporarily in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, and finally in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries both under Russian-Soviet rule and as an independent nation-state (1918-1921, and after 1991).\textsuperscript{63}

As elaborated below, Eastern and Western Georgia developed along two different historical trajectories especially before the “Golden Age” when they were dynastically

\textsuperscript{62}Rapp, \textit{IHC}, pp. 505-507.

\textsuperscript{63}A sound expression of the first view can be found in the conclusion to G.A. Melik`ishvili’s \textit{Nairi-Urartu}, p. 421.
united into a single Caucasian kingdom. Even after this period, in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, we again see the Georgian lands divided into two distinct spheres that mitigated against the cultural unity of the Georgian peoples occupying the various lands within these two domains. For this reason Cyril Toumanoff characterizes this division as “the immemorial division of the Georgian lands into the two Georgias, Eastern and Western,” a condition that found expression in one of the royal titles for the Kings of united Georgia—“King of Ap’xazet’i and K’art’li.” According to Toumanoff, the archaeological record reveals that the “early population of the Pontic-Caspian isthmus” was divided at least from the third millennium BC “into two distinct groups, the western and the central-eastern. Greek mythology supplies a name for the western group: the Kingdom of Aeza, the land of the Golden Fleece;” and, p. 59: “This division of the Georgian nation, by the way, between two polities continued to some extent the duality observable already among the traces of proto-Caucasian Bronze Age civilizations, and remained a permanent factor of Georgian history.” The reference to royal titulature comes after his characterization of this division as “the perennial dichotomy of the realm composed of Western and Eastern Georgia,” and is found in his article, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty in Georgia,” Traditio VII (1949-1951): 191, n. 128. See also Ot’ar Lort’k’ip’andize (Lordkipanidze), Nasledie drevnei Gruzii (T’bilisi: Mec’ niereba, 1989): 65, for the antiquity of this division; also A. Gugushvili, “Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia”; David Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 40-42, 208, 269-271; and Rapp, IHC, pp. 268-269, 283-284, 427-428, 450.

Hence, we come to the most problematic designation, that of Georgia. Of particular significance for this study that straddles both sides of the imposition of tsarist rule in Guria is registering how the different historical paths of Eastern and Western Georgia and the diverse regions within them influenced the terminology used by Georgians, Russians, and others in the late-eigteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although a systematic study of this theme lies beyond the scope of this investigation, I return to this subject in Chapter Two but pause here to define my own usage for the chapters that pertain directly to this period. In general, when discussing the Georgian lands under Russian rule, I use the term “Georgia” to refer to all these lands, Eastern and Western. This usage conflicts with the Russian usage, at least in its precise delineation. That is, the terminology used by the Russians, through much of the first half of the nineteenth century, reflected the fragmented state of the Georgian lands into numerous polities which the Russians encountered at the end of the eighteenth century. The Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century had precipitated the process of fragmentation which finally reached its most developed form in the fifteenth century. By the end of the fifteenth century, Eastern Georgia consisted of the two Kingdoms of K’art’li and Kaxet’i, and Western Georgia was split into the Kingdom of Imeret’i, and the principalities of Samegrelo, Guria, Ap’xazet’i, Svanet’i, and Mesxet’i.66 The Russian designation Gruziia referred to Eastern Georgia or the united Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i and not to Sak’art’velo in the sense of greater Georgia encompassing both the Eastern and Western domains. The Russians called K’art’li itself Kartalinia.67

66Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids,” p. 215, where he places Mesxet’i among the western principality rather than counting it as an eastern principality. He does this because of the change in political orientation of the territory during this era of dissolution.

67See G.G. Paichadze, Nazvanie gruzii v russkikh pis’mennykh istoricheskikh istochnikakh (T’bilisi: Mec’iereba, 1989): especially, pp. 61-65, where he talks about the first use of the term “gurzi” in late fourteenth-century sources. Russian embassies to the courts of various kings of the Georgian domains in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tended to use “Iberia” and “Gruziia” to designate K’art’li-Kaxet’i, although, depending on the circumstances, it was entirely possible that Iberia could mean only Kaxet’i.
Several problems attend this Russian usage and therefore explain my decision to use Georgia in its broader sense. For one, despite the evident political fragmentation and the lack of a national consciousness among the inhabitants of the Georgian lands prior to the Russian incorporation, this more restricted sense of “Georgia” or Gruziia, obscured a cultural unity of the Georgian peoples and lands that was recognized by Georgian scholars and sovereigns, foreign travellers, and the Russians themselves at least from the eighteenth century. In the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, several members of the K’art’velian branch of the Bagratid royal family and other Georgian scholars and writers actively used Sak’art’velo to mean greater Georgia. Vaxushti used the word Sak’art’velo this way as though to revive its old use and promote the reunification of the Georgian lands. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that the use of terms like Gruziia and gruziny by Georgians was not as systematic and consistent in meaning as one might hope. To the contrary, these terms are slippery insofar as they can signify various levels of identity depending on context. For instance, Dimitri Bak’radze, whose study of Guria and Achara clearly articulated an all-encompassing vision of the Georgian nation, in the same work differentiates the characters of the “gruzin” (i.e. K’art’velian-Kaxet’i-an) and the “imeretin” (or Imeret’i-an). Still, his

Brosset, Perеписка, na inostrannykh iazykakh, gruzinskikh tsarei s rossiiskimi gosudariami, ot 1639 po 1770 g. (SPB: Imperatorskaia akademiia nauk, 1861).

An example of a sovereign expressing the distinct notion of Georgian unity is the seal used in 1639 and 1652 by King T’eimuraz I of Kaxet’i in letters to Tsars Mikhail Fedorovich and Alexei Mikhailovich that proclaims himself “King of all of Georgia” (mep’e govlisa sak’art’velo). M.-F. Brosset, “Monographie géorgienne de Moscou,” Bulletin scientifique IV:18-19 (1838): 297-298. Two of the most prominent examples of these Bagratid scholars were Vaxushti Bagrationi and Davit’ Bagrationi (1767-1819). K’art’lis c’xvreba, Simon Qauxchi’ishvili, ed., vol. 4: Batonishvili vaxushti aghcera samep’osa sak’art’velo (T’bilisi: Sabchot’a sak’art’velo, 1973); and David [Davit’] Bagrationi, Istoria Gruzi [Georgian: Sak’art’velosistoria], A.A. Rogava, trans. (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1971): especially pp. 27-28. For an elaboration of “Georgia” and the “Georgian nation” (Gruzinskaia natsiia) through history, one that includes all the Georgian lands in its scope, see Dmitri Bak’radze, Arkeologicheskoe puteshestvie, p. vi. See also the testimonial offered by the kat’alikos-patriak’ti Anton II, son of King Irakli II, at the end of the eighteenth century about the structure of the Georgian Church. AKAK, vol. I, Ad. Berzhe, ed. (Tiflis: Arkhiv glavnago upravleniia namestnika kavkazskago, 1866): Document #648, p. 530.

D. Bak’radze, Arkeologicheskoe puteshestvie, p. 3.
The over-riding objective is to delineate a broad Georgian nation composed of various distinct regional groups like the islamicized inhabitants of Ch’uruk’-su, Kobuleti, and Achara, whom he considers residents of what he calls “Turkish Georgia.”

In addition, this tendency to signify a larger Georgia by the word *Gruziia* or *Georgia* appears in travel accounts. While travellers in the region acknowledged the perennial division into two realms, they were often confused by its boundaries and quick to recognize the linguistic and cultural unity of the inhabitants throughout the Georgian lands. In one of the most prominent travel accounts of the seventeenth century, for example, the French jeweller Jean Chardin (1643-1713), who travelled through the Georgian lands in 1672-1673, considered “Georgia” to include “Imiretta” (Imereti) in addition to K’art’li and Kaxet’i.

By the nineteenth century, despite the deplorable state of the Georgian polities, scholars like Julius Heinrich von Klaproth (1783-1835), who explored the Caucasus in 1807-1808 under the auspices of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, counted Imereti and Samegrelo as “provinces of Georgia,” and divided “the Georgian nation” into four linguistic branches that included everyone from the K’art’velians to the Svanis, Megrels, Gurians, and Laz (but not the Ap’xaz).

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71 Julius Heinrich von Klaproth, *Travels in the Caucasus and Georgia, performed in the Years 1807 and 1808, by the Command of The Russian Government* (London: Printed for Henry Colburn, 1814): 400; and his, *Tableau historique, géographique, ethnographique et politique du Caucase et des provinces limitrophes entre la Russie et la Perse* (Paris: Ponthieu et C°, Libraires, 1827): 85-86. See also the erudite
Russian usage, especially in the realm of scholarship, gradually came to equate *Gruziia* with *Sak’art’velo*. For example, in a geographical-statistical dictionary of the mid-nineteenth century, *Gruziia* includes both Kutais and Tiflis provinces (or approximately Eastern and Western Georgia).\(^72\)

Even in political discourse from the eighteenth century, Russian terminology recognized an implicit unity of the Georgian lands despite their political fragmentation into several distinct polities. In a letter to King Solomon I of Imeret’i written by Catherine the Great in 1767, the empress described Solomon as “a ruler of one part of the Georgian land that extends to the Black Sea…”\(^73\) Or again, in response to a set of questions posed by Catherine to the College or Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the extent of *Gruziia*, officials at the College responded to one query simply by stating that “Georgia is divided into different regions which are: Mingrelia, Imeretia, Guriel, Kartalinia, and Kakhetia.”\(^74\) In fact, Russian efforts to induce Irakli II and Solomon I to join the war against the Ottomans, during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, pressed these sovereigns to lay aside differences between themselves and rival dynasties (notably the Gurielis and Dadianis in Western Georgia), to recognize their common lineage and

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\(^72\)Geografichesko-statisticheskii slovar’ Rossiskoi imperii, P. Semenov, ed. vol. 1 (SPB: Imp. Russkoe Geograficheskooe obshchestvo, 1863): 700-701. See also Gugo Shukhardt, “O geografii i statistike kartvel’skikh (izhnokavkazskikh) iazykov (s kartoi),” *SMOMPK* vol. 26 (Tiflis, 1899): 47-114, especially p. 64; and K.F. Gan, “Pervyi opyt ob’iasnenii kavkazskikh geograficheskikh nazvanii,” *SMOMPK* vol. 40 (Tiflis, 1909): 73, 122. For the more narrow, official interpretation of *Gruziia* as coinciding only with the united Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i in Eastern Georgia, see Evetskii, Statisticheskoe opisanie zakavkazskogo kraia, pp. 24-26; on the other hand, he readily acknowledges the linguistic basis for grouping all the Georgian peoples into the “Georgian tribe,” p. 28.

\(^73\)Masalebi XVIII saukunis meore nazevris | Materialy po istorii russko-gruzinskikh omoshenii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 235. See also a letter by Count N.I. Panin in 1768 in which Panin wrote to Solomon that he recognized “Georgian Christians [gruzinskia khristiane]” to be all those living in Solomon’s domain (which was construed as encompassing Mingrelia-Samegrelo and Guria) as well as the united Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i ruled by King Irakli (or Erekle) II. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

\(^74\)Ibid., p. 295.
fight as a unified power against their Muslim enemies, the Turks. These efforts actually amounted to an explicit Russian recognition of a greater Georgia.

Similarly, article four appended to the famous Treaty of Georgievsk concluded in 1783 between Catherine II and Irakli II, that rendered the K’art’li-Kaxet’i a protectorate of Russia, stipulated that Catherine would do all in her power to “to effect the return of all the territories which, at a former date, have belonged to the Kingdom of K’art’li and Kaxet’i...” This phrasing acknowledged K’art’li-Kaxet’i or Eastern Georgia to be the core region of the Georgian lands and implied that the lands of Upper K’art’li (Zemo K’art’li), at the time under Ottoman rule, belonged to this kingdom. Furthermore, an agreement concluded between Irakli and the King Solomon II of Imeret’i, Grigoli, the Dadiani or ruling prince of Samegrelo or Odishi, and Vaxtang II Gurieli, granted to Irakli the exclusive right to negotiate on behalf of all these rulers a protectorate status with Russia. Catherine readily agreed to this subordination of the Georgian lands to K’art’li-Kaxet’i. Therefore, these diplomatic agreements endowed Georgia or Gruzia with both the narrow sense of K’art’li and Kaxet’i and the broad meaning of greater Georgia, roughly coterminous with the medieval Kingdom of Sak’art’velo. In light of this trend to recognize the commonalities between the Georgian peoples, and notwithstanding efforts to confine Gruzia to its narrow sense of Eastern Georgia, I use the term Georgia as applied to the second half of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries to mean all the Georgian lands under Russian rule. For the earlier period, I use Eastern and Western

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75 Ibid., documents 207-210, pp. 277-284.


77 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

Georgia, or other more specific regional names, unless referring specifically to the united Kingdom of Sakartvelo.

One final point about terminology pertains to the use of Russian or Georgian names of regions during the period of tsarist rule. As seen from the above comments about Georgian history prior to the arrival of the Russians, I use Georgian names for regions, or their foreign equivalents to show variant spellings (usually Greek or Latin). However, in turning to the nineteenth century, choice of designation becomes more problematic. In general, I use the Georgian renderings of place names with their Russian spellings in parentheses to demonstrate how the earlier Georgian names persisted, and in certain ways were rejuvenated by Russian rule and its Russian terminology. This duality of terminology represents the tensions and cohesions between Russia’s imperial enterprise with its Russian administrative terminology and the traditional designations of the various realms of the united Georgian kingdom, rekindled under a burgeoning national consciousness. A prime example of this phenomenon is found in explanations of the district names of K’ut’aisi province (Russian: Kutais) that overlay the traditional names of the polities of Western Georgia. Thus, V. Masal’skii lists both the “official” names of the districts and regions of K’ut’aisi province as well as the “local, long-existing names” that are still much used. Ozurgetskii district became the official Russian name for Guria. It did not replace Guria but coexisted with it, and one name was chosen over the other according to context. I adhere to this practice, but in order to avoid confusion, especially with unfamiliar terms, I put the alternate name in parentheses. This somewhat cumbersome convention is intended to avoid the either-or (Russian imperial or Georgian national) dichotomy of terminology that conceals more than it reveals about the way in which Russian imperial rule accommodated itself to the

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indigenous peoples of Caucasia. Certainly, one of the most difficult tasks for the new imperial rulers was to reconfigure the landscape in accordance with Russian place-names.

IV. Footnotes, Bibliographic Entries, and Transliteration

Because many Georgian scholars and writers wrote in both Russian and Georgian, the presentation of their works in the footnotes and bibliography presents some problems. I have resolved these issues by recording their works under the name as transliterated from Georgian. At the same time, I include the Russian variant(s) of their names in the bibliography referring the reader to the Georgian spelling; and in the footnotes, I record the Russian spelling in parentheses. This solution allows me to place all works by an author under one entry in the bibliography. Using Ivane Javaxishvili as an example, the bibliography includes an entry for Russian variants of his name, Dzhavakhishvili and Dzhavakhov, with the statement, “see Javaxishvili.” Accordingly, the footnote citation for one of his Russian publications would appear as Ivane Javaxishvili (Dzhavakhishvili).

For transliteration schemes, I follow the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian and mostly for Georgian. I have adopted the system used by Stephen Rapp in his dissertation that modifies a handful of letters from the Library of Congress transliteration system to lessen the use of diacritical marks. Unlike Georgian, which does not have capital letters, I have chosen to capitalize proper Georgian names.

For dates of rulers of the Kingdoms of K’art’li, Kaxet’i and Imeret’i, I rely on the genealogical tables compiled by Mzia Surguladze and Mixeil K’avt’aria, unless otherwise stated. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. For a list of abbreviations used in the footnotes, see the Bibliography.

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80 Mzia Surguladze and Mixeil K’avt’aria, Bagration’i samep’o saxli (T’bilisi: Gamomc’emloba Kandeli, 1995).
V. MAPS
PART ONE

DYNASTIC RULE IN GURIA
CHAPTER TWO

THE PRINCIPALITY OF GURIA
IN THE BORDERLAND ZONE OF CAUCASIA

The present chapter looks back into the pre-Russian period of Gurian history in order to uncover the nature of Guria's frontier position within the borderland zone and the autonomy exercised by its sovereign princes. Together with the following chapter, it investigates the relationship between Guria's frontier location and the principality's system of dynastic rule. A cursory view of Gurian history reveals how autonomy derived from the fact that the principality, along with all the other Georgian territories, existed in a borderland zone between pre-modern empires, centered to the southwest in Anatolia (Byzantium-Ottoman Turkey), to the southeast in Persia (Sasanid, Safavid, and Qajar Iran), and to the north in Muscovite-Imperial Russia. While this observation may be axiomatic for Georgia and even Caucasia as a whole, Western Georgia and Guria in particular manifested this condition in ways that differentiated the region from Eastern Georgia. Most importantly, at least for the three centuries preceding the Russian annexation (1801), kingship remained a weaker institution in Western than in Eastern Georgia. For the period of immediate concern, the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, Western Georgia was divided into multiple autonomous or semi-autonomous polities whose independence was cultivated by the region's general western orientation and proximity to the Ottoman Empire.

As an example of dynastic rule in this borderland region, however, Guria presents a special case. First, the principality occupied a peripheral position among the Georgian lands, bordering as it did the Ottoman Empire and earlier imperial enterprises emanating from Anatolia. As argued below, this particular location explains Guria's relatively late appearance in the historical record as an autonomous dynastic principality. That is,
unlike Samc'xe to the south and Samegrelo and Imeret'i to the north, Guria appears to have come into existence as a distinct polity in the eighth-ninth centuries. Curiously, church monuments in Guria are of a much more recent provenance, dating to the fourteenth century and not to the eighth or ninth centuries (if not earlier) as one might expect. At the same time, the dynastic family that ruled Guria, the Gurieli-s, do not appear in sources with this name at least until the thirteenth century. Hence, given the strategic location of this territory what accounts for Guria's relatively late appearance as a principality, to what extent did the Gurieli-s exemplify Toumanoff's idea of dynastic rule which seems predicated on the antiquity of lineage and occupation of a given domain?

As elucidated in this chapter, the Gurieli-s would in fact embody the principles of dynastic rule. They exploited the strategic importance of their domains to maintain a precarious autonomy well into the Russian period. In fact, for the period most under scrutiny here, the fifteenth-eighteenth centuries, the Gurieli-s proved themselves to be extraordinarily competent in forging alliances to preserve their precious autonomy as the smallest of contending polities in the region. The dynastic rulers consistently upheld the independence of their princely house usually by accommodating themselves to the overlordship of a neighboring power, be it the Ottoman sultans, the kings of Imeret'i, princes of Samegrelo, or at 'abagi-s of Axalc'ixe (Turkish: bey, or beg). That is, autonomy entailed a kind of compromised or conditional sovereignty that vacillated between full independence, tributary status, and outright submission to foreign control of external affairs with troops posted inside its borders (rare and only momentary though this was). Hence, the point that motivates the following account of Gurian history is that Guria existed for centuries as a tiny sovereign principality because of its particular location within the larger zone of Caucasus and the Georgian lands.

This chapter examines Gurian history primarily during the period of political fragmentation of the Georgian lands, spanning the four centuries leading up to the Russian annexation of Eastern Georgia in 1801. I frame this investigation in terms of the
twin concepts of borderland zone and dynasticism. The first locates Guria as a distinct
principalities within Western Georgia and, more broadly, detaches Western Georgia from
Eastern Georgia in an attempt to illuminate the differences in the historical development
of these two regions. The second underlies an examination of the political history of the
principalities and lays the foundation for examining more closely in the next chapter the
survival strategies employed by the Gurians. I argue that the two concepts converge in
the political autonomy exercised by the sovereign princes of Guria (the Gurieli-s).
Furthermore, Guria's location in the borderland zone imparted to its inhabitants an
unusual range of action that the turbulent political history of the period often obscures.
Indeed, Gurians developed a wide array of survival strategies to eke out a living on the
precarious frontier between the Georgian lands and Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, I argue
that Guria's location in the borderland zone shaped its local social order, centered around
dynastic rule, and explains the turbulent encounter with the Russian imperial regime
during the first half of the nineteenth century.

I. The Concept of Borderland

"Throughout history Caucasia has been a borderland."¹ Thus begins W.E.D.
Allen's history of four centuries of warfare in Caucasia that includes the Russian
conquest and ends with the proclamation of independence from Russian rule in 1918.
One need not look deeply into the historical record to find confirmation of this axiom of
Caucasian history. Less clear is the particular articulation of this idea in the various
territories within the Caucasian borderland. That is, if a scholar of the region like Cyril
Toumanoff can identify common features defining how Caucasia was a borderland
civilization, it is more difficult to illuminate the different historical trajectories of the

¹ W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian
constituent peoples of the region. Toumanoff does this brilliantly for Eastern Georgia and Armenia with less attention to Western Georgia. The disaggregation of the borderland zone — particularly with regard to the distinction between Eastern Georgia and Western Georgia and Guria’s location in the latter — is the principal task of the present chapter, and it provides the framework for the subsequent encounter with Russian imperial rule.

Owen Lattimore and Peter Sahlins on Borderlands

In their discussions of frontier zones, scholars like Owen Lattimore and Peter Sahlins contribute much to our understanding of Caucasia as a borderland zone. According to Lattimore, the Chinese-Mongol frontier was characterized by its spatial or zonal quality that persisted even after the bifurcation of the region by a distinct boundary like the Great Wall.² Likewise, this borderland region was not a mobile zone ever pushing north or west with Chinese expansion but rather a stable zone of contact, exchange, and confrontation.³ If, in Lattimore’s conception, the borderland was static, it


³ By contrast, in his famous lecture at the 1893 meeting of the American Historical Association, Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932) advocated a notion of frontier that connoted movement of Americans of European descent into what was perceived as virtually uninhabited wilderness; the American frontier was therefore as much a process of establishing American institutions in the great void as a distinct albeit shifting zone that stretched to the Pacific Ocean. Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt, 1920). Gregory Nobles provides an excellent overview of the history of the Turner thesis in American historical scholarship and the revisions it has undergone rendering the frontier, in many respects, more like its Eurasian counterpart as described by the likes of Owen Lattimore. Gregory H. Nobles, American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997). See also the essays in The Frontier in Perspective, Walker D. Wyman and Clifton B. Kroeber, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1957); Dietrich Gerhard, “The Frontier in Comparative Perspective,” CSSH 1:3 (1959): 205-229; and, in the Russian case, Donald W. Treadgold, “Russian Expansion in the Light of Turner’s Study of the American Frontier,” Agricultural History 26:4 (October 1952): 147-152; Joseph L.
was also a dynamic zone that was socially constructed. In addition, the frontier marks a region between peoples whose proximity and shared history impart to the borderland population strategies of accommodation, assimilation, acculturation, and, at times, partial conquest. Indeed, accommodation tends to be the primary strategy whereby populations inhabiting a borderland zone can, despite ethnic or linguistic differences, unite with one or another outside power to oppose the encroachment on their lands of an invading force. This ambivalence of loyalties and the fragmented, fluctuating nature of Mongol-Chinese power relations reinforced local identities. Finally, because of its strategic value to the imperial or nomadic centers of power, the borderland also spawned institutional and social innovations that had an impact on the development of China and nomadic confederations. Thus Lattimore asserts that the Mongol-Chinese frontier served as the locus for nothing less than the emergence of feudalism in China. This last point is

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5 Thus, Lattimore remarks that “The changing significance, for changing societies, of an unchanging physical configuration which may at one time be a frontier, at another time a frontier of different significance...leads to the axiomatic statement that frontiers are of social, not geographic origin.” O. Lattimore, “The Frontier in History,” p. 471.


7 He summarizes this argument in two articles, “Frontier Feudalism” and “Feudalism in History” in *Studies in Frontier History*. He concludes a third article, “The Periphery as Locus of Innovation,” with the assertion, “We may, I suggest, be able to ascribe the origin of feudalism to the impact of the periphery on the centre.” In *Centre and Periphery*, Jean Gottmann, ed., p. 208. Another more obvious innovation he attributes to this borderland is the development of Chinese cavalry, *ibid.*, p. 207. Interestingly, Lynn White postulates that the origins of feudalism in Europe lie in the transfer to Europeans of the innovative
especially pertinent to the case of Guria, for I argue that, when viewed in terms of its borderland position, Guria can be seen as the locus for an innovative form of agrarian movement eventually defined by the alliance between Georgian Social Democrats and Gurian peasants.

Peter Sahlins' more specific study of shifting ethnic and national identities in a section of the borderland zone in the Pyrenees complements Lattimore's work and also sets the stage for an investigation of Caucasia, for the Pyrenees resemble the Caucasus as an ecologically diverse mountain range and static borderland. While Lattimore's scheme pertains mainly to the medieval and early modern periods of Chinese-Mongol history, Sahlins elaborates the concept of borderland in the specific context of the Cerdanya valley on the border between France and Spain in the early modern and modern periods. There he explores more carefully the relationship between the zonal and linear senses of a border as they pertain to the formation of ethnic and national identities at a time when the state's presence in the region grew tremendously. He finds that the two types of boundaries coexisted for several centuries. A linear boundary did not replace the borderland region with the imposition of a uniform state administration. Similarly, local identity persisted and actually infused national identity with meaning even before the capitals of Spain and France sought to transplant national identity to the region. From a linguistic and cultural standpoint, local identity was essentially a version of Catalan identity, and it centered around village life and peasant agricultural production and extended to households and villages across the national territorial boundaries of France and Spain that first divided the valley in the seventeenth century. From that time, it was the local communities on either side of the boundary that initiated the process of constructing French and Spanish national identities. By Sahlins' estimation, national

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identity "appeared less as a result of state intentions than from the local process of adopting and appropriating the nation without abandoning local interests, a local sense of place, or a local identity." Accordingly, if "Catalan remained the lingua franca of rural society in the borderland, so too could it coexist with the contextual adoption of national languages—French or Castilian—despite the failure of either state to pursue a policy of linguistic uniformity." Lastly, Sahlins asserts that the appropriation of a national identity was a deadly serious affair prompted mostly by local disputes over land boundaries and rights to resources.

Sahlins' analysis of nested identities and the local creation of national identities in this borderland zone cautions us not to misconstrue ambivalent loyalties for amorphous identities or situational identities seen as a set of "masks" donned according to the exigencies of the moment. Such a view reduces itself to the apriori, transcendant peasant who exists before and outside of all of these identities. Sahlins argues that self-characterization always entailed one or another of these identities. If the boundaries between linguistic use and identity remained fluid, this did not mean that identity was somehow less authentic or inherent in the peasants' view of their world. In effect, Sahlins demonstrates how a local community in a borderland zone proved instrumental in conjuring up the feelings of French and Spanish nation identity that many scholars traditionally saw as born in the centers and imposed on the peripheries of France and Spain. As we shall see, this process of nation-building extended to the Caucasian frontier.

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8 Sahlins, Boundaries, p. 9; likewise, in a lengthier anthropological discussion of this issue, he states, "Identities and loyalties in the Cerdanya were not fixed in a permanent hierarchal order but remained constantly shifting among levels," from village to parish, valley, region or province, and nation, p. 112; also pp. 269-270.

9 Ibid., pp. 166, 262-265.

10 Ibid., p. 159.

11 Ibid., pp. 165-166.
principality of Guria where Gurians actively participated in the construction of the Russian Empire (and, eventually, the Georgian nation).

Taken together, the studies of Lattimore and Sahlins underscore how much the communities in a borderland region are dynamic in their development and not pre-existing entities moving through a continuum of time. They also illustrate the process of empire- and nation-formation especially in borderland regions. And they point out the dangers of starting with linear boundaries marking national territories as the signifiers of distinct peoples occupying uniform national spaces. Indeed, the difficulties posed by the study of borderlands is that they subvert notions of fragmented space and natural communities of distinct peoples by demonstrating how spaces and peoples interact across boundaries. The examination of the emergence of Guria in the borderland region of Caucasasia that follows is thus designed to introduce the Gurians not as a pre-existing, autonomous, and primeval people but as a community whose distinct identity and autonomy were generated and perpetuated through their interactions with stronger powers.

*Cyril Toumanoff and the Caucasian Borderland*

Some basic similarities between the Chinese-Mongol frontier, the Pyrenees, and Caucasasia stand out. For one, they all have been stable rather than shifting frontier areas. Nothing represents that stability better than the Caucasian mountains themselves, which for the Persian-Anatolian civilizations to the south acted much like the Great Wall for the Chinese — as both a defensive fortification against nomadic incursions and a delimitation

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12 Ibid., pp. 270-271.

of their optimal forward expansion. Similarly, Caucasia was a frontier zone whose coherence from a structural point of view derived from the shifting boundaries between the great settled powers and nomadic confederations. It has been a contested zone for all of recorded history as Allen asserts. At the same time, for millenia the region has generated numerous local polities whose inhabitants have developed highly complex strategies of resistance, accommodation, and autonomy to ensure their survival. Similar to Sahlin’s assessment of identity in the Pyrenees, in Caucasia identities have been multiple, nested and fluid, local, to be sure, but also instrumental in establishing the presence of the various empires contesting hegemony over parts or all of the region. Finally, following the scholarship of Cyril Toumanoff, one can claim that Caucasia, too, has been the site of innovative social and political institutions.

Of all the scholars who have studied this region, none has developed more of a sense of Caucasia’s specificity and coherence as a borderland civilization than Cyril Toumanoff (1913-1997). Toumanoff argues that the Caucasus must be regarded as a distinct civilization that centers on the Christian lands of Armenia and Georgia: thus, the title of his seminal book, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History.* In fact, although he uses the term Caucasus to name this civilization, he actually means the territories of “Ciscaucasia,” or Armenia and Georgia, lying to the south of the main Caucasian range. For Toumanoff, the mountaineers of that range are “the history-less highlanders in the

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north.\textsuperscript{16} Likewise, he concentrates on the Christian lands of Caucasia as the core of its civilization because he sees the Caucasus range as "a well-nigh impenetrable wall, save for a few passes, like the Alan Gate, or Daryal defile," to the north of which lay "the hyperborean waste beyond."\textsuperscript{17} Accordingly, he declares that the basin of the Cyrus River (Kura, or, in Georgian, Mtkvari) is the "locus of Caucasian society: the land of its two chief components, the Armenian and the Georgian nation."

It is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate Toumanoff's oeuvre in terms of the way he excludes the "history-less" peoples of the mountains and the role of the nomads to the north. Nonetheless, even focusing on Georgia as a distinct component of Caucasian civilization, I would argue that Toumanoff's notion that the Caucasus range acted like an "impenetrable wall" is as sound as the claim that the Great Wall did the same. More recently, scholars like David Braund, Benjamin Isaac, and Peter Golden have challenged this image. They emphasize not just that many more than "a few passes" exist (Braund counts thirty-six in the central section between Mt. Elbruz and Mt. Qazbegi [Kazbek]); they also emphasize that, at least from the fourth century with the appearance of the Huns, nomadic confederations exploited the permeability of the Caucasus sufficiently to compel Persia repeatedly to attempt to negotiate with Byzantium, its principal western

\textsuperscript{16} Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{18} \textit{SCCH}, p. 33; also his "Christian Caucasia between Byzantium and Iran. New Light from Old Sources," \textit{Traditio} 10 (1954): 109, n. 1. By his formulation, Ciscaucasia encompasses all the territory in the isthmus south of the main Caucasus range, between the Black and Caspian Seas, extending to the southeast across the Mughan Plain of what was Albania in antiquity (and today is largely Azerbaijan) and to the south and southwest across the mountains and plateaus of Armenia. This region designated the northeastern-most segment of the Mediterranean world and today is readily referred to as the South Caucasus rather than Transcaucasia of Russian imperial and Soviet times.
adversary, to guard the passes as a mutually beneficial strategy.19 Thus, there can be little doubt that the Caucasus range did not act as an impenetrable barrier, that the nomadic tribes to the north at times played a strategic role in the Caucasian policies of the larger empires to the south, and that, indeed, they affected “the underlying fabric of society and [altered] the texture of life” in Ciscaucasia.20 Indeed, at least from the third century AD, the role of nomadic confederations penetrating the Caucasus mountains represented a third prong in what became a tri-partite competition for hegemony over part or all of the region.21 This rivalry unfolded continuously between various Anatolian enterprises and


20 The quotation is from Peter Golden who highlights how concern for nomadic raids, even invasions, induced the imperial rivals—Rome-Byzantium and Persia—to enter into a “policy of synarchy” designed to share the burden of guarding the Caucasian passes against such incursions. Peter Golden, “The Turkic Peoples and Caucasus,” in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change*, Ronald Suny, ed., pp. 45-46, and pp. 47-48, 51-52.

Persia to the south, and nomadic confederations inhabiting the steppelands to the north of the Caucasus. Accordingly, this reflection calls into question Toumanoff's assessment of the nomads' role in Caucasian civilization and begs a more systematic study on a par with Owen Lattimore's work and, more recently, Thomas Barfield's study of the Mongol-Chinese border. 22

Still, insofar as the subject of this study is the Georgian principality of Guria, I adhere to Toumanoff's view of Christian Caucasian civilization and how this civilization derived from the region's proximity to larger powers to the south and west. Indeed, despite the evident influence of the nomadic confederations on culture and politics in the lowlands south of the main range, these peoples, most notably the Georgians and Armenians, looked predominantly to the imperial powers to the south for the inspiration for their own civilization. It was not until the concerted drive of the Russians to enter Caucasus at the end of the eighteenth century that an agriculturally-based imperial power from the north transformed what had long been a threat of invasion by nomadic powers into the actual domination of these lands. Only with the advent of the Russians did this Caucasian civilization turn to the north for this inspiration.

Toumanoff argues that the proximity to greater powers was largely responsible for the creation of distinct, syncretic "national" cultures and "states," which despite the differences between them shared certain "perdurable" social forms and practices that separated them from their larger southern neighbors and constituted these indigenous inhabitants as distinct peoples within an enduring civilization. Inherent in his conception of this civilization is the notion that the Georgian and Armenian peoples stood "poised"

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between Persian and Anatolian-Mediterranean civilizations. Writing about Caucasia’s position between the Iranian and Romano-Hellenistic worlds in late antiquity, Toumanoff summarizes this view as follows:

But it [Caucasia] was claimed by both [worlds]. And its absorption by either one was precluded by the equipoise of their incessant rivalry over it, which, though it did exclude the exercise of political control in it by either power, did in fact ensure its survival as an autonomous society. The political control claimed, or achieved, over Caucasia by these two adjacent empires was of different kinds: it could be either suzerainty or sovereignty resulting from annexation. Accordingly, the Caucasian lands were either vassal States or integral provinces of one or the other of the rival empires; and the former might on occasion be subjected to annexation, while the latter might gain autonomy.

This observation underscores the distinction of Caucasia as a frontier region whose location made it peripheral to the centers of power in the Persian and Anatolian-Mediterranean worlds but yet indispensable to the security of those very centers. If these various empires lacked the resources to rule the region outright for long periods of time, they could not afford to neglect Caucasia because of both its resources and strategic

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23 I have placed words in quotation marks to indicate that these are keywords in Toumanoff’s thought. As empirical as he is in elaborating his thought over several decades, I submit that Toumanoff’s historical vision conforms to a system of thought that seeks above all else to illuminate the antiquity, longevity and course of development of the Georgian and Armenian nations into states and a unique Caucasian civilization. Still, it would be a mistake and distortion of his enterprise to reduce Toumanoff to an “essentialist” thinker. He is not one who believes that an essential Georgian and Armenian tribal and then national identity came to fruition in a pre-determined way, much like the transformation of a seed into a plant. Toumanoff is exceedingly sensitive to the contingencies of history, the role of individuals, and the “constructedness” of identities. Having said this, I would maintain that his emphasis on the cultural and religious over the material and his reliance on reified analytical categories of the State, Nation, and what he calls the various thought-patterns of the “Social Myth” endow his work with an idealism in the Hegelian fashion that at times borders on transcendent, in the sense of transmuted, national-cultural identities.

value; to do so only ran the risk of strengthening one’s adversary.\(^{25}\) Accordingly, in his recent study of Russian imperialism, John LeDonne underscores the strategic value of this area by characterizing Georgia and Armenia as a “prorruption zone” which in geopolitical theory designates “forward points of growth” and in Caucasia marks the region where the Russo-Turkish, Russo-Persian, and Turco-Persian frontiers met.\(^{26}\) Thus, Toumanoff’s stress on the equipoise of the region between often equally strong (or weak) imperial rivals underscores the geo-political, structural dimension defining this region as a borderland.

Toumanoff deems the most prominent “perdurable” social form characterizing Caucasian civilization the dynastic class of sovereign rulers arising from the interaction between what he calls “dynasticism” and feudalism.\(^{27}\) For Toumanoff, these terms refer to a particular relationship between, on the one hand, a tribal polity centered around the patriarchal structure of the clan and, on the other, a more centralized, bureaucratic, and anti-aristocratic state structure. A dynastic regime may have been clan-based like Lattimore’s nomadic tribes, but it evolved when a set of tribes coalesced into an

\(^{25}\) Toumanoff, “Christian Caucasia between Byzantium and Iran,” p. 113; *SCCH*, pp. 148-149, 153.


\(^{27}\) As with the theme of Caucasia’s equipoise between empires, Toumanoff develops his theory of the unique interaction between dynasticism and feudalism across several works, the most prominent of which is *SCCH*, especially chapter one, “The Social Background of Christian Caucasia.” Others include his articles, “The Princely Nobility of Georgia,” in *From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoian*; “Iberia on the Eve of Bagratid Rule,” *Le Muséon* vol. LXV (1952): especially pp. 25-26, and “La Noblesse géorgienne: sa genèse et sa structure,” *Araldica* (Roma, Sept. 1956): 259-273. My summary of Toumanoff’s concept of the dynastic and feudal regimes comes from these four sources. This tension between dynasticism and feudalism is reminiscent of Lattimore’s competing notions of “tribalism” among the nomadic Mongols and feudalism as it evolved among certain nomadic tribal chiefs and their imperial overlords to the south.
autonomous, if not fully sovereign, polity occupying a distinct area and committed to the cultivation of the soil. The building blocks of such a formation were the individual tribes presided over by dynastic chiefs who possessed sovereignty over a geographical area and over a group of people with their own cultural tradition. Some of these tribal polities, like the K’art’velians and Colchians (or, in the Georgian historical tradition, Megreli-s), were able to develop the institution of kingship precisely because of their proximity to pre-existing, relatively centralized state structures and ideological traditions as represented most prominently by Achaemenid Iran, the Seleucids and, later, the Roman-Byzantine Empire. Kings arose among a number of multiple sovereign dynasties as primi inter pares, or the primary sovereigns among equal dynasts in the case of those regions like K’art’li, Kaxet’i, and Imeret’i where the dynast acquired a royal title. In a principality like Guria or Samegrelo, the Dadiani and Gurieli families acquired a similar status among princely families who possessed similar claims to their lands and antiquity of lineage. Thus, because the dynasts existed before kingship, the sovereignty of a dynastic kingship was always “polygenetic,” in the sense of springing from a plurality of tribal polities, in which the chief dynasts each possessed a specific territory as their inalienable domain. The crucial point here in this delineation of a dynastic regime is that the balance between a centralized state and tribal polity leaned in favor of the latter; that is, the centralizing tendencies of the state (whether the imperial enterprises to the


south or even the K`art`velian Kingdom within Caucasus) did not succeed in dissolving the rights and titles of the dynastic families within the realm and make them into an untitled, servitor noble class. In a dynastic regime, the titled aristocratic class, as distinct from the servitor noble class, retained its place in the preeminent stratum of the society by virtue of its family rights that dated back to the earliest historical memories.

By contrast, Toumanoff designates a feudal regime as one in which the centralized and bureaucratic tradition of a pre-existing state prevailed over the dynastic tradition of a tribal polity. As a result, the "super-dynast" that came to rule the feudal state succeeded in subordinating the dynastic houses and reducing their status to that of the lower, untitled service nobility; for aristocratic and noble house alike, their relationship to the ruler became that of vassal to sovereign.\(^{30}\) As a sign of the "monogenetic" power of the ruling sovereign, landholding was contractual and conditioned by the fulfillment of an office. Toumanoff contrasts the two types of aristocracy that existed in a dynastic and a feudal regime by stating that for the dynastic aristocracy their names derived from "the idea of what one is" as passed down from the remotest of times; and for the feudal aristocracy their names were based on "the idea of what one has," by virtue of the territories they possessed as vassals of a sovereign.\(^{31}\) In addition to carefully documenting the shifting tensions between these two types of polities in Caucasus, Toumanoff also demonstrates how proponents of dynasticism and feudalism looked to their southern imperial neighbors for inspiration to advance their particular claims. Thus, he states that the kings of the Armenian and Georgian lands

\(^{30}\) According to Toumanoff, this historical process obtained in Sasanid Iran and Western Europe, for example, but not in the Roman Empire, he argues, where "an anti-nobiliary and bureaucratic, total étatisme" prevailed. SCCH, pp. 39-40, including notes 13 & 14.

usually looked to the more bureaucratic, centralized rule of the Byzantine emperors as an inspiration for how to assert their rule over dynastic families, while the dynastic noble families over which those kings sought to extend their power looked to the Iranian Shahs for protection of their dynastic rights.\textsuperscript{32} Weighed against the historical record, Toumanoff asserts that more often than not in Caucasia the balance tilted in favor of the dynasticist tradition of sovereignty.\textsuperscript{33} As we shall see, this was particularly true in Western Georgia for a span of several centuries prior to the Russian incorporation of the region.\textsuperscript{34}

Toumanoff asserts that, overall, dynasticism prevailed over feudlalism because of Caucasia’s location as a borderland region between great agricultural empires of differing social and political structures but often comparable military might. And herein lies the crux of his perspective on how the borderland produced this enduring social order:

Occasionally, the geography of a region, such as Greece or Caucasia, favours the growth within its limits of a number of small polities and precludes the rise of a large and unified, centralized and bureaucratic monarchy. The unity of such a region rests on geographical, cultural, and ethnic, rather than political, foundations. When, thus, a number of small States coexist in a circumscribed area, the group of the kingly dynasties ruling in them, though each unique in its own polity, come to form together, in the multiplicity of States, as it were one class. This class, then, constitutes the highest stratum of the society of the entire area, cutting across its political divisions. And it becomes crystallized as a


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 123. W.E.D. Allen concurs with this assessment in his discussion of the history of Same‘xe, one of his scholarly passions pertaining to the Georgian lands: “The mountainous nature of both Georgia and Armenia always afforded opportunities to great feudal lords to break away from their allegiance, and, in fact, the unlicensed power of the feudatories in the Trans-Caucasian lands was, eventually, among the primary causes of the extinction of political independence in both Georgia and Armenia.” Allen, “The March-Lands of Georgia,” The Geographical Journal 2 (August 1929): 155.

\textsuperscript{34} One episode in K’art’velian history that demonstrates the tension between Toumanoff’s concepts of dynasticism and feudalism was the abolition of kingship that occurred in the late sixth century in large part at the behest of the dynastic families of K’art’li who sought the aid of the Sasanid Shah to abolish their monarchy. Toumanoff, SCCH, p. 153; and Rapp, who traces this view in early K’art’velian histories of the event, IHC, pp. 481-483.
social class long before the other social strata are definitively formed, that is, before the original tribal society of free warriors is finally stratified as one in which, besides the dynasts, there are lineages of clan-chiefs and family-heads—the inchoate nobility—as well as the rest of the people.\textsuperscript{35}

While Toumanoff asserts that this “unique” aristocratic class was the most enduring form of Caucasian society, he takes pains to demonstrate that the emergence of this class was the result of the tension between the dynamic and feudal modes of governance in Caucasia. “The perdurable form in question,” he claims, “is one of a strongly aristocratic society which combined in an unusual way the features of a feudal régime with those of a dynastic régime evolved from the earlier tribal conditions.”\textsuperscript{36}

Nonetheless, insofar as Toumanoff trains his eye on the emergence of this dynastic aristocracy across political and ethno-religious boundaries, he sees social history as the reconstruction of dynastic lineages and the study of their interrelationships. He was not as interested in “the rest of the people” or even the lower untitled nobility as such.\textsuperscript{37} I emphasize this conception of the enduring form of Caucasian society to use it as a foundation for investigating how the survival of dynastic rule not only reflected the borderland status of the region but how it had impact on “the rest of the people” specifically in Guria. In particular, Toumanoff’s concentration on the dynastic families of the realm raises the question of the extent to which these families retained power in the Georgian lands after the Russian annexation and influenced the course of emancipatory politics in the late nineteenth century. That is, the role of the dynastic nobility as

\textsuperscript{35} SCCH, p. 37; see also p. 34.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 34.

\textsuperscript{37} As Robert Hewsen points out in his obituary for his teacher, Toumanoff’s Studies in Christian Caucasian History was actually intended as the background to “his magnum opus,” Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie de la Caucase chrétienne (Rome, 1976), which is “a vast compendium of genealogical charts of the royal and princely houses of Armenia, Georgia, and Caucasian Albania.” It was later republished as Les dynasties de la Caucase chrétienne de l’antiquité jusqu’au XIXe siècle (Pavia, 1990). Hewsen, “In Memoriam. Cyril Toumanoff,” p. 100.
delineated by Toumanoff serves as the foundation for viewing the encounter of Western Georgia with Russia.

In brief, Toumanoff asserts that the core of Caucasian civilization was the conglomeration of small polities ruled by ancient dynastic houses that looked primarily to Persia and the Greco-Roman-Byzantine worlds for inspiration in administering, defending, and propagating the claims of their kingships. The stability of location of these polities and dynastic houses most immediately strikes the historian of Caucasia. With the extensive movement of peoples through the area — Scythians, Greeks, Huns, Avars, Khazars, Arabs, Seljuqs, Mongols, to name the most prominent — one must ask how these polities survived at all, anchored as they were to the soil and hence forever prey to invasion. By Toumanoff’s estimation, history reveals that the tension between dynasticism and feudalism provides much of the answer; for the small dynastic polities possessed the requisite antiquity of lineage to legitimate their claims to the territory, coupled with the flexibility to ally with neighboring dynasts or imperial powers to endow them with resiliency and the means to reproduce as a class.\footnote{In the case of the Georgian lands, these polities included Colchis (or Egrisi in Georgian)-Lazika-Ap’xazeti’i and Suanet’i / Svaneti’i in the west, Same’xe (and the duchies of Cunda, Odzrxe, and Klarjet’i) and the Georgian-Armenian territory of Tao in the south and southwest, and K’art’li and Kaxet’i in the east. They were rooted in river and mountain valleys and ruled by separate dynasts.} At times, however, always depending on the larger geo-political situation in the Near East, they united in various combinations into a composite kingdom. The most brilliant example of Georgian unity was the medieval Bagratid kingdom of Sak’art’velo that came into existence under Bagrat III (1008-1014) and began to break up with the onslaught of the Mongols at the time of Queen Rusudan (1223-1245).\footnote{Here it is worth recalling that the term Sak’art’velo designating an all-Georgian realm came into currency only in the eleventh century thereby expressing the novelty of this new kingdom.} In the span of two centuries Sak’art’velo was transformed into a veritable pan-Caucasian kingdom, which, in the words of Stephen
Rapp, “was the most powerful kingdom in Caucasia and the northern sector of the Near East,” and which, by the time of Queen T’amar (1184-1213) “could now legitimately claim, at least in Georgian eyes, to be in an even more powerful position than Byzantium itself.” It is during this illustrious, indeed, Golden epoch of Georgian unity that we find the clearest manifestations of the nature of Caucasian borderland kingdoms. At once, a “hybrid” and unprecedented enterprise, the Kingdom of Sak’art’velo demonstrated how Caucasia acted like a source for novel “unitive formations.” The Georgian script, Church, and tradition of historical writing all exemplify the particularity and innovative energy of this borderland kingdom.

II. The Borderland Region of Western Georgia

Caucasia was a borderland zone with the kingdom of Sak’art’velo brilliantly highlighting its potential attributes, and this isthmus was further divided into separate dynastic realms each of which maintained distinct relations with surrounding imperial powers and with the Georgian-Armenian Christian Caucasian civilization which was centered in the Mtkvari-Araxes River valleys. Western Georgia or Egrisi (broadly construed as Colchis-Lazika-Ap’xazet’i in ancient and early medieval times) was one such region. A crucial question for the historian of Georgia is how K’art’li came

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40 Rapp, IHC, pp. 683, 686.

41 Toumanoff refers to this period as Georgia’s “Golden Age.” Toumanoff, “Medieval Georgian Historical Literature,” p. 162.


43 All of these themes are developed in Rapp, IHC.
eventually to constitute the center of a united kingdom of medieval Georgia. Up until the twelfth century, when Davit’ II emancipated Tp’ilisi (new orthography: T’bilisi) from Arab rule, the principal city of K’art’li had been in Arab hands for four centuries, and the kings of Ap’xazet’i played a pivotal role in effecting the process of unification of the Georgian lands. Indeed, in the ninth and tenth centuries, it appeared that the Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i might prevail as the center of a united kingdom of Georgia. Already much studied, the question of the historical formation of Sak’art’velo lies beyond the focus of this study.\footnote{The depth to which Georgian historians have investigated this theme is apparent in the bibliography of Stephen Rapp’s dissertation, \textit{IHC}. In addition, Toumanoff’s \textit{SCCH} is the foundational work in English. See also the multi-volume series, translated into Russian, \textit{Ocherki istorii Gruzii}, especially vols. I & II (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1989 & 1988); also, \textit{Istoriia Gruzii}, vol. I, S. Dzhanashia (Janashia), ed.} Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, in essence, K’art’li found itself more centrally located than did Egrisi-Ap’xazet’i with respect to straddling the Persian and Mediterranean-Anatolian worlds. As a reflection of this balance, K’art’li became the locus of a more prominent and extensive tradition of kingship and royal administration, with an autocephalous Church, and a written tradition transmitting the historical memory of the Georgian lands from the vantage point of K’art’li.\footnote{Thus Toumanoff states, "While the peripheral States of Pontic or Western Georgia (Colchis-Lazica) and Caspian Albania succumbed each to its immediate neighbor’s domination, Armenia and Iberia (Eastern Georgia) preserved, thanks to the equipoise reached by the two empires in mid-Caucasia, their cultural and political continuity. It is, thus, with Armenia and Iberia that the student of Caucasian history has principally to deal." Toumanoff, "Christian Caucasia between Byzantium and Iran," pp. 113-114. As examined by Rapp, no better illustration of K’art’li’s position of royal equipoise exists than the image of King Vaxtang Gorgasali (ca. 447-ca. 522) conveyed in the pre-Bagratid work, \textit{The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali} (ca. 800) preserved in \textit{K’art’lis c’oxvareba}. Rapp, \textit{IHC}, chapter five.} The most concrete expression of the pre-eminence of K’art’li as the central land of greater Georgia is the appellation of the all-Georgian kingdom: \textit{Sak’art’velo} is derived from the root word K’art’li and literally means “the place where the K’art’velians live,” but under the Bagratids it came to signify more “the place where the Georgians live.”\footnote{See my comments in the Introduction. The most famous expression of the sense of a greater Georgia is the declaration by Giorgi Merch’ule, author of \textit{Works of Grigol Xandzi’eli} (951), who stated that “K’art’li
the chief fruit of contention between the Persians and Byzantines, both because of its geopolitical and commercial location and because Egrisi was too far removed, except for short periods of time — as in the fifth-sixth centuries — for the Persians to exert a sustained threat to Byzantine (and later Ottoman) hegemony in those western lands.

The question then arises as to what differentiated Western from Eastern Georgia as distinct territories. A central theme stands out in Western Georgian history that distinguishes the region from Eastern Georgia. This theme is the western orientation of the lands lying on the far, western side of the Surami mountains. Beginning with the Greek colonization of the Black Sea littoral in the seventh century BC, and moving through the Roman-Byzantine period (roughly 300-1070 AD), to the Seljuk (1070s-1320s), and then the Ottoman centuries of dominance (1320-1810), we see a growing encroachment by the rulers of the Anatolian lands on Western Georgia to the exclusion of the Persians.\textsuperscript{47} If the Greeks exerted primarily an economic influence, the Romans-Byzantines and Ottomans came to play an increasingly prominent role in the political life of the dynastic houses in the region. From this vantage point, the three centuries of K`art`velian control (after 1008 to the Mongol campaigns in the thirteenth century, and then for periods in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) represented somewhat of an anomaly in the political life of Western Georgia. To be sure, if scholars have effectively refuted the claims of the Georgian historical tradition that, from the reign of P`arnavaz (the semi-legendary first King of K`art`li, 299-234 BC), the kings of K`art`li have ruled

\textsuperscript{47}I mark the end of Ottoman encroachment by the year 1810 because that year the Russians overcame the resistance of Solomon II, abolished kingship in Imereti, and forced the king into exile in Turkey, thereby weakening the Ottoman presence in much of Western Georgia.
Egrisi for long periods of time,\(^{48}\) they have nonetheless detected K'art'velian cultural influence dating at least to the third century BC.\(^{49}\) Still, as argued below, while the Surami/Lixi mountains acted as a permeable boundary between K'art'li and Colchis-Egrisi and hence as an interface between the two lands, the "k'art'velization" of the region did not intensify until the eighth century when the Kingdom of Ap`xazet`i was established.\(^{50}\) Even if the "Great Tradition" represented by K'art'velian culture, ruling institutions, and political aspirations prevailed in Egrisi with the foundation of the united Kingdom of Sak'art'velo, this influence and direct control was not enough to defy the western orientation of the Georgian lands on the Black Sea.\(^{51}\) At the same time that the

\(^{48}\) See, for instance, Rapp, \textit{IHC}, p. 272, fn. 167. On the other hand, scholars like Brosset argue that as far back as King P'arnavaz, K'art'li exerted its rule over the lands of Western Georgia. M.-F. Brosset, \textit{Histoire de la Géorgie. Introduction et Table des matières}, p. ix.

\(^{49}\) Braund points out that archaeological evidence (pottery and building structures) at sites like Sairxe/Sairke and Saqanchia indicate the presence of K'art'velian influence in the material culture of the inhabitants of the eastern part of Colchis. Braund, \textit{Georgia in Antiquity}, pp. 122, 136, 144-146, 149-151, 174. Indeed, it appears that the boundary in antiquity between Iberia and Colchis fell on the western side of the Lixi-Surami mountains and that it was marked by the fortresses of Sarapan (modern-day Shorapani) and Skanda. A. Gugushvili, "Ethnological and Historical Division of Georgia," p. 56; \textit{istorii Gruzii}, vol. I, S. Dzhanashia (Janashia), ed. p. 115.

\(^{50}\) It should be added that in addition to the contact established between K'art'li and Egrisi over the Surami mountains, Toumanoff notes that a breach existed in the mountains of the Lesser Caucasus farther south around the mouth of the Acampsis or Choroxi River southwest of present-day Bat'umi. He identifies what he calls "the beginning of the Iberian thrust into western Caucasia" in the first century AD during the reign of King Pharsamanes I, who, as an ally of Rome, sought to check the power of the neighboring Kingdom of Armenia by seizing the Armenian territory of Cholarzene (or Klarjet'i). He adds that the K'art'velians must have lost this foothold by 378 AD. Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, pp. 101-102, 447-448. King Vaxtang Gorgasali (447-522) also seems to have exerted control over part of this area as a new "sub-kingdom" that included Klarjet'i (Cholarzene), Odzrze, and part of Cunda. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 462-464. See also the account of his attacks on Egrisi as recorded in the Georgian chronicle, \textit{The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali} (ca. 800), in Robert Thomson, \textit{Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 172 [Hereafter \textit{RCH}]; and Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, pp. 362-364. As Rapp postulates, the impact of Vaxtang's campaigns and presence in Egrisi might well have given rise to "the K'art'velian notion that Ap`xazet`i [Egrisi] was an integral part of K'art'li" from the time of Vaxtang, but historically we know he did not actually rule Egrisi. Rapp, \textit{IHC}, pp. 408, fn. 87 (quote), 427-428, 450, fn. 239.

\(^{51}\) I use the term "Great Tradition" in the sense imparted by Robert Redfield in his \textit{The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), originally published in Sweden in 1956; see in particular pp. 40-47. In the K'art'velian context, I use the term to refer to the
historical trajectories of Western and Eastern Georgia became harnessed to a common imperial enterprise in the eleventh century, they did not meld into a single, monolithic Georgian nation or land but continued to exist as separate realms, each in turn divided into even smaller dynastic territories. Despite the genuine aspirations entertained by various late-medieval and early-modern kings to re-unite the two principal domains (Svimon I, Solomon I, T'eimuraz II, and Erekle II, for example) and even the feigned attempts (King Arch'ıl II), after the official dissolution of the Kingdom of Sak'art'velo in 1491, Western Georgia remained under Ottoman suzerainty for three centuries more or less up to the era of Russian rule in the nineteenth century.52

Once disentangled from the K'art'velian historical tradition and placed more squarely in the shadow of various Anatolian imperial enterprises beginning with the Byzantines, the history of Western Georgia reveals certain peculiarities in its frontier location. In turn, these features bring into focus the unique position of Guria within Western Georgia. Thus, for instance, as compared to Armenia and K'art'lı, the forested

unification of the K'art'velian Church and the Church in Egrisi, the spread of the K'art'velian language, laws (represented by the law code of Giorgi V, for example), and calendrical system (K'orikon), and the administrative structure and terminology elaborated in its early forms by Ivane Javaishvili in his Gosudarstvenyi stroi drevnei Gruzii i drevnei Armenii. D.M. Lang, "Georgia in the Reign of Giorgi the Brilliant (1314-1346)," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, vol. XVII (1955): 81-82. See also, Zakony Vaxtanga VI, D.L. Purce'ladze, ed. & trans. (T'bilisi: Mec'niereba, 1980): 6-7. In keeping with the cosmopolitan nature of Georgian-Caucasian society, Purce'ladze notes that King Vaxtang VI's law code (compiled 1707-1709) is actually an amalgamation of various law codes including that of Giorgi V, the laws of Beki I and Agbugi from Samc'xe (late-thirteenth and late-fourteenth centuries), Byzantine, and Armenian laws, among others (pp. 14-15). On the development of the K'orikon, see Rapp, IHC, pp. 500-504; and B. Martin-Hisard, "L'aristocratie géorgienne et son passé: Tradition épique et références bibliques (VIIe-XIe siècles)," BK, vol. XLII (1984): 24-25.

52 Svimon I ruled K'art'lı 1556-1559 and again 1578-1600. Solomon I ruled Imeret'i from 1752-1784; T'eimuraz II ruled Kaxet'i 1709-1715 and K'art'lı 1744-1762; and his son, Erekle II, was King of Kaxet'i 1744-1762 and of a united Kaxet'i-K'art'lı from 1762-1798. Arch'ıl II ruled Imeret'i from 1661-1663 and Kaxet'i, 1664-1675. For colorful sketches of these kings, see Allen, History of the Georgian People, pp. 156-160, 174, 177-178, 191-205. The dates of their reigns come from Mzia Surguladze, Bagrationi 'a samep'o saxli (T'bilisi: Kandeli, 1995): 52-55, 61-62.
lands of Western Georgia remained relatively free from foreign invasion.\(^5\) Not only did the region have less geo-political significance than the other two territories but a strong tradition of piracy and banditry and a heavy infestation of malaria on the coast mitigated against imperial encroachment.\(^4\) In effect, rather than promote the creation of an

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enduring feudal kingship, these factors supported the autonomy of the most prominent dynastic houses against unification on the scale that occurred in K`art`li. Indeed, if Armenia lay conspicuously exposed in eastern Anatolia along the path of imperial invaders to the detriment and eventual destruction of the institution of kingship, K`art`li was sufficiently distant from that path to nurture several royal lines which under the Bagratids gave kingship its greatest longevity and expression as the most brilliant feudal kingdom in much of the Near East. 55 Egrisit-Ap`xazet`i or Western Georgia was even more removed from direct military routes and thus intervention and was less a fruit of contention than K`art`li, and rather than spawning a strong, centralized kingdom, this insularity strengthened the individual dynastic houses against the aspirations of K`art`velian, Kaxet`ian, or Imeret`ian kings. Insularity did not mean isolation, however.

Allen, “The March-Lands of Georgia,” pp. 138-141, 147; J.B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1958): 79. Braund, Tsetskhladze, Berdzenishvili, Javaxishvili, and Janashia all stress the connection between piracy and the rise of the slave trade that commenced perhaps as early as the fifth century BC, after the establishment of Greek colonies in Colchis. On the prevalence of malaria along the coast, see Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 48-50, 54, 192; G.A. Lort`k`ip`andize (Lordkipanidze) and D. Braund, “Recent Work at Pityus,” in V.A. Maxfield and M.J. Dobson, eds., Roman Frontier Studies, 1989: Proceedings of the XVth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1991): 335; Isaacs, Limits of Empire, pp. 45-46. In this light, the Georgian chronicles acknowledge the ravages of disease in the lowlands of Egrisi when, in the ca. 800 text by Ps.-Juansher, he states that 35,000 Saracen or Arab invaders died of dysentery before the fortress of Anakop`i. Thomson, RCH, pp. 242-244. As we shall see, the prevalence of malaria along the coast continued to have a devastating impact on Russian garrisons throughout the nineteenth century.

55 Two indications of the destruction that Armenia suffered at the hands of foreign invaders were the size of the Armenian diaspora and the decline in the number of noble houses. See Robert Thomson, “The Origins of Caucasian Civilization: The Christian Component,” in Transcaucasia, R.G. Suny, ed., p. 37, and his article, “The Writing of History: The Development of the Armenian and Georgian Traditions,” in Il Caucas: Cerniera fra culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia, vol. 1, p. 494; Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 228-229, 253; as well as his essay, “Armenia and Georgia,” pp. 595-596; also Robert H. Hewsen, “Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography,” RÉArm, n. s., vol. 13 (1978-1979): 97. On the other hand, a poignant symbol of the brilliance of Sak`art`velo can be seen in the use of the term sharavandeci in Bagratid royal titularia. Ultimately of Persian origin, sharavandeci retained its pre-Bagratid meaning of “crown” or “rule,” and under the Bagratids also meant the “corona” of the sun as represented by a halo. The halos on border markers evidently were intended to transmit sharavandeci to demarcate the radiant and sacrosanct domains of the kingdom. Rapp contends that the solar imagery may well be traced to Byzantine influence. Thus, the term was borrowed from the Persians, associated with an image from Byzantium, and emboldened by Bagratid kings to exude an inner state of charisma and power reflecting the grandiose scale of the unprecedented Caucasian Kingdom of Sak`art`velo. In effect, sharavandeci articulated the syncretic genius of Caucasian peoples. Rapp, IHC, pp. 658-662.
insofar as the region remained intimately connected through trade and kinship ties with the imperial domains of northeast Anatolia. Accordingly, an enduring tension between the ambitions of these domains and local dynastic autonomy pervades the history of Western Georgia.

The separation of the Georgian lands and larger disaggregation of Caucasus brings to light the less obvious distinction between borderland and marchland. Neither Egrisi nor K’art’li was a marchland. Rather, the area where the two principal realms met near the Black Sea marked the northern boundary of the “Iberian” or Meszet’ian marchland.\footnote{Armenian: Mazk’ut’k’, also Gugark’; Latin: Moschia or Meschia; Greek: Moskhoi. Robert Hewsen elaborates the geographical boundaries of the four marches that surrounded Armenia, one of which was the Iberian or Meszet’ian March. R.H. Hewsen, “Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography,” pp. 85-86; also his “Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography IV: The Vitaxates of Arsacid Armenia. A Reexamination of the Territorial Aspects of the Institution (Part One),” RÉArm, n.s., vol. 21 (1988-1989): 271-319; and Part Two: “The Vitaxate of Moskhia: (The Iberian March),” RÉArm, n.s., vol. 22 (1990-1991): 147-183.}


The Iberian March defined a highly complex frontier zone between the lands of Armenia, K’art’li, Egrisi-Lazica, and Rome-Byzantium and Ottoman Turkey.\footnote{Strabo described the Moschian country as “divided into three parts: one part is held by the Colchians, another by the Iberians, and another by the Armenians.” Strabo, The Geography of Strabo, vol. V, 11.2.18 (pp. 214-215). For more on the theme of the cultural heterogeneity of this region, see Rapp, IHC, pp. 511, 634-635, 647.} W.E.D. Allen describes this region as “a confused mass of mountains and valleys, with a mixed population of Georgian, Armenian and Kurdish stock.” As a reflection of the region’s precipitous terrain, he notes that it remained virtually unexplored by European travellers until the mid-nineteenth
century. According to Robert Edwards' study of this region, its unifying features are its mountainous terrain, scant settlements, and isolation. A ring of mountains on the perimeter—extending from near Erzurum in the south, to the town of Speri in the west, up to Bat'umi and the Achara River (Acharis-cqali) in the north, and the town of Art'ani in the east—gave the marchland its coherence and reinforced its isolation. Hence, this zone acted as a buffer guarding Egrisi from Byzantium, Armenia, and the nomadic armies that often ravaged eastern and northeastern Anatolia. Despite its remoteness and precipitous terrain, however, this was a contested region of competing socio-cultural traditions and shifting suzerainties, and, from the fifth century, it became the principal site for asserting K'art'velian hegemony over Egrisi. Thus, this Iberian/Mesjet'ian

59 Allen, “The March-lands of Georgia,” pp. 137-138. Similarly, Anthony Bryer notes that the Trebizond-Tabriz trade route that ran through part of this marchland was “effectively closed to Western traffic from the late fifteenth century until 1830,” which explains in part the lack of travellers’ accounts for the region; there are only fifteen known accounts for the Pontos between 1472-1795. A. Bryer, “The Taurkocratie in the Pontos: Some Problems and Preliminary Conclusions,” 32. Reprinted in A. Bryer, The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980): 30-54.

60 Edwards, “The Vale of Kola,” pp. 124-127. As Anthony Bryer states it, “Frontiers are quiet places.” See his preface to The Georgian Chronicle: The Period of Giorgi Lasha, S. Qaukhchishvili (Qauxch/ishvili), ed., Katharine Vivian, trans. (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1991): III. The fact that three of the largest rivers in the Near East—the Mtkvari/Kura, Aras/Araxes, and Euphrates/Firat—have their headwaters in the ranges along the southern and eastern flanks of this territory testifies to its mountainous landscape. The region also possesses many mountain fortresses that were built to secure the passes. Finally, like Strabo and Vaxushiti, Edwards emphasizes that the boundaries in this region ran along mountains not rivers. Ibid. A British military report of the late-nineteenth century provides a rich description of this marchland zone. See “Report B: Military Notes on the Russo-Turkish Frontier in Asia and on South-West Trans-Caucasia,” reprinted in Caucasus Boundaries: Documents and Maps, 1802-1946, Archives Edition (Oxford: Hobbs the Printers of Southampton, 1996): 410-411. Though some dispute has occurred over the precise boundaries of these marchlands, the region includes much of Zemo K'art'li or Upper K'art'li, including Tao/Tayk', Klarjet'i (or Cholarzene with the city of Artanui), parts of Cunda (with Kola, Art'ani, and Javaxeti'), and parts of Odzrxe (Sam'xe and Achara). See Hewsen, Geography of Ananias, pp. 134-135; Hewsen, “The Vitaxates of Arscacid Armenia,” pt. 1, vol. 21 (1988-1989): 275; and pt. 2, vo. 22 (1990-1991): 147-152; Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 142, 446-447; Gugushvili, “Historical Division of Georgia,” pp. 66-67.

61 See my earlier comments, based on Toumanoff, about early K'art'velian incursions into this region. Toumanoff provides a detailed history of this region chronicling the shifting suzerainties over it in the early period. See his essay, “The Armeno-Georgian Marchlands,” part V, SCCH, pp. 437-498, in large part
Marchland has continuously held great strategic importance to the balance of power in the Near East, acting as a kind of fulcrum or springboard for the assertion of suzerainty over the more populated centers in the Georgian and Armenian lands and eastern Anatolia as a whole.\textsuperscript{62}

Guria emerged as an autonomous principality on the northern edge of this marchland joining K'art'li, Armenia, Byzantine and Ottoman-controlled Anatolia, and Egrisi itself. Ethnically it represented an amalgamation of the indigenous Megrel inhabitants with migrant K'art'velians. This pivotal location bred in the ruling Gurieli princes an aptitude for forging expedient political alliances that preserved their autonomy. This tradition of alliances fostered a political acumen that would persist well into the Russian period. But the tradition ran deeper than the stratum of princely families, embracing the gentry nobles and serfs as well. Far from living in an isolated, autarkic world as one could claim more easily about peasants inhabiting the northern woods of Muscovite Russia, the serfs of Western Georgia and Guria lived in close proximity to neighboring powers and peoples. In response, they devised survival strategies that fostered a keen sense of local allegiance, honor, and latitude in a complex and intertwined social order.


\textsuperscript{62} Rapp notes, for instance, that in the tenth century the Byzantines "regarded the Georgian territory of Tao/Tayk' [which was a distinct duchy in the marchland] as an integral part of its eastern defense, for not only did it guard the northeastern Byzantine border but the area might also be used as a springboard for Byzantine offensives into Armenia and as a check upon the pretensions of the rising 'Georgian' kingdom." Basil II created the \textit{Theme of Iberia} out of part of this territory, but following the Battle of Manzikert (Malazgert) in 1071, the Georgians gained control over the \textit{theme}. \textit{IHC}, pp. 546, 545-552. Nonetheless, as Edwards points out, the Turkic Seljuq invaders who prevailed at Manzikert ultimately prevented the absorption of Tao/Tayk' by the Georgian kings and, in fact, initiated a process of Turkification in the region that eventually led to the erosion of the cultural links "between the Georgians of the marches and their counterparts to the north...." Edwards, "The Vale of Kola: A Final Preliminary Report," pp. 136-141. In more recent times, once the Russians established their presence in the Georgian lands, a century-long struggle ensued between them and the Ottomans over control of this most strategic region. The Russians ended up acquiring these marchlands as a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 but again lost them with the collapse of the empire.
The Western Orientation of Egrisi-Ap’xazet’i-Imeret’i

Within the tri-partite rivalry for hegemony over Caucasia, the unitive formations in Western Georgia retained a western orientation. Western Georgia often fell within the cultural and political sphere of Greece, Rome-Byzantium, and Ottoman Turkey, and its proximity to these powers was enhanced by the Black Sea which acted as a thoroughfare for trade and the transport of troops.63 We see this theme articulated throughout the history of the region and especially during the periods when Colchis, Lazica, Ap’xazet’i, and Imeret’i assumed prominence as unitive formations asserting suzerainty over various neighboring dynastic houses.

Already the early Kingdom of Colchis exemplified the dependence of Western Georgian lands on larger powers to the southwest, in this case the Hellenistic Empire.64 For Colchis, however, this dependence on Greece appears to have been limited more to trade than to any kind of political control.65 Indeed, the presence of Greek colonies did not mean Greek hegemony, and though the question remains of how centralized a polity Colchis was and what role the Greeks played, if any, in its administration, it seems probable that Colchis was a local union of tribes ruled by some kind of super-dynast, as construed in Toumanoff’s terms.66 At the same time, the long process of colonization of

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64 It is possible that an even earlier unitive formation existed in this region known as Aea to which Colchis became a successor polity in the eighth century BC. W.E.D. Allen, "Ex Ponto, V. Heniochi-Aea-Hayasa," BK nos. 34-35 (1960): 80; and Toumanoff, SCCH, p. 58, fn. 57; G.A. Melik’ishvili, "Kolkhida v VI-IV vv do n.e.,” in Ocherki istorii Gruzii, vol. 1, p. 231; Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, p. 278.


66 Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 68-69; Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 91, 154. Strabo’s (ca. 64 BC-AD 25) famous description of the diversity of local tribes supports the notion of the dynastic foundation of the
the eastern littoral by the Greeks is best characterized, in the words of David Braund, as a process of “cultural osmosis,” a concept that plays down the role of conflict in imposing Greek lifeways and products on the indigenous peoples and emphasizes the sustained interaction between local inhabitants and foreign colonizers in quotidienn life. Thus, in this earliest manifestation of western influence on Colchis, it seems safe to assert that the Greek presence facilitated the economic integration of the coastal settlements with sites in the hinterland and intimately linked Colchis with the larger world of Greek trade.

Eventually, Colchis was incorporated into the Pontic Kingdom of Mithridates IV Eupator (131-63 BC) and then the Roman Empire. Yet during this period of several centuries when the region was ostensibly controlled by Rome, local rulers retained their authority, and the aristocratic class of dynasts that had emerged during the Hellenistic period remained unaffected by changes on the “super-dynastic level.”


67 Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 95, 106, 114-118; also pp. 76-77 and 79-80. As he applies the concept to burial sites at Pitchvnari in northwest Colchis, “In modern treatments of Greek colonization cultural osmosis like that visible at Pitchvnari is regularly said to have created either ‘Hellenized barbarians’ or ‘barbarized Hellenes,’ but neither formulation is adequate, for each apportionment a temporal and cultural priority to one of the elements: the burials at Pitchvnari are at once both Colchian and Greek” (pp. 116-117).

68 Sh. A. Mesxia (Meskhiia), Goroda i gorodskoi stroi feodal’noi Gruzii, XVII-XVIII vv. (T’bilisi: Izd-vo Tbilisskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1959): 12; Braund, ibid., pp. 95-121.

69 Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 85, 254; Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 171-180.
The Kingdom of Lazica presents a more dramatic example of the influence of the Hellenistic world on Western Georgia. The rise of Lazica occurred in tandem with the foundation of Constantinople and the shift eastward of the center of gravity of the Roman Empire. The founding of Constantinople made Colchis-Lazica more important as a strategic frontier zone for the Roman emperors who expanded their garrisons in the area as tensions with Persia grew. Lazica’s dependence on Byzantium was mutually beneficial insofar as the rulers in Constantinople relied on local forces to guard the Caucasian mountain passes and the northeastern frontier of the Empire, while a small number of Roman garrisons along the coast provided an imperial presence to discourage such incursions. One sign of the vassal status of Lazica was the fact that the Byzantine emperors confirmed the Lazic kings as rulers in the fifth and sixth centuries, and during the period of Persian suzerainty (470-522), the Persian Shahanshahs did the same.

Trade ties grew as well. Lazica was a source of slaves, honey, and fleeces and in return received salt, wheat, and luxury items. Also indicative was the practice, particularly in

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70 Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, p. 275. This is not the place to elaborate the changing nature of the relationship between Lazica and Byzantium. Still, to show the tenuous nature of Byzantium’s suzerainty over the region, one need only point out that the Roman-Byzantine presence was generally small, largely confined to the coast, and it decreased significantly from the time of Arrian’s visit in the second century (before the emergence of Lazica) to the end of the fourth when Pausanias stated that Colchis lay outside the Byzantine Empire and lacked any Roman garrisons. At this time, Braund asserts, “Withdrawal had been made possible by the creation of a stable Lazian empire, sufficiently under Byzantine control to obviate the need for such garrisons (p. 276).” Only in the fifth and sixth centuries, when tensions with the Sasanids of Persia escalated, did Byzantine forces increase along the Black Sea littoral and even penetrate the hinterland at Scanda and Sarapanis (Shorapani) in eastern Lazica (present-day Imereti). Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*, pp. 178-201, 270-275, 291-292; Isaacs, *Limits of Empire*, pp. 46, 229-230, 265-266; and N. Lomouri, “Zapadnaia Gruziiia-Egrisi (Lazika) v IV-V vv.,” in *Ocherki istorii Gruzii*, vol. II (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1988): 117.


the sixth century, of sending children of the Lazic royal family to Byzantium for their education. These acts of "cultural osmosis" promoted the intermarriage of Lazian noble families with their Byzantine counterparts. Even more significant was the spread of Greek as the official language of government, of church services, trade and social elites. A final indicator of the immense influence of Byzantium on Lazica was the spread of Christianity, which rendered Lazica "very much a Christian empire." Equally significant, the fact that the Church in Egrisi remained under the auspices of the


74 Braund, ibid., p. 286.

75 Lomouri, "Zapadnaia Gruziia-Egrisi (Lazika)," p. 134.

76 Braund, ibid., p. 281. While the Christianization of Western Georgia during the period of Lazica is a crucial event in the history of the region, it lies beyond the focus of this study. Nonetheless, some brief remarks are warranted to highlight the dynamic quality of this borderland zone lying in the shadow of powers to the west. Some scholars have pointed to the presence at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 of three bishops from regions on the fringes of Lazica as evidence for early conversions in the region, or, at least for the possible influence of Christian beliefs on some of the local population. N. Lomouri, "The History of the Kingdom of Egrissi," p. 215; M. Tarchnishvili, "Sources arméno-géorgienne de l'histoire ancienne de l'église de Géorgie," Le Muséon 60:1-2 (1947): 23. Some archaeological evidence from burial sites near Pityus and even in the hinterland at Sairxe (in present-day Imereti) dating to the fourth century suggest Christian influence in burial practices. Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, p. 264. More telling was the adoption of Christianity by the Lazic King, Gubazes I, who visited Constantinople in the mid-fifth century. Ibid., pp. 271-273. Evidently, during the period of Persian rule following Gubazes, the Lazic kings abandoned Christianity in favor of Zoroastrianism and only adopted Christianity again after King Tzathus (Ztathius) I's proclamation of a new alliance with Byzantium and his conversion to Christianity in 522. See the account of this conversion in Theophanes Confessor, The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813, Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 257. These episodes suggest that Christianity had a clear influence on the region in the fifth century, but they also underscore the point that the Lazic kings converted to or shunned Christianity as a manifestation of their political allegiances and in recognition of the "liminality of Lazica," suspended as it was in a precarious albeit pivotal position between Persia and Byzantium. Braund, ibid., pp. 271, 281-282; and Toumanoff, SCCH, p. 370. Similarly, the reluctance of some Lazic kings to convert in the face of Christian influence along the coast can be seen as an argument for their intention to preserve their autonomy against an encroaching Byzantium. Berdzenishvili, et al., pp. 116-117. Thus, we can conclude with other scholars that the more general Christianization of Egrisi probably occurred as early as the late fourth and primarily in the fifth century as a slow process. Lomouri, "Zapadnaia Gruzia-Egrisi (Lazica)," pp. 137-138; Toumanoff, "Christian Caucasus between Byzantium and Iran," p. 167, fn. 254.
Byzantine Church until the ninth-tenth century, when it fell under the K'art'velian Church, reflects both the prior independence of Egrisi-Lazica from K'art'li as well as the predominant influence of Byzantium. Lazica disappears from the historical record not long after the conclusion of peace ending the Lazic Wars in 561, at which time the kingdom divided along dynastic lines into multiple polities, albeit still under nominal Byzantine control.

We see this pattern of dependence repeated in the formation of the Kingdom of Ap'xazet'i following the Lazic wars of the mid-sixth century and the Arab conquest of much of Caucasia in the seventh-eighth centuries. Interestingly, as suggested by the northern location of Ap'xazet'i within the lands of Western Georgia, the rise of Ap'xazet'i marked a shift in Western Georgia's orientation from Byzantium to the


79 Western Georgia did not suffer the invasion of the Arabs or Saracens in the seventh century. The only attempt of the Arabs to attack Egrisi came nearly a century after they conquered the lands of Eastern Georgia (645), when Marwan ibn Muhammad invaded Egrisi in 736 but quickly withdrew. Ps.-Juansher provides an account of this campaign in his continuation of The Life of Vaxtang in K'art'lis c'xvreba, Thomson, RCH, pp. 241-247; also A.A. Bogveradze, "Rannefeodal'nye gruzinskii goсударства в VI-VIII vv.," in Ocherki istorii Grazi, vol. II, pp. 177-178. On the limitations of Arab rule in Egrisi, B. Martin-Hisard, "La domination byzantine sur le littoral du Pont Euxin," pp. 144-146; and her "Les Arabes en Géorgie occidentale au VIIIe s.," pp. 109-110; Toumanoff, "Christian Caucasia between Byzantium and Iran," p. 158; and M. Lort'k'ip'anidze (Lordkipanidze), Matiane kartlisa, pp. 6-7.
Khazars of northern Caucasus. Whereas Lazica (Egrisi) grew up under the shadow of Byzantium, the Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i remained culturally, and to an extent, politically dependent on Byzantium at the same time that Ap’xaz kings sought Khazar aid to establish and preserve the autonomy of their kingdom against Byzantine incursions. Thus, initially Byzantine support of the Anch’abadze clan enabled this family to consolidate its dynastic rule as hereditary erist’avis or dukes over Ap’xazet’i. But once the Byzantine presence weakened in the face of the Arab conquest of K’art’li and eastern Anatolia, Leon II (766/67-810/11) transferred the allegiance of his fledgling kingdom to the Khazars. With nominal Byzantine support Leon II extended his rule over Egrisi in the 780s, but then with Khazar support he rejected the Byzantine claims to his territory and proclaimed himself king in the 790s. The Byzantines did not, however, relinquish their

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81 Thus, the Chronicle [Book] of K’art’li states: “When the Greeks grew feeble, the erist’avi of the Ap’xaz by the name of Leon…rebelled against them. This second Leon was the offspring of the daughter of the king of the Xazars. With their support he rebelled against the Greeks, seized Ap’xazet’i and Egrisi as far as Lixi [the Surami mountains], and took the title of king of the Ap’xaz.” Thomson, RCH, p. 258. A. Bogveradze suggests that the unification of Ap’xazet’i and Egrisi occurred not later than the 770s with Byzantine support as a means of countering Arab power in K’art’li. A. Bogveradze, “Ranfesodal’nye gruzinskie gosudarstva v VI-VIII vv.,” Ocherki istorii Gruzii, vol. 2, p. 184; Toumanoff, SCCH, p. 401, n. 45; Peter Golden, “The Turkic Peoples and Caucasian,” pp. 51-52; M. Lordkipanidze, “Voznikovenie novykh feodal’nykh gosudarstv,” Ocherki istorii Gruzii, vol. 2, pp. 281-282. Lort’k’ip’anidze notes that some dispute remains over the southern extent of the new Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i and whether it encompassed all the lands around Trapezus/Trebizon; she claims that it extended to the Choroxi gorge (p. 283, n. 168). At the same time, it should be pointed out that the migration of K’art’velians and Armenians to the Mosxian-Iberian Marchland at this time fostered the rise of the Bagratids in this buffer zone, thereby reinforcing the security of the rulers of Ap’xazet’i from Byzantine intervention. Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 201-204; 407-416.
hold on the littoral and continued to exercise a strong cultural and even political influence over the region after the Ap’xaz defection to the Khazars.82

Indeed, it would be misleading to exaggerate the independence enjoyed by these new sovereigns, and at best we can describe it as yet another manifestation of a tenuous autonomy similar in latitude to that exercised by the Lazic kings. Thus, although Leon II successfully revolted against Byzantium and gained Byzantine recognition of his de facto independence, Leon’s successors still acknowledged the suzerainty of the Empire.83 The Byzantines still influenced politics in the realm by supporting various candidates to the throne and by supplying troops when needed.84 As seen, the Byzantines exerted a predominant influence in ecclesiastical affairs in Western Georgia at least until the mid-ninth and probably the tenth century. Greek inscriptions and the Greek names of many of the kings in Ap’xazeti, mentioned in The Divan of the Kings, attest the strong influence of Byzantine culture. Indeed, it is unclear whether the Ap’xaz kings even spoke K’art’velian or used the written language at this time. It is plausible that Georgian did not become widely known in the united kingdom of Ap’xazeti until the ninth-tenth centuries, at which time, the kat’alikos of Ap’xazeti became subordinate to the kat’alikos of Mc’zet’a in K’art’li.85 Thus, the power of Byzantine cultural influence over political

82 In the mid-ninth century the Byzantines undertook three sea-borne campaigns against Ap’xazeti, evidently suffering heavy losses. Having lost their political hegemony in the course of the ninth century, they did not formally acknowledge this loss, as they refused to call any of the Ap’xaz sovereigns “kings” and settled on “Exusiai”. M. Lort’k’ip’anidze (Lordkipanidze), “Vozniknovenie novykh feodal’nykh gosudarstv,” pp. 280-281, 296-297; Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 105-106.

83 Toumanoff, “Chronology of the Kings of Abasgia,” p. 75, fn. 5.

84 The Byzantines extended this kind of support to Bagrat I (887-899), who took refuge in Constantinople and gathered troops to oust his half-brother. The Chronicle [Book] of K’art’li, Thomson, RCH, pp. 263-265.

85 Rapp, IHC, pp. 617-618; E. T’aqashvili (Takaichvili), “Les sources des notices du Patriarche de Jérusalem Dosithée sur les rois d’Aphkhazie,” pp. 364-365. While Mariam Lort’k’ip’anidze argues that the spread of Georgian began in the ninth century, as attested by epigraphic evidence, the Church in Ap’xazeti did not supplant Greek with Georgian until the creation of the Sees of Ch’qondidi, Mok’wi, and
and ecclesiastical affairs is demonstrated by the fact that Georgian replaced Greek in official spheres of government and religious practice well after it took root among the predominantly Chan-Laz-Megrel and Ap’xaz indigenous population.

Ap’xazet’i’s independence proved to be short-lived insofar as the kings of Ap’xazet’i eventually fell under the overlordship of the newly ascendant Bagratid rulers of K’art’li. K’art’li’s suzerainty over Western Georgia marked the first instance of the sustained political control of the region by an eastern power. As it turned out, the dramatic rise of the K’art’velian branch of the Bagratids after 772 in the marchlands of Samc’xe proved to be the decisive event linking the Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i and the revived Kingdom of K’art’li in a common imperial enterprise culminating in the formation of the unified Kingdom of Sak’art’velo in the eleventh century. The process of unification of the two principal realms was a highly complex affair that involved as much conflict between the dynastic rulers of rival Georgian polities as it did alliances to curtail the power of the Arabs in K’art’li and that of the newly reconstituted Armenian Bagratid (Bagratuni) Monarchy. Indeed, the span of two centuries following the rise of

Gudava in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. M. Lor’t’k’ip’anidze (Lordkipanidze), Essays on Georgian History, pp. 193-194. It should be borne in mind that the predominant ethnic group of Western Georgia were the Laz-Megrels, who may be classified linguistically as a constituent group of the “Georgian” peoples but who nonetheless spoke a language that is largely unintelligible to the inhabitants of K’art’li-Kaxet’i. I return to this point in the discussion of Guria.

At the same time, the rise of the Bagratids owed much to the support given by the Byzantines. By the reign of Davit’ II (“Aghmashenebeli,” or the “Re-builder,” 1089-1125), Georgian rulers may still have been beholden to Byzantium for their model of governance, but they shunned Byzantine influence in political and ecclesiastical affairs by ceasing to use Byzantine titles and claiming that the Georgian Church was a patriarchate and autocephalous as well. Late in Queen T’amar’s day (1184-1213), at a time when Constantinople had fallen to the Crusaders in 1204, from their Caucasian perch the Bagratids could claim preeminence over Byzantium in the Near East. Rapp, IHC, pp. 673, 686.

The heyday of the Fourth Armenian Monarchy lasted a hundred and fifty years from the late-ninth century up to the early-eleventh, after which it succumbed first to Basil II of Byzantium and then to the power of the Seljuqs. During this period, the Armenians sought to extend their control over much of the marchlands and even parts of Inner K’art’li up to Tp’ ilisi/T’bilisi. Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 354, 490; Anthony Bryer, Preface to The Georgian Chronicle: The Period of Giorgi Lasha , S. Qaukhchishvili, ed., Katharine Vivian, trans. (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1991): ix.
Ap’xazet’i was a period of assertive dynastic rule in Kaxet’i, in Inner K’art’li (where kingship had been in abeyance since the late sixth century and revived only in 888), and in Upper K’art’li where the Bagratids were installing themselves as a new dynasty in Tao-Klarjet’i. For a time in the ninth and tenth centuries, the rulers of Ap’xazet’i were the most powerful contenders for a unified realm, but by Davit’ II’s reign (1089-1125), under whom Tp’ilisi became the capital of the unified kingdom (1122), the lands of Ap’xazet’i became incorporated into Sak’art’velo as a collection of erist’av-ates. This pan-Caucasian imperial enterprise represented the clearest and most extensive example of a feudal system of governance prevailing over the dynastic.

This medieval kingdom began to unravel before the onslaught of the Mongol and Timurid armies that ravaged many of the Georgian lands during the reign of Queen Rusudan (1223-1245) at the end of the fourteenth century. The cosmopolitan practices of the Georgian kings themselves also contributed to the collapse of their pan-Caucasian empire. In his pivotal study of the dissolution of the Georgian kingdom, Toumanoff demonstrates how the implementation of the Byzantine practice of “collegial sovereignty” at the beginning of the fifteenth century fused with Sak’art’velo’s

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88 Toumanoff states of the power of the Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i: “During the following two centuries [from the 790s] the Kings of Abasgia were the most powerful of all the Georgian dynasts, including even the Bagratids who held great States in Upper Iberia and were enfeoffed of the office of Presiding Prince of Iberia (Eastern Georgia), and who outranked them at the Court of Constantinople.” Toumanoff, “Chronology of the Kings of Abasgia,” pp. 75-76; also his SCCH, pp. 416-417, fn. 37. The Chronicle [Book] of K’art’li makes clear Ap’xazet’i’s (or Abasgia to the Byzantines) predominance during these crucial two centuries of dynastic rivalry. Thomson, RCH, pp. 262-274. On the ascension of K’art’li over Ap’xazet’i, ibid, pp. 274-277; also Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty,” pp. 204-205. As a reflection of Ap’xazet’i’s enduring preeminence, Byzantine and Arabic sources often referred to the kings of Georgia as “Kings of Abasgia,” or “King of the Abxaz/Afxaz,” and in Bagratid initiatatio the title, “King of the Ap’xaz” occurred first. Rapp, IHC, pp. 569-577; Toumanoff, “Chronology of the Kings of Abasgia,” pp. 76-77. Once incorporated in K’art’li, Ap’xazet’i became divided into the erist’av-ates of Suanet’i, Racha with T’akueri, C’xumi, Arguet’i (or Imeret’i), and Odishi (or Samegrelo). Rapp, IHC, p. 585. Finally, in ecclesiastical affairs, the incorporation of the Church in Western Georgia had already begun prior to the dynastic unification of the two principal realms, but in the late-eleventh century, as a sign of the superior stature of the K’art’velian Church, the kat’alikos of K’art’li was raised to the rank of patriarch (patriark’i). Ibid., p. 635.
indigenous tradition of dynasticism to splinter the realm into three kingdoms — K’art’li, Kaxet’i, and Imeret’i — and five principalities, all in Western Georgia, including Ap’xazet’i, Samegrelo, Guria, Svanet’i, and the Saatabago of Same’xe. As a reflection of this division of the Georgian lands, in 1390 the Georgian Church split along the Surami mountains with the establishment of an independent kat’alikos in Bichvinta (or Pityus, now Pitsunda in present-day Ap’xazet’i), site of a sixth-century church constructed by the renowned Byzantine Emperor Justinian. In accordance with the political fragmentation of the realm, the fracture within the Church hierarchy grew in the fifteenth century as the Bishops of Shemok’medi (in Guria) and Bedia (Samegrelo) asserted their independence from the Kat’alikos of Ap’xazet’i, styling themselves Metropolitans and assuming control over the churches in Guria and Samegrelo. At the Council of 1490-1491, attended by the spiritual and temporal heads of the realm and

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89 C. Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty in Georgia,” pp. 169-220, especially pp. 216-219. During the extended period of invasions by the Mongols and Timurids, the Georgian lands were periodically unified, as during much of the fourteenth century during the reigns of Giorgi V (“Brcqinvale,” or “the Brilliant,” [1314-1346]), Davit’ III (1346-1360), and Bagrat V (1360-1393), and, in the fifteenth century, under King Aleksandre I (1412-1442). Under Constantine II, the final division of the realm occurred in 1489, when the Kingdom of Imeret’i split from K’art’li. Toumanoff notes that by the end of the fourteenth century, King Alexander I (1387-1389) and his two sons appear to have ruled Imeret’i as independent monarchs, though this independence was short-lived. Ibid., pp. 181-182. The split that occurred through the latter half of the fifteenth century reinforced the perennial division between Eastern and Western Georgia. See also A. Manvelichvili, Histoire de Géorgie (Paris: Nouvelles éditions de la Toison d’Or, 1951): 241-247, 254-269; and A. Gugushvili, “The Chronological-Genealogical Table of the Kings of Georgia,” pp. 125-129. It should be emphasized that this division of the realm in the fifteenth century occurred under the pressure of outside incursions by mountain tribes, the Aqqoyunlu nomadic confederation centered in Azerbaijan, of the rulers of Persia, and of the Ottomans.

convened by the King of K'art'li, Constantine II (1478-1505), the division into kingdoms and principalities was ratified ex post facto, the independence of the five principalities having already been attained between 1454 and 1465. 91 Rent by internal division, the Georgian lands were hardly prepared for the cataclysmic clash in the sixteenth century between the Ottomans and Safavids that resulted in the division of those lands into spheres of influence, the Ottomans claiming the lands of Western Georgia and the Safavid Persians the eastern territories. 92 Hence, from the mid-fifteenth century up to the Russian annexation of K'art'li-Kaxet' i in 1801, Western Georgia remained politically separate from Eastern Georgia, divided into numerous polities, and under the shadow of the Ottoman Empire centered in the west in Constantinople/Istanbul. 93

With the exception of the period of unification with K'art'li-Kaxet' i, this historical exposition of Western Georgia reveals a persistent trend of ever-increasing

91 Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty,” pp. 215-219. Four of the five principalities (Same' xe was the exception) effectively obtained their independence following the Battle of Ch'ixori in 1462 between the King of K'art'li, Giorgi VIII, and the King of Imereti, Bagrat VI, to whom these principalities were allied; Same' xe won its independence from K'art'li shortly thereafter in 1465. Allen, History of the Georgian Peoples, pp. 135-140; Toumanoff, Ibid., pp. 186-187.

92 Toumanoff, Ibid., p. 169. Allen expresses this view thus: “Turkey and Persia were never for long strong at the same time; their politics were perpetually opposed; and even when Georgia lay in weak and divided little royalties, the Sultan and the Shah each sought, often with anxiety, the alliance of the different Bagratid kings. And so, if Georgian unity had been maintained during the fifteenth century, it is possible that the kings of Tiflis [Tp'ilisi/T'bilisi], by playing a policy between the two Muslim empires, might have upheld continuously the unity and the independence of the Kingdom.” History of the Georgian People, p. 143.

93 In the ensuing two centuries up to the end of Safavid rule in the early eighteenth century, the Ottomans undertook seven campaigns against the Persians for control of southern Caucasia. By the mid-sixteenth century, by the Peace of Amasi (or Amasya, 1555), they reached a tenuous accord with the Safavids that divided the Georgian lands once again along the Surami mountains, with the Saatabago of Same' xe split between Persian and Ottoman suzerainty. This arrangement was confirmed again in 1639. Muriel Atkin, “Russian Expansion in the Caucasus to 1813,” in Russian Colonial Expansion to 1917, Michael Rywkin, ed. (New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988): 141; J. Purgstall-Hammer, Histoire de L'Empire Ottoman, depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours, M. Dochez, trans. from German, vol. II (Paris: Béthune et Plon, 1844): chaps. XXXI & XLVIII; M.F. Kirzioglu, Osmanlilar' in Kafkas-elleri ni fehti (1451-1590) (Ankara: Türk tarih kurumu basimevi, 1993): 241-249; D.M. Lang, The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, p. 14.
intervention and even control exerted by successive imperial enterprises in Anatolia. In the case of Colchis, Lazica, and Ap’xazet’i, the kings of these unitive formations managed to extend their nominal rule over all territories in the region only with the patronage of an imperial power to their west. Crucial to this process of unification was the fact that these imperial powers did not or could not maintain a strong presence in the region but opted to support a particular dynast as a mutually beneficial strategy of promoting kingship in return for guarding their northeastern flank. In time, these indigenous kingdoms dissolved into numerous dynastic territories which represented the historical foundation for the region’s political life thereafter. The ascendancy of the Bagratids in Tao-Klarjet’i, K’art’li, and Ap’xazet’i marked the high point of the K’art’velization in the medieval period of the predominantly Laz-Megrel peoples in Western Georgia. But even in the guise of the western erist’av-ates of Sak’art’velo, the dynastic houses remained intact. As we shall see, Guria arose in the midst of this process of uniting Eastern and Western Georgia. Finally, the Ottomans hastened the collapse of Sak’art’velo and subsequently prevented the unification of the Western Georgian lands around the Kingdom of Imeret’i precisely because they exerted a more direct and sustained political influence in the region than their imperial predecessors. The Ottoman period demonstrates most clearly how adept the other dynastic houses like that of Guria had become in forging political alliances, without regard to religious faith or ethnic kinship, in order to preserve their precious autonomy. Because their principality directly bordered the Ottoman Empire, the Gurielis demonstrated this skill with great determination.

III. The Emergence of Guria as a Frontier Principality in the Borderland

The First Appearance of Guria
In examining the history of Guria, one is struck by the apparent contradiction between the antiquity of the land and the apparent newness of its indigenous architectural monuments. On the one hand, scholars as far back as Dubois de Montpéreux noted that the region that came to be Guria contained ancient ruins from the days of Greek colonization and later Roman-Byzantine suzerainty over Lazica. This region was certainly a constituent domain of the kingdoms of Colchis and Lazica and contained ruins attesting the fact. The most prominent of these sites is the city of Petra, built by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, some fifteen miles north of Bat’umi on the location of the present-day village of C’ixis-dziri. Nonetheless, despite the existence of these sites, it seems this area was little populated through the Roman period. Procopius states that Justinian founded Petra in a part of Lazica “which was altogether uninhabited.”

In one of the most extensive studies of those monuments, Dmitri Bak’radze (1827-1890) commented on their newness: “Indeed, the history of Guria cannot be commended for its antiquity: there are no ancient architectural monuments; the oldest of its churches is not older than the fourteenth century, and moreover, they are all

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94 Thus, several authors mention the existence of a Roman-style _villa rustica_ (fourth-fifth century AD), boasting a mosaic floor in its bath building. It has been excavated near the village of Shuxuti in the Lanch’xut’i district of Guria. N. Lomouri, “History of the Kingdom of Egrissi,” p. 215; Braund, _Georgia in Antiquity_, p. 278; and G.A. Lomtadzé, “Kul’tura i byt v VI-X vv. po arkeologicheskim materialam,” in _Ocherki istorii Gruzii_, vol. II, p. 461. Similarly, preliminary excavations have occurred at the sixth-century site of Vashnari, lying about ten miles inland and above the flood-plain of the Natanebi River (or the River Isis of Arrian), and this work seems to promise the existence of a significant Roman settlement. Braund, _ibid._, p. 294. One might add Bat’umi or Bathys to this list for its Greek and Roman settlements like Losorium, since at one time Bat’umi was considered a part of Guria. _Ibid._, p. 295.

95 Montpéreux mistakenly took the inland site of Vashnari for the famed Petra when he visited Guria in 1833. Following Brosset, Bak’radze argued against this conclusion. More recent excavations have revealed that Petra was built at a strategic point along the coast called C’ixis-dziri today, lying where coastal mountains push the road from Bat’umi close to the sea before it reaches the broad plain of the Phasis/Rioni to the north. Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux, _Voyage autour du Caucase_, vol. III, (1839): 86-94; D. Bak’radze, _Arkheologicheskoe putešestvie_, pp. 275-277; and Braund, _ibid._, pp. 290-291, 294, 309.

striking for the simplicity of their style...."\(^{97}\) When compared to neighboring Mesxet’i (Sanc’xe or Zemo K’art’li) which possesses some of the oldest churches in the Georgian lands bearing inscriptions from the ninth century, Guria appears as a much younger Georgian domain.\(^{98}\) On the other hand, the antiquity of Guria’s status as a Georgian territory is attested by the first references to the region in one of the earliest Georgian chronicles dating to ca. 800. How are we to account for this discrepancy between the antiquity of Guria’s existence in the K’art’velian historical record and its more recent presence attested by its monuments and manuscripts?

This question is not intended to elicit a comprehensive history of Guria but to evoke the peripheral status of this territory within the larger borderland region of Western Georgia and the Georgian lands as a whole. The earliest references to the territory suggest that Guria occupied a peripheral position in the new Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i and seems to have remained in the same position during the period of unification. Two of the earliest texts of the Georgian historical tradition are of special importance for our discussion of Guria. They were composed at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century (before 813), the time when the Bagratids began establishing themselves in their new K’art’velian domains centered in Mesxet’i. Hence, these two works predated the establishment of the Bagratids as the rulers of K’art’li and so should be considered pre-Bagratid historical works. Still, given that kingship remained in abeyance in K’art’li, it is not surprising that these works articulated a tension between Eastern and Western Georgia (or between K’art’li and Egrisi) and expressed a growing aspiration for a unified

\(^{97}\) D. Bak’radze, Arkheologichesko prudshestvie, p. xvii.

\(^{98}\) On the antiquity of Mesxet’i’s churches, see Bak’radze, Arkheologichesko prudshestvie, pp. xiii-xiv; also W.E.D. Allen, “The March-Lands of Georgia,” pp. 135-156.
Georgian kingdom centered around K’art’li.\textsuperscript{99} That is, both works fashioned quasi-historical arguments to assert the primacy of K’art’li as the core domain over all other Georgian lands, most notably Egrisi-Ap’xazet’i.

The first work is the anonymous \textit{Life of the Kings} and the second is known as the “continuation” of \textit{The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali} written by “Pseudo”-Juansher.\textsuperscript{100} The \textit{Life of the Kings} provides the foundational myth of the K’art’velians of Eastern Georgia and of the Megrels of Western Georgia.\textsuperscript{101} It is important for our discussion because it articulates the author’s vision of the boundaries between Eastern and Western Georgia and, more precisely, locates their conjunction in a confused manner south of the Rioni River in the area that is designated “Guria” by the contemporary author of the continuation of \textit{The Life of Vaxtang}. This second text contains the first extant references to Guria, Sak’art’velo, and the Bagratids, all falling in close proximity to one another in the final pages of the text.

\textsuperscript{99} The dating of these works, which are among the constituent texts of the royal corpus, \textit{K’art’lis c’xovreba}, remains in dispute, with many scholars dating them to the eleventh century. Rapp elaborates the most extensive argument for considering these earliest works as “pre-Bagratid” compositions, stressing, among other points, that either they do not mention the Bagratids at all, or they convey no sense of the role that the Bagratids would come to play as the new ruling dynasty of a unified Georgian kingdom. Therefore, unlike works that were composed after the Bagratids revived kingship in K’art’li (in 888), these works were not written to glorify or promulgate the achievements of their rule. Rapp, \textit{IHC}, primarily the Introduction and Chapter One, and p. 506. Also, Toumanoff, “Medieval Georgian Historical Literature (VIIth-XVth Centuries)”; M. Tarchnishvili, “Sources arméno-géorgiennes de l’histoire de l’église de Géorgie,” \textit{LeM} 60:1-2 (1947): 29-50.

\textsuperscript{100} The appellation “continuation” is not part of the Georgian historical tradition as passed down in redactions of \textit{K’art’lis c’xovreba} but was applied by Toumanoff to this work after he determined that it was appended to \textit{The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali}. As regards the author of this text, I follow Rapp’s argument for a Ps.-Juansher and not for the Juansher mentioned in the work itself. Rapp, \textit{IHC}, pp. 15-16, 113-120. Thomson disagrees; he argues that the author is the same Juansher Juansheriani mentioned in the work. \textit{RCH}, p. 247, fn. 44. See also Toumanoff, “Iberia on the Eve of Bagratid Rule: An Enquiry into the Political History of Eastern Georgia between the VIIth and the IXth Century,” \textit{LeM} 65 (1952): 17-49, esp. 19-20.

\textsuperscript{101} For a description of this text, known in Georgian as \textit{C’xorebay k’art’veli’a mep’et’a}, see Rapp, \textit{IHC}, pp. 15, 55-111. Thomson provides a translation of the text, which he calls the \textit{History of the Kings of K’art’li}, in \textit{RCH}, pp. 2-84.
The Life of the Kings provides a narrative of the earliest period of history of the Georgian domains, from the mythological partition of the Caucasian lands to the Christianization of K'art'li by King Mihran/Mirian III (284-361 AD). In demarcating the boundaries between K'art'li and Egrisi, the author demonstrates a vague understanding, if not ignorance, of the territory south of the Rioni River down to Mesket'i. It appears as a terra incognita. Three times the author addresses the border between K'art'li and Egrisi, and in all three instances he either neglects to specify the southern boundary between the two realms, or he specifies conflicting boundaries. The first instance sets the precedent for the latter two and deserves attention because of its influence on later scholarship about Guria. It appears as part of the author's elaboration of the mythological origins of the Georgian peoples. According to this biblically-derived story, T'argamos (or Togarmah), who was the great-grandson of Noah through Japheth, distributed the lands of Caucasia to his eight most prominent sons. The first-born was Hay/Haos, the eponymous father of the Armenians, followed by K'art'los, the same for the K'art'velians, and finally, the eighth son Egros, who provided the name for the Megrels in Western Georgia. The author claims that T'argamos gave Egros “the lands at the bay of the sea [i.e., the Black Sea or Euxine], and he defined the boundary: from the east the small mountain which is now called Lixi [the Surami mountains]; from the west the sea; (from the north) the river of the Lesser Khazaret'î [Kuban River] where the summit of the Caucasus ends.”

It is curious that the author does not define the southern boundary of this appanage, which must be deduced from the alleged boundary of K'art'los's appanage: namely, where the Lixi (or Ghado) mountains run in a southwesterly direction to the Black Sea, near the city of Bathys (or Bat'umi). The author proclaims the longevity of this (ca. 800)

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102 Thomson, RCH, p. 5.

103 Ibid., p. 4, where the western boundary of K'art'los's patrimony is simply called the "Pontus sea." A little later, the author reiterates that K'art'los had a foothold on the Black Sea when he states that after
K'art'velian claim on the land reaching to the Black Sea by the statement that the mightiest of K'art'los's sons, Mcéxt'os, also controled the lands "from the Aragvi as far as the sea of Sper."\textsuperscript{104} The domain of Mcéxt'os originally coincided with both Inner K'art'li (or Shida K'art'li) and Upper K'art'li, or Mesxet'i (Zemo K'art'li).\textsuperscript{105} In turn, Odzxrros, one of the three mightiest sons of Mcéxt'os, received as his inheritance the western-most part of Mcéxt'os's domain, "from Tasis-kari as far as the sea of Sper, a rocky land."\textsuperscript{106} In this way, the inhabitants of Odzrxre are included among the K'art'velian tribes. Thus, one can construe this assertion that K'art'li bordered on the Black Sea from the time of its foundation as the first written K'art'velian claim to territories usually considered part of Egrisi (Colchis-Lazika).\textsuperscript{107} Of particular importance here is not just that the author asserts K'art'li's presence on the Black Sea, but that he does not delimit the actual boundary between K'art'velian territories and those of Egros or Egrisi. This same ambiguity attends his two later attempts to specify the boundaries of the eight erist'avates (or dukedoms) created by the semi-legendary King P'arnavaz of the third century BC.\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{footnote}
K'art'los established himself in Armazi at the center of K'art'li, "the whole of K'art'li was called K'art'li, from Xunan as far as the sea of Sper" (p. 9). Again, the "sea of Sper" refers to the Black Sea. Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, p. 322, fn. 76.
\end{footnote}

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{105} See A. Gugushvili, "Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia," pp. 66-67.

\textsuperscript{106} Thomson, \textit{RCH}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{107} Rapp, \textit{IHC}, p. 149, including fn. 37.

\textsuperscript{108} These two instances are somewhat different from the first in that the author does specify an actual southern boundary between Egrisi and K'art'li but the boundary is different in both cases. The confusion derives from the author's reference to the Egris or Egrisi River and the fact that two rivers went by this name—one possibly corresponding to the Inguri River, which today demarcates the boundary between Ap'xazet'i and Samegrelo in the north, and the other corresponding to the Eger Su in present-day Turkey in the south of Western Georgia. Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, p. 462, fn. 113; A. Gugushvili, "Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia," p. 57, fn. 3. In the two instances in question the author seems to refer to both rivers. The first apparently marks the southern boundary when he states: "Now [the land] below the Egris river remained to the Greeks, because the inhabitants of that region had not wished to rebel against
What seems clear from this discussion is that the author of the *Life of the Kings* held an unclear picture of these lands in his mind as he pushed K'art'li's borders to the sea.\(^{109}\) Given that Guria emerged as a principality that eventually encompassed Achara as well as the lowlands along the coast and farther north of the Acharan range, it is possible that he conceived of this region as split between the erist'avis of K'uju and Odzrxe. In any event, the author does not seem to know the name Guria that his contemporary, Ps.-Juansher, uses in his continuation of *The Life of Vaxtang* [*Gorgasali*]. On the other hand, his mention of Achara appears to be the first use of this designation in Georgian historical literature and may reflect a growing knowledge of the geography of these western domains as depicted by the K'art'li-centered author.\(^{110}\) Still, I would argue that the

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\(^{109}\) Bak'radze emphasizes that the chronicles in *K'art'lis c'xovreba* provide "no information whatsoever" about the Ch'uruk'-su or K'obulet'i region that comprised the lowlands along the coast and that eventually fell within the borders of Guria. *Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie*, p. 16; also Rapp, *IHC*, pp. 359, 399. On the lowland region of Kobulet'i falling within Guria, see A. Gugushvili, "Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia," p. 64.

\(^{110}\) It is unclear when the term Achara first came into use. It appears in the Armenian text, *The Geography of Ananias of Shirak*, which Hewsen dates to the seventh century (pp. 12-15).
demarcation of the erist' avates in the Life of the Kings does not account for or explicitly acknowledge the lowland area south of the Rioni River and north of the Acharan range, which constituted the core of Guria. The neglect of this region may in part derive from the aforementioned unhealthy climate and swampy terrain characterizing the flood-plain of the Rioni. As Procopius claims, given these harmful climatic conditions, it is quite possible that this lowland zone, especially to the south of the Rioni, including Lake Paleostomi down to K'obulet'i, was little inhabited in the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods.

And yet, at least part of this larger region, particularly the southern, mountainous section near Bat'umi that reaches to the sea, appears to have been of great importance to this author and his contemporaries. As noted above and reflected in the demarcation of boundaries in Life of the Kings, K'art'li did attempt at various times to expand to the Black Sea through the lands that were considered a part of Egrisi and Odzrxe. Indeed, as The Life of the Kings and a contemporary text, The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali indicate, from the vantage point of Egrisi, this southern frontier zone marked the principal site for the projection of K'art'velian power and influence into Egrisi, and Guria was born in this zone from this tension.

The name Guria first appears in the “continuation” of The Life of Vaxtang [Gorgasali], which provides terse accounts of the reigns of Vaxtang’s successors up through “King” (and Saint) Arch’il (reigned 736-786). The author’s temporal proximity to the history he recounts may explain his use of the term “Guria,” since it is probable that Guria emerged as a distinct territory only in the seventh-eighth centuries, or

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111 See footnote 51.

112 Thomson’s translation of The Life of Vaxtang appears in RCH, pp. 153-251, with the “continuation” comprising pp. 223-251. I have placed quotation marks around “king” as applied to Arch’il and to his brother Mir, because, in fact, neither ruled as kings but as “presiding princes.” Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 399-401.
in the wake of the Arab invasions of K’art’li beginning in the mid-seventeenth century.

Indeed, the three occasions when Ps.-Juansher mentions Guria all occur in his narrative of the Saracen invasion of Egrisi in 735/736 led by the infamous Murvan Qru (Marwan ibn Muhammad) and the subsequent reign of Arch’il. The author gives no indication of the meaning or origin of the word Guria, and subsequent references in the chronicles also do not address this issue, leaving it to modern scholars to surmise the meaning of the term.

The author uses the term Guria for the first time in extant Georgian historical sources when he says Murvan and his troops, fleeing a series of natural disasters that thwarted

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113 Interestingly, D. Bak’radze and A. Tsqareli (C’agareli) assert that Guria is first referred to in the second half of the seventh century, but they do not substantiate this claim, and no evidence exists in the sources that I know of for this claim. Bak’radze, Arkheologichesko e puteshstvie, p. 99; A. Tsqareli (C’agareli), “Guria,” Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, Brokgauz & Efron, eds., vol. 9, pt. 2 (SPB, 1893): 913.

114 Scholars have advanced numerous theories about the derivation of the word, highlighting, if nothing else, the mystery that surrounds its origins. Thus, in his explication of place-names, Brosset stated that the origin of the name Guria was still a mystery. M.-F. Brosset, Histoire de la Géorgie. Introduction et Table des matières, p. viii. Nonetheless, he proposed that the term derived from the Persian word for fire-worshipper, gyare, a link he traced to the presence of the Persians on the territory of present-day Guria during the Byzantine–Persian Wars of the sixth century. For a summary of his and various other interpretations of the etymology and use of the terms “Guria,” “gurieli,” and “guruli,” see the article by K’veli Ch’xatarashvili, “Termini bi ‘guria’ ‘guruli’ da ‘gurieli’,” in Sak’ art’velosha da k’art’velobis aghmishwinvi uc xauli da k’art’uli terminologia, G.G. Paichadze, ed. (T’bilisi: Mec’nereba, 1993): 453-457. To my mind, the most convincing approach to the etymology of the term remains that taken by the famous linguist, Niko Marr (1864-1934). Marr proposed the idea that Guria derived from the same root as Egrisi, Megrel, indeed, Iberia and Sper(i)-Inspi, even Innereti, and Georgia. According to principles of Georgian phonetics, he devised an etymological scheme that connected roots as follows: (1) ber>hber>hver>ger>Ger, generating the name of the territory Egrisi and its inhabitants, megrel-i; (2) also, ger (gveria)>gur, and thus guria and guriel-i, as well as the Syriac Gurzan, the Arabic Jurzan, Jurhan, and gurj, and the Persian gurji, from which came the Russian designation Gruzia and the English variant Georgia. See his article, “Kreshchenie armian, gurzin, abkhazov i alanov sviatym Grigoriem,” Zapiski vostochnago otdelementa Imperatorskago russkago archeologicheskago obshchestva, vol. 16 (SPB, 1905): 166-169. An isolated occurrence in Life of the Kings points to the common root of both Guria and Egrisi as posited by Marr: “[Parnavaz] was no longer afraid of his enemies and he became king [mep ‘e] of all K’art’li and Egrisi...”. In Egrisi we see both Egrisi and the root gur from which Guria is formed. See Rapp’s comments on this occurrence, IHC, p. 269, fn. 161. Several scholars subscribe to Marr’s linguistic analysis, including: A. Gugushvili, “Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia;” Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 60-61, fn. 60; W.E.D. Allen, “The Inner East: The Ancient Caucasus and the Origin of the Georgians,” The Asiatic Review, series 4, 24:80 (October, 1928): especially pp. 554-556; Robert Hewsen, ed. and trans., The Geography of Ananias, p. 125; and Marr’s students and colleagues like I. Kipshidze, Grammatika mingrel’skago (gerskago) iazyka (SPB: Tip. I.A.N., 1914): xiii-xiv; and I.V. Megrelidze, Lazskii i mingrel’skii sloi v guriiskom (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd-vo A.N. S.S.S.R., 1938): 42-43, 66-67.
their campaign in Egrisi, "took the Guria road, and crossed into Sper."\textsuperscript{115} Shortly thereafter, the term appears a second time in the reported speech of "King" Mir. After being mortally wounded in combat, Mir instructs his younger brother and fellow "King" Arch‘il to distribute to their erist‘avis (governors or dukes) Mir’s daughters in marriage and their patrimonial lands: "What I possess as elder (brother) I give to you, and you will have the elder’s lot: Egrisi, Suanet‘i, T‘akueri, Arguet‘i, and Guria."\textsuperscript{116} Finally, the third reference to Guria occurs at the end of this episode and in the conclusion of the work itself. The writer recounts how "Arch‘il went away and inhabited Egrisi up to Sorapan [modern Shorap‘ani]. He administered all the castles and cities, and built a fortress on the border of Guria and Greece [Byzantium]."\textsuperscript{117}

The most immediate observation that can be made about these references pertains to Guria’s southern orientation toward Byzantium as a border region. The "Guria road" leads south-by-southwest into Sper and "Greece." In the second reference, the enumeration of the principal domains of Western Georgia proceeds in a circular fashion from the heartland, Egrisi proper, north to Suanet‘i, northeast to T‘akueri (modern Lech‘xumi and Racha in Imeret‘i), east and southeast to Arguet‘i (Imeret‘i), and then south to Guria. And in the third reference Guria is depicted as being a land bordering "Greece."

Not coincidentally, the only time that the term "Sak‘art‘velo" appears in this text, which is also the earliest extant text to use that word in the Georgian historical tradition (by two centuries), occurs a few leaves before the first mention of Guria. Murvan Qru

\textsuperscript{115} Thomson, \textit{RCH}, p. 245. Drawing on the geographical expertise of Robert Hewsen, Rapp identifies the "Guria road" as "a coastal road from Guria to Pontus/Trebizond," a route also mentioned in Roman sources. Rapp, \textit{IHC}, p. 353.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 246-247.

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 248-249.
“attacked the Klisura which at that time was the border of Greece [Byzantium] and Georgia [Sak`art`velo]....” The Klisura mentioned here is most certainly the southern Klisura River which is a tributary of the Choroxi located in Klarijet’i (Cholarzene). Therefore, the proximity of the references to Sak’art’velo and Guria as both bordering “Greece” suggests that Guria and Sak’art’velo themselves bordered one another in a frontier zone between Byzantium, greater K’art’li (govelii K’art’li), and Egrisi-Ap’xazet’i. Again, Achara is not mentioned in the text. That is, only Guria is named as the southern-most territory of Egrisi-Ap’xazet’i, though this text provides little indication of the actual boundaries covered by this new term, except to suggest that the Speri or Choroxi River might have been its southern boundary. There can be no doubt, however, that the author considered Guria to be a constituent territory of Western Georgia or of the new Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i. Moreover, the author’s reference to the Bagratids, again for the first time in Georgian historical literature, placed them in parts of Klarijet’i, which would have been included in his vague notion of “Sak’art’velo” to the south and east of the territory of Guria.

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118 Ibid., pp. 241-242. Rapp argues that this first extant use of the term Sak`art`velo was merely intended to convey “some sense of an all-Georgian kingdom, an entity greater than K’art’li, and it is specifically applied to the ‘frontier between Byzantium and Georgia [Sak`art`velo],’” and, one might add, Egrisi. Significantly, he defends the authenticity of this early, single use of the term and does not regard it as a later interpolation. Finally, as a way of illustrating the relative scarcity of the term even under the Bagratids of the Golden Age, he concurs with the general view that the term came into currency only under the Bagratids some time after the ascendancy of Bagrat III in 1008, but cautions that this did not mean frequent use at least in extant historical writing. “Thus even in the twelfth century, although the Bagratids had by then succeeded in constructing a pan-Caucasian empire..., this fact was not emphasized in Georgian historical literature by use of the term Sak`art`velo.” IHC, pp. 506-507.

119 As in the case of the Egrisi River (Egrisi-cqali), two Klisura Rivers existed in Western Georgia. Toumanoff, SCCH, p. 462, fn. 113.

120 Stephen Rapp writes about the development in the Georgian historical tradition of the relationship between the term “greater K’art’li” (govelii K’art’li) and “Georgia” (Sak`art’velo). “Expressions of Exile and Unity: The Two Meanings of Sak`art’velo (Georgia),” unpublished paper, 1997.
These first references to Guria, therefore, suggest more about its frontier status than about its territory, leaving its actual proportions vague. They say nothing about who lived there. Subsequent references in Bagratid-era chronicles provide little more information. They suggest that a class of nobles (Georgian pl.: aznaurebi) had emerged by the period of unification,\(^{121}\) that Guria was one of eight erist' avates in Western Georgia during this same period;\(^{122}\) and that by the time of the Mongol invasion of the early thirteenth century Guria had emerged as a distinct principality with its own dynastic head, an unnamed Gurieli.\(^{123}\) Taken together, all of these early references support the

\(^{121}\) Thus, the eleventh-century Chronicle of K'art'li states that the Bagratid King Bagrat IV (1027-1072) called on the “nobles of Guria and Lomsiani” (“gurieli aznauri-s”) to initiate a campaign against the fortress of Xup'at'i on the Black Sea coast in Klarjet'i. Thomson, RCH, p. 291. The fact that these nobles are called aznauri-s suggests that they were not of a princely class but in service to an unnamed ruling prince or erist' avi, possibly a lord from Egrisi or Samegrelo, construed in the narrow sense of the territory. On the origins and changing meaning of the term aznauri, see Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 93-94, 266-267; Allen, History of the Georgian People, pp. 225-230; Javakhishvili, Gosudartsvenyi stroi drevnei Gruzii, pp. 55-62.

\(^{122}\) The thirteenth-century Life of T'amar (C'xorebey mep 'et 'mep'isa t'amaris) enumerates eight provinces or territories in Western Georgia that lent support to T'amar's first husband, luri Bogoliubskii (son of Prince Andrei Bogoliubskii of Vladimir-Suzdal in Rus’), who attempted to seize the throne after T'amar banished him from the realm in 1188. This source states that Vardan Dadiani, who held sway over the whole of Svaneti [Suanet'i], Abkhaizia [Ap'xazet'i], Saegro [Samegrelo or Egrisi], Guria, Samokalako [Samok'alak'o], Rach'a, Takveri [T'akuerei] and Arqveti [Arquet'i]," brought all of Western Georgia—designated by the term “Lixt' -Imier—over to Yuri's side in his unsuccessful revolt against Queen T'amari. The Life of Tamar, in The Georgian Chronicle, Katharine Vivian, trans., p. 127. K'art'lis c'xoreba, vol. II. Istoryiani da azmani sharakantedi'ari, S. Quach'shivili, ed. (T'bilisi: Sabchot'a sak'art' velo, 1959): 49.14-15. In a later passage the text names the inhabitants of Guria as "Gurians" ("Gurielni"), specifically in reference to the troops from Guria summoned by Queen T'amari. Ibid. The Georgian text reads differently from Vivian's translation. Quach'shivili joins the names "Suan-Megrel-Gurielni" as one group or contingent and does the same for "Racha-T'akuere-Margueli'urt,'" implying that these regions were somehow unified. K'art'lis c'xoreba, vol. II, p. 65.16. For a description of this source, see Rapp, IHC, p. 17, and chapter seven. The term Lixt' -Imier means "the far side of the Lixi [or Surami] mountains." It is juxtaposed against the term "Amier" or "this side" of the Lixi mountains, clearly reflecting the K'art'li-centered perspective of the author. This terminology came into usage during the period of unification. See Toumanoff, SCCH, p. 61, fn. 58; and his "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature," p. 196; "The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty," pp. 181-182; and A. Gugushvili, "Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia," pp. 58-59.

\(^{123}\) The text known as The Chronicle of a Hundred Years, which provides an account of the life of T'amari's daughter, Queen Rusudan (reigned 1223-1245), makes the first known reference to the Gurieli or ruling prince of Guria. This unnamed Gurieli is included along with the Dadiani of Egrisi (Samegrelo or Bedia), and the erist' avi of Rach'a, and "all the dignitaries [earch'inebulni]." K'art'lis c'xoreba, vol. II,
conclusion that Guria was a relatively new dynastic territory in submission to Ap’xaz-Megrel overlords and that it assumed growing prominence as a pivotal territory for the “K’art’velization” of Western Georgia and for the defense of Egrisi-Ap’xazet’i from incursions through the marchlands immediately to the south. It seems, then, that Guria was somehow beholden to the ruler of Egrisi (narrowly construed as Samegrelo) and Suanet’i because Qauxch’ishvili groups them together ("Suan-Megrel-Gurieli") and because Toumanoff asserts that a common "Dadian-Gurieli Dynasty" was known in Western Georgia at least from the tenth century and that this dynasty held the lands of Suanet’i, Samegrelo, and Guria.\(^{124}\) Bak’radze made a similar argument for the common ancestry of the ruling houses of Guria and Samegrelo based on the fact that the name Mamia only appears as a name in these two houses; and he notes that in later medieval inscriptions and charters, one sometimes sees Megrel sovereigns call themselves "Dadiano-Gurieli" and Gurian rulers use the title "Gurieli-Dadiani." What remains unclear is the process that led to the division of this common ancestry into distinct dynastic houses ruling separate autonomous territories.\(^{125}\)

**Modern Interpretations of Guria’s Origins**

Modern interpretations of Guria’s origins support the little information provided by the medieval Georgian chronicles. In particular, Prince Vaxushti Bagrationi’s description of Guria in his monumental history and geography of the Georgian lands, which was completed in 1745 while in exile in Moscow, captures the obscurity and significance of Guria’s emergence. Interestingly, as if to emphasize Guria’s peripheral

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\(^{124}\) Toumanoff, *SCCH*, p. 269.

\(^{125}\) Bak’radze, *Arheologicheskoe puteshestvie*, pp. 268-269.
location among these lands, Vaxushti places his geographical description of the
principality at the end of his work. More importantly, he begins the description with the
statement, “And Guria was not the lot of Egros but of K’art’los.”126 His statement draws
on the well-established foundational myth of the Georgian peoples. He engages the
question of the ethnogenesis of the Gurians not simply by calling them the descendants of
K’art’los but, more precisely, by claiming that they were linked to the territory of Odzrxe,
its own a part of Mesxet’i in the southwestern lands considered to be part of the domains of
K’art’los. Thus, he relates that the Gurians were the progeny of K’art’los and that “when
Leon was crowned king of the Ap’xaz, then these [Gurians] no longer had the will to be
submissive to the erist’avi of Odzrxe, Adarnase, and his son Ashot, who were the sons
of Step’anoz Bagratoni;…[they] defected and joined Leon, as the name proclaims:
renegades like Guria [guriobit’ gandgomilni]. And the language that they speak is
Mesxian and not Imeret’ian in accent.”127 He considered the Gurians and their territory
originally to have been a constituent part of the Odzrxe erist’avate, and in the final years
of the eighth century, they defected from K’art’los’s domains and submitted to the rule of
the newly crowned Leon of Ap’xazet’i, who came to extend his rule over the lands of
Egros. In this light, it would not be too much to say that Guria was born in revolt, for it
emerged as a principality by breaking away from the larger territory of Odzrxe—
“renegades” indeed! As a renegade territory, Guria lay on the frontier between Eastern
and Western Georgia, and its origins represented the infusion of people of K’art’velian
stock into the domains of the Chans/Laz, Megrels, and Ap’xaz.

More recent scholarship has for the most part corroborated Vaxushti’s
interpretation. Scholars have stressed that the basic ethnic composition of the lands of

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127 Ibid., p. 789.13-17.
Western Georgia, at least along the coast and in the immediate hinterland, from east of Trapezuz/Trebizond to the imperial province of Ap'xazet’i in the north was a composite of Western Georgian tribes related to the Chan-Laz-Megrels. While it would be too rigorous a division to exclude Eastern Georgian tribes like the K’art’velians from Western Georgia, it is fair to say they inhabited the interior reaches of this realm—the K’art’velians around Sarapan/Shorap’ani in Arguet’i/Imeret’i and the Mexsians in Samc’xe. And as explored above, it appears as though these tribes exerted a nominal influence in Western Georgia, at least until the more pronounced influx of K’art’velian people into Samc’xe and Tao-Klarjet’i in the wake of the Arab conquest of the mid-seventh century. Even more to the point, the area that emerged as Guria seems to have been inhabited (and perhaps sparsely inhabited, at least in the lowlands) by both Chan-Laz and Megrel tribes. Most significantly, in the seventh-eighth centuries, this area seems to have become the locus for the “K’art’velization” of the local tribes living along the littoral, while Arguet’i played a similar role to the northeast in the hinterland of the Rioni River valley. Thus, Ivane Javaxisshvili claimed that in the period following the Arab conquest, K’art’velians moved into the lands of the Mexsians to the Black Sea, an area that he (like Procopius) thought had little population in the preceding centuries. This


130 I.V. Megrelidze, Lazskii i megrel’skii sloi v guriiskom, pp. 42-43.
incursion acted like a wedge separating the Chan-Laz from the Megrels.\footnote{131} As a result of this gradual infusion of K`art`velian peoples, Javakhishvili concludes that “we must consider the contemporary Gurians and Imeret`ians as K`art`velianized Megrels-Laz’.”\footnote{132}

Using primarily linguistic evidence, I. Megrelidze is most explicit in claiming that the Gurians emerged as a distinct group as a result of the interaction of K`art`velians with Laz and Megrels. “The Gurians as well as the Acharans who are close to them were formed from the Chans, Laz and Megrels, who were already living there, and in part from the new tribes who were joined to them from neighboring lands — not only from K`art`li but also, and above all, from Mesxi (Axalc`ixe).”\footnote{133} During his expedition through Guria and Achara in 1873, Dimitri Bak`radze recorded a folk belief among the Laz according to which the Megrels were considered a kin tribe of the Laz. At one time these tribes occupied the entire coast from Pitsunda in the north to Kemer in the south (just east of Rize and Maparvre/Maparvri in present-day Turkey). At an undisclosed time, a Georgian king went to war with the Laz and separated them from the Megrels by settling “Georgians” (meaning K`art`velians) between them in the area of present-day Guria.\footnote{134}


\footnote{132} Quoted in A.N. Javakhishvili (Dzhavakhishvili), \textit{Gruziny Gurii}, p. 54. Musxelivigli is equally bold in his assessment of this period, describing the first half of the eighth century as one “of the k`art`velianization of the Western Georgian tribes.” D.L. Muskhelishvili (Musxelivigli), “Istoriitcheskaia geografiia Gruzii,” p. 401. This view was also espoused by V. Gurko-Kriazhin in his entry for Achara, “Adzariantskaia ASSR,” \textit{Bol`shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediiia}, vol. 1 (Moscow: Aktsionernoe obshchestvo “Sovetskaia entsiklopediiia,” 1926): 593. He claimed that the infusion of K`art`velian peoples began in the seventh century.

\footnote{133} Megrelidze, \textit{Lazskii i megrel`skii sloi v guriiskom}, pp. 45-46.

\footnote{134} Bak`radze added that he believed the gist of the tale, that the K`art`'s forced themselves into the domains of the Laz-Megrels as a kind of wedge, but he also acknowledged that the circumstances surrounding this
Curiously, if one accepts the notion that Guria was a “new” territory — by comparison with other Georgian domains like Samegrelo, Samc’xe, and K’art’li —, but one nonetheless known from the eighth century, if it emerged because of the influx of K’art’velian peoples, presumably architectural monuments attesting the implied “K’art’velization,” primarily by way of the Georgian Church, would remain from at least the time of the unified kingdom. Thus, the dilemma remains as to how to regard Guria’s role in the spread of the K’art’velian Church into Western Georgia; because of the lack of early church architecture, it seems that a greater role would have been played by Arguet’i.

Notwithstanding this mystery, according to the group of scholars discussed here, many of whom were students or proponents of Niko Marr, the Gurians emerged as a product of the penetration by the K’art’velian tribes of the Laz/Chan-Megrel tribes that sprang from the marchlands of Samc’xe and not over the Surami mountains. That is, Guria seems to have emerged as a direct result of the “K’art’velization” of the northern marchlands (meaning the southwestern border zone between K’art’li and Egrisi) just at the time that the Kingdom of Ap’xazet’i was forming and the Bagratids were establishing themselves as the rulers of much of the marchland territories. And this new territory evolved into a distinct, autonomous principality (by the fourteenth century) that had to maintain a precarious balance between clan ties to both Meszet’i to the south and Egrisi to the north while also preserving a larger political balance between three primary constellations of power. These were Meszet’i, later to be known as the Samc’xe sa- at’aabago lying to the southeast, Samegrelo, or the domain of the Dadiani, together with Imeret’i to the north, and finally the various Anatolian imperial enterprises that supplanted one another and vied with Persia for hegemony over the Caucasus. Through Samc’xe, K’art’li pressed its claims to the sea in the southern reaches of Guria. The

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dominant polities of Western Georgia, whether Samegrelo or Imeret’i, sought to extend their jurisdiction over Guria down to the Choroxi River. As we shall see, once the unified realm fractured in the latter half of the fifteenth century, in Western Georgia the kings of Imeret’i persistently claimed sovereignty over Guria and Samegrelo (and by extension, Ap’xazet’i), though the ruling princes of these territories acted as de facto sovereign rulers and at times even ruled as kings of Imeret’i itself.135 And the Byzantines and later the Ottomans exerted considerable military and political pressure in an effort to subjugate the territories of Western Georgia as tributary powers on the frontier of their imperial enterprises.

CHAPTER THREE
DYNASTIC RULE IN EARLY MODERN GURIA

Given Guria’s precarious location skirting the K’art’velian marchlands with Anatolia to the south and prey to the feudal aspirations of the Imeret’ian kings and Megrel princes to the north, it is not surprising that the history of the principality up to the Russian incorporation reveals a succession of expedient political alliances forged between the Gurieli-s and various neighbors. Already in antiquity precedent existed for such alliances. The most dramatic exposition of how local rulers calculated and forged political alliances appears in the history of the sixth-century Lazić Wars by the contemporary historian Agathias. He recounts how the Laz (called “Colchians”) withdrew to a remote mountain gorge to deliberate how to respond to the murder by local Byzantine military commanders of their King Gubazes II (d. 555) — whether to switch their allegiance back to the Persians or to remain loyal to the Byzantines.¹ Two leaders

¹ The actions of King Gubazes II exemplify how the growing importance of Lazica as a strategic border territory imparted to the Lazian kings a larger latitude of action in maintaining a precarious autonomy and even determining the fortunes of both the Persians and Byzantines in the Caucasus; for neither imperial power could exert its control over this area and oust its rival without the allegiance of the rulers of Lazica. Gubazes was married to a Byzantine woman, and he held a court title under Emperor Justinian (527-565). Despite these ties, however, Gubazes grew disillusioned with the exorbitant demands imposed by Justinian’s stationing of several thousand troops in his domains and by the monopoly of trade established by the Roman general in command of the new fortress at Petra, named after the emperor himself (Petra Pia Iustiniana, lying in what would become Guria). Therefore, he turned to the Persian ruler Khusrau (Chosroes) for support against the Byzantines only to return to Justinian’s side after realizing that Persian control severed Lazica from the valuable Black Sea trade, introduced Zoroastrian influence into his Christianized kingdom, and imposed an onerous tax burden on the local inhabitants. The precariousness of his position is demonstrated by the fact that Chosroes sought to have him killed, but finally in 555 Gubazes was killed by the commanders of his Byzantine allies, unbeknownst to the emperor. Procopius, History of the Wars, II.xv.9-31 (vol. I, pp. 389-397), II.xxviii.15-xxx (pp. 519-557); Braund, Georgia in Antiquity, pp. 275, 290-296, 309; A. Gugushvili, “Chronological-Genealogical Table,” p. 51.
represented the opposing sides of the debate — Aetes who extoled the benefits of a Persian alliance and Phartazes who advocated continued allegiance to their fellow Christians. Aetes urged his compatriots to uphold the honor of the deceased king, to seek vengeance for his murder, which in those oppressive times, he argued, was the most reasonable course of action. For his part Phartazes appealed to the common religious faith of his countrymen and the “Romans” as the only genuine basis for allegiance and the re-establishment of a lasting order. In the end, his argument wins by invoking the spirit of Gubazes: “He would bid us rather to recover the dignity and self-reliance of Colchians and of free men and to stand up courageously to misfortune, not allowing ourselves to be induced to do anything dishonourable or unworthy of our country’s history and remaining true to its present obligations, secure in the knowledge that Providence will not abandon our nation.” Phartazes carried the day by underscoring the fundamental importance of Colchis’s (Lazica’s) history of autonomy gained through its alliance with Christian Byzantium. David Braund points out that while this kind of stylized debate was typical of Greek historical writing, some kind of debate must actually have occurred given the magnitude of the crime committed by their allies.

Agathias’s account of the legendary debate conveys the unanimous desire to preserve Lazica’s independence through one or another advantageous alliance. The subsequent historical record manifests this same desire shared by the dynastic rulers of Western Georgia (and Caucasia as a whole). They demonstrated a remarkable prowess and persistence and employed a variety of strategies to uphold their independence well

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3 *Ibid.*, 3.13.6 (p. 83). Quotations relevant to the points made by Aetes and Phartazes appear in 3.10.10 (p. 78) and 12.10 (p. 82).

into the Russian period. Seen from the vantage point of modern historical studies the period of fragmentation (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries) appears as a time of dissolution, depravity, and greediness on the part of the dynastic lords who shamelessly allied with Turk, Persian, or neighboring prince to assert their independence thereby preventing all efforts to reunite the Georgian lands. Nothing exemplifies this fallen state of affairs better than the escalation of the slave trade in which members of all social groups participated; it looms as a massive transgression against notions of the Georgian nation. Thus, for example, in his excellent study of eighteenth-century Russian-Georgian relations, Nikoloz K`ort`ua describes the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a time of “endless bloodily defensive battles of the Georgian and Armenian peoples that exhausted their military might and strength and brought them face-to-face with the threat of physical extinction [fizicheskogo istrebleniia].” Armenia lost its independence altogether, he asserts, while

Georgia alone heroically preserved its freedom and independence, preserved its state, ancient culture and national individuality [natsional’nuju samobytnost’]. Despite its manly resistance in unequal battles with its enemies, it often endured invasions that considerably expedited the treacherous activities of the reactionary faction of the Georgian feudal lords, who not infrequently switched to the side of the enemy and took an active role in the destruction of their native land.⁵

K`ort`ua’s remarks encapsulate the modern nationalist perspective on this period.

“Georgia” is an independent actor already claiming a political and cultural “individuality,” or national essence. “It” withstands invasions in a manly fashion and suffers the treachery of reactionary, self-centered lords. Georgia is a historical given that defines a moral bearing and development against which the actions of the dynastic rulers appear as transgressions insofar as they are judged to threaten or impede the realization of

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⁵ N.M. K`ort`ua (Kortaia), Russko-gruzinskie vzaimootnoseniia vo vtoroi polovine XVIII veke (T`bilisi: Izd-vo Tbilisskogo universiteta, 1989): 51.
national (re-)unification. At the same time, fragmented into disparate polities, Georgia is also a transcendent entity, assuming its closest historical incarnation in K`art`li, "the locus of Georgian statehood and culture." Making K`art`li the locus of the Georgian nation-state allows an easier division into reactionary magnates — like various Dadianis from Samegrelo — and enlightened rulers. Scholars involved in the publication of documents or source materials that could be seen as reflecting efforts to kindle a national consciousness among the prominent Georgian dynastic houses are particularly prone to this kind of interpretation.  

Historians have interwoven several important themes into their analyses of this period of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries and institution of princely rule (or t`avadoba). The picture they draw is as follows. The most prominent trend of the era was the heightened role of foreign intervention particularly by the Ottomans in the lands of Western Georgia and the Persians in Eastern Georgia (with attention also paid to the Lezghis and other mountaineers). Increased control of the Black Sea basin by the Ottomans greatly constrained trade and cultural ties with Europe, leading to economic stagnation and the depopulation of the Georgian lands. Furthermore, the loss of Samc`xe to the Ottomans proved pivotal in obstructing the course of national development. For their part, the dynastic rulers fomented the internal division of the realm, tightened their hold over their serfs, and engaged increasingly in the slave-trade with the Ottomans. This exploitation and debasement of the serfs promoted a class-war between serfs and lords.

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7 In the introduction to his translation of the law-code of King Vaxtang VI, P`urc`eladze (Purtseladze) also embodies “Georgia” as a distinct historical actor engaged in “the national-liberation struggle” that remained steadfast through those treacherous times. Ibid., pp. 8-10. Or, again, writing at the critical time of possible national unification in 1917, G. Veshapeli exclaimed that “the idea of a unified, undivided Georgia was always the nerve of Georgian dynastic politics, which leaned on national and religious interests.” G. Veshapeli, Edinstvo gruzii i russkii protektorat (Moscow: Tip. Ia.G. Sazonova, 1917): 5.
that was to grow through the centuries.\textsuperscript{8} These developments threatened the very existence of the Georgian nation and prompted various Georgian monarchs to seek aid from their Christian brethren to the north; thus, the narrative of depravity and decline leads inevitably to Russian aid, annexation, and the rescue of the national-liberation movement.\textsuperscript{9} The turn to Russia saved Georgia from physical extermination — or national extinction, as it were — and facilitated the re-emergence of the nation, setting Georgia back on the proper course of historical development that ultimately led to the independence of the modern Georgian nation-state. As we shall see, in the nineteenth century, tsarist officials, ethnographers and a range of scholars, and others were quick to identify ways that the Ottomans had tarnished the character of the Gurians and others in Western Georgia, thus rendering the history of the dark period not so much static (in the sense of changeless) as regressive and backward.

While scholars who subscribe to this narrative have carefully scrutinized a wide array of source materials to elucidate much about this period, the nationalist perspective obscures more than it illuminates. Who exactly was treacherous in forging alliances with the “enemies”? Why were they treacherous if by chance the “nation” did not exist and if they sought allies to preserve their independence in the face of threats posed not just from outside the Georgian lands but from within (and from fellow sovereign rulers of those lands)? Whose sovereignty was most authentic and on what basis can this be asserted?


\textsuperscript{9} A succinct expression of this general narrative can be found in I. Surguladze, Istoriiia gosudarstva i prava Gruzii (T’bilisi, 1968): 81-83; also Georgii (Giorgi) G. Paichadze, Georgievskii Traktat (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1983): 6-11.
Indeed, how clear a division can actually be drawn between “reactionary dynastic lords” and enlightened rulers? Did “Georgia” and “Georgians” really face extermination because of a marked decrease in population after the golden age of the unified realm under T’amar? If so, when exactly did they face this threat, and how grave was it? A more nuanced approach, like Toumanoff’s, argues that the initial dissolution of the realm ultimately occurred because the Bagratids adopted the late Byzantine practice of collegial sovereignty, and Konstantine II employed it at a particularly critical time of tension among the rulers of the Georgian lands.  

Others contend that the principal dynasts (t’avadebi) lost sight of “common-state problems” (obshchegosudarstvenikh zadach).  

Rather than view Gurian independence during this period through the lens of nation-building (or nation-wrecking), I propose examining the historical record from the vantage point of dynastic rule and the strategies employed by the petty sovereign rulers of principalities to compel loyalty. To analyze this period in terms of the progress toward or away from the (re)-creation of a Georgian nation imposes an ideological straightjacket on the events and actors that tightly circumscribes their options and motivations. The nearly four centuries of political fragmentation should not be construed as an aberration in the course of national development. Close scrutiny of this longue durée reveals a haphazard series of alliances forged and broken, insults given, vengeance sought, respect and honor bestowed. Historical memory in the chronicles was not rendered in terms of the golden

\[10\] Indeed, Toumanoff reminds us that Konstantine together with “the lords spiritual and temporal of the Realm” sanctioned the independence of Kaxet’i and Imereti at a council in 1490-1491. C. Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty in Georgia,” pp. 200-201.

\[11\] Istoriia Gruzii, vol. I: S drevneishikh vremen do nachala XIX veka, S. Janashia (Dzhanashia), ed., p. 318. Though casting his history in terms of the nation, Allen passes a harsh judgment on all the sovereign rulers of Georgian lands of the time. He writes: “The Georgian rivals fought like chivalrous boys; they did not kill like kings. The House of Bagrationi spawned far and wide its handsome knightly claimants, but not one of them grew cunning, mean and watchful — to scotch the rest. Here were no cold, wary Tudors whetting the axe for their distant cousins, but a pack of Christian gentlemen wasting the land in chivalrous fracas. In this period the gallantry of one claimant towards another is as amazing as the futility of their plots and combinations.” History of the Georgian People, p. 133.
age of a unified realm but more immediately as manifestations of loyalty or offense that upheld or threatened the autonomy of particular ruling sovereigns. Dynastic autonomy was deemed more important than feudal submission to a K'art'velian king. To be sure, outside powers like Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Persia exacerbated tensions between the rulers of the Georgian lands and reinforced the quest to uphold local autonomy. But the assumption underlying the nationalist narrative is that without foreign intervention and intrigues — schemes to divide and conquer — politics would naturally have sought an equilibrium in the restoration of the unified kingdom that would eventually evolve into a modern nation-state. This view disregards the nature of the borderland zone and the much longer history of small, autonomous dynastic polities that marked Caucasia's political and social structure.

Indeed, I would argue that the nationalist narrative is an effect of the condominium worked out between Georgians and Russians during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it received a fervent boost with the articulation of the Extinction or Extermination thesis (a point to which I return in Chapter Four).\footnote{As stated in the Introduction, the Extinction Thesis is the idea that by the end of the eighteenth century the Georgian lands faced imminent peril of extinction and that the Russians saved the Georgian peoples from it.} In the case of Guria under Russian rule, up through the Crimean War, the Gurians would increasingly side with Phartazes in their insistence that they join with their co-religionists seeing this as the most expeditious and honorable way to maintain their autonomy. And they would attempt to hold the Russians to the obligations of their alliance, even if it meant that they had to rebel to press their demands. At the same time, as the Russians tightened their hold on Guria, the terms of the alliance changed. Not only did the Christian-Muslim boundary become more boldly demarcated in the ideology and policies of incorporation, but the Russians stressed their role as the purveyors of enlightenment for their Christian
kin. Faced with the dissolution of their sovereignty, the Gurians imbibed the enlightenment discourse and, along with others from the Georgian lands, primarily in the second half of the nineteenth century, fashioned a nationalist agenda that ennobled peasant rebellion as an emancipatory weapon for recovering a nation that now, for the first time, could be imagined.

I. Guria’s Fragile Autonomy

The following exposition rests on the contention that Guria’s borderland position threatened the integrity of the principality’s borders and autonomy blurring social boundaries and accentuating the need for social cohesion and, at the same time, autonomy of princely households. I am interested in highlighting the correspondence between the structural configuration of Guria (and the other Western Georgian lands) within the Caucasian borderland zone and the socio-cultural practices that imparted social cohesion and preserved autonomy among these dynastic polities. Hence, while Agathias’s account of the secret assembly of the Laz demonstrates the antiquity of expedient political alliances and the value placed on autonomy, similar episodes in the early modern period of political fragmentation show how political alliances and autonomy rested upon common strategies. More specifically, this investigation focuses on the political alliances forged by the ruling princes of Guria (the Gurieli-s), the Gurian social structure, and the system of subsistence agricultural production. These topics demonstrate how the Gurieli-s upheld dynastic rule and how, more generally, Gurians understood loyalty and sought to maintain autonomy in the borderland. Viewed by themselves as a stream of distinct events, the expedient political alliances forged by various Gurieli-s appear arbitrary, shifting, and confusing. But when analyzed more closely in terms of how they were forged, maintained, and violated, these alliances become more intelligible as a crucial strategy to affirm political autonomy and social cohesion.
To elaborate this perspective, I rely primarily on the eighteenth-century Georgian scholar, Vaxushti’s history of the Georgian lands. Though other histories from the early modern period exist for the Georgian lands, these generally pay scant attention to Guria; therefore, Vaxushti’s synthesizing study provides the most comprehensive account of dynastic rule in Guria. I am particularly interested in how Vaxushti depicts the practice of forging alliances, that is, the language he uses and the judgments he makes in assessing the success of various rulers in preserving their autonomy. I would contend that the way he describes these alliances was familiar to his readers, who would be able to recognize the personages and grasp their motivations from Vaxushti’s account. As suggested in the introduction, though Vaxushti endeavored to write a comprehensive “national” history employing European historiographic models, his narrative highlights the fractious nature of dynastic rule and alludes to a code of honor that governed the actions of the personalities he mentions. I use additional sources, including charters and Vaxtang VI’s law code, to supplement Vaxushti’s insights into dynastic rule in Guria.

The historical record becomes more discernible and continuous in the wake of the Mongol invasions when Guria and its neighbors began to assert their independence within the fractured Kingdom of Sak’art’velo. The first erist’avis of Guria evidently came from outside of the territory. They were possibly members of the Vardanidze clan that the sources say ruled Svanet’i as erist’avis. As we have seen, however, after the Mongol invasions of the early thirteenth century, the first references are made to a gurieli ruling Guria. This designation represents the emergence of an indigenous dynasty of

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13 Specifically, the Chronicle of K’art’li mentions the Vardanidzes as erist’avis of Suanet’i under King Giorgi II (1072-1089). Thomson, RCH, pp. 306-307. In turn, as we have seen, if these first erist’avis of Guria came from Suanet’i, it seems that they were also related to the Dadianis of Samegrelo. At any rate, D. Bak’radze found an inscription in Guria that related the Vardanidzes to Guria at least from the time of Queen T’amar, and he posits the view that they were the predecessors of the Gurieli-s and the Dadianis of Samegrelo. D. Bak’radze, “Kavkaz v drevnikh pamiatnikakh xristianstva,” Zapiski Obshchestva liubitelei kavkazskoi arkeologii, vol. 1 (Tiflis, 1875): 91; also his Arkeologicheskoe puteshestvie, p. 111, 268-269; and I.V. Megrelidze, Lazskii i megrel’skii sloi v Guriiskom, pp. 41-42.
ruling princes whose rule was hereditary and autonomous. The appellation was in part a name and in part a title, but together it symbolized a sovereign princely house that possessed subjects and a distinct territory, even if its boundaries often shifted.\(^\text{14}\) We know little about the actual size of the territory of Guria when it was an erist' avate during the extended period of unification. Evidently, Guria far exceeded the boundaries of its nineteenth-century incarnation as the Ozurgetskii district within the Russian Empire. It is likely that Guria extended from the Rioni River south along the low-lying coastal strip to Bat'umi (Bathys) as far as the Choroxi River, which would have included the western reaches of present-day Achara. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, when asked by the Russians to provide a description of Guria's historical boundaries, the youthful Mamia V Gurieli (most probably with help from his uncle, K'aixosro) marked the southern boundary at the coastal settlement of Kemer at the time of Queen T'amur's reign.\(^\text{15}\) He then briefly chronicled how the southern boundary shifted to the north, thus shrinking the size of the principality, and noted that though it is possible that Achara belonged to the pashalik of Axalc'ixe, the Gurieli-s often controlled it.\(^\text{16}\) The southern boundary of Guria

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14 A. Bryer and D. Winfield, Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos, vol. I, p. 344. According to the research of D. Bak'radze, the first named gurieli was Kaxaber, who, along with his wife Anna, are credited in an inscription of 1352 with building the Lixauri (Rexueli) church in Guria. Arkheologicheske puteshestvie, p. 143. See also Toumanoff, SCCH, pp. 186-187, fn. 99. Brosset follows Vaxushti, who likely did not know about this inscription because he probably never went to Guria, arguing that the first gurieli was a Kaxaber who died in 1483. Brosset, Histoire de la Géorgie, vol. II, p. 252, fn. 1, and p. 650. Bak'radze dismantles this argument by identifying another earlier gurieli, Giorgi and his wife Elene, who in 1422 are said to be the builders of a bell-tower for the Lixauri church. Ibid., pp. 111-112, 123. Nonetheless, Bak'radze's revision of the date for the earliest named gurieli did not gain the attention of subsequent scholars. cf. A Tsagareli (C'agareli), “Guria,” Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, Brokgauz & Efron, eds., vol. 9, pt. 2 (1893): 913; and Tsarevich Vakhushti, Geografia Gruzii, M.G. Dzhanashvili (Janashvili), trans. (Tiflis: Tip. K.P. Kozlovskogo, 1904): 238, fn. 626

15 He states that Gurians (guriulni) referred to Kemer as “rkinis-palod” or “iron stake.” Akty sobrannye Kavkazskoi arkheograficheskoi komissiei [hereafter AKAK], vol. II, doc. no. 1055 (no date, but most probably in the fall of 1804): 539-540.

16 Ibid. It is worth recalling that Vaxushti claims that the Ap'xaz King Leon II's erist'avate of Guria, which was allegedly created in the eighth century, extended down to the Choroxi River. Vaxushti, Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, N. Nakashidze, trans., pp. 221-222; Brosset, L'Histoire de la Géorgie, vol. II, pt. 1,
changed with the advances of K’art’li and particularly the Ottomans. At any rate, the fragility of Gurian autonomy becomes apparent from the first decades of the fourteenth century. By around 1330 the Gurieli had submitted to the Bagratid King Giorgi V, “The Brilliant” (1314-1346). Evidently Guria included Bat’umi, for Giorgi V seized the port from the Gurieli in 1330.\textsuperscript{17} Some forty years later in 1372, during the reign of Bagrat V of K’art’li (1360-1390), we find the Gurieli possibly paying homage to Alexios III (1349-1390), Emperor of Trebizond.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{18} The circumstances surrounding this change of allegiance are not known, but it appears that Guria and maybe Samc’xe as well maintained close relations with, if not a dependency on, the emperors of Trebizond until the mid-fifteenth century, when the Ottomans conquered it. Brosset, \textit{ibid.}, p. 252. S.P. Karpov, \textit{Trapezundskia imperii i zapadnoeuropeiskie gosudarstva v XIII-XV vv} (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1981): 9, 157-158; Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids,” pp. 186-187, fn. 99. Bryer is more tentative about this specific allegiance in 1372 but nonetheless stresses the close ties between Guria and the Empire of Trebizond for the better part of a century. Bryer and Winfield, \textit{Byzantine Monuments}, pp. 335, 344-345; and Anthony Bryer, “The Littoral of the Empire of Trebizond in Two Fourteenth-Century Portolano Maps,” \textit{Arkheion Pontoi} 24 (1961): 118-121. An indication of this relationship is that the prevailing currency in Western Georgia even during the reign of Giorgi V earlier in the fourteenth century was silver aspers from Trebizond. Lang, “Georgia in the Reign of Giorgi the Brilliant,” p. 87. At the same time, it is likely that Guria lost control of Bat’umi to K’art’li or perhaps to the Genoese. By the mid-fifteenth century it was in the hands of the \textit{at’abegi} of Samc’xe. Bryer and Winfield, \textit{Byzantine Monuments}, p. 345.
By the latter half of the fifteenth century, when the united Georgian Kingdom was fracturing into multiple polities, Guria was well recognized as an independent principality. Documents surrounding the attempts by Ludovico da Bologna to recruit various Georgian sovereigns and the Grand Komnenos of Trebizond for a crusade against the Turks in 1459-1460 style Mamia Gurieli a “marquis” (Mania marchio Goriae) who is said to have possessed his own army.\(^{19}\) The crusade never took place. To the contrary, under the leadership of Bagrat VI of Imeret’i, the sovereign princes of Western Georgia rallied against Giorgi VIII of K’art’li (1446-1465) at the Battle of Ch’ixorı in 1462, and the Ottomans are said to have supplied weapons to Bagrat that helped the coalition in their victory.\(^{20}\) Indeed, following Fätih Sultan Mehmet II’s conquest of the Empire of Trebizond in 1461, the polities of Western Georgia allegedly became nominal dependencies of the newly established Trebizond/Trabzon sancak-beylik (or province).\(^{21}\) During this period, Guria may well have reached its largest extent, stretching south past Bat’umi into Chanet’i west to Kemer and embracing Achara as well (confirming Mamia V’s claim).\(^{22}\) It would seem that growing Ottoman encroachment buttressed the relative


\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 86; A. Gugushvili, “Chronological-Genealogical Table,” p. 132; K’art’lis c’xovreba, vol. 4: Batonishvili Vaxushti, S. Qauuch’ishvili, ed., pp. 704-705; Vaxushti Bagrationi, Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 194; Allen, History of the Georgian People, p. 137. At least in the early-nineteenth century, the Gurieli family preserved the memory of their principality extending to Kemer and often
autonomy of the politics of Western Georgia. By 1508, the future sultan, Selim I (1512-1520), further consolidated Ottoman influence in Western Georgia by imposing an annual tax on Guria and Imereti as tributaries even though these two territories lay outside the jurisdiction of the Trebizond sancak. In 1512, Selim sent an expedition to Same‘xe where Mzechabuk At‘abagi met the Turks and guided them to Imereti in a devastating campaign. The fragility of Gurian autonomy is demonstrated by the increasing Ottoman encroachment as well as by the tacit dependence on the king of Imereti to sanction the designation of a new Gurieli. When Giorgi Gurieli died in 1512, King Bagrat III (1510-1565) approved Mamia as the new ruling sovereign of Guria.

If we examine Vaxushti’s history of Western Georgia in this time of political fragmentation, we discern an array of values and practices motivating allegiances and sustaining the political order of distinct autonomies. Thus, Vaxushti records how King Bagrat III of Imereti (1510-1565) “remembered [his] enmity toward the at‘abeg

including Achara. See AKAK, vol. II (1868), doc. no. 1055 (no date, but most probably 1804), pp. 539-540.

23 Kirzioglu, Osmanlılar’ın Kafkas-Elleri’ni Fethi, pp. 48, 69, 86, 93, 98. As an indication of the growing Ottoman presence in northeast Anatolia or the Pontic region encompassing the marchlands south of Guria, Kirzioglu notes that prior to the conquest of the Empire of Trebizond, the lands of Samegrelno and Ap‘xazet‘i were tied to the Rum or Sivas Eyaleti. After the conquest, these regions paid an annual tax to a new administrative entity, the Tirabuzon or Trebizond Sancak. Then, following the future Sultan Selim’s devastation of Guria and Imereti in 1508, these additional territories in Western Georgia paid an annual tax and presented gifts to the head of this Sancak. Finally, in 1535 the Erzurum eyaleti was formed, and all the Western Georgian principalities and the Kingdom of Imereti became dependencies on Erzurum. The Imereti‘an King was styled the “Melik Kral,” which is roughly equivalent to “king of kings,” a title that would have reflected the primacy claimed by the Imereti‘ian king over the other sovereign princes in Western Georgia. The Ottomans called each of these rulers “melik” or king. Ibid., pp. 69-71. For a much more detailed account of the administrative terminology employed by the Ottomans for the territories of Western Georgia and their other dependencies elsewhere in the empire, especially in the eighteenth century, see Orhan Kılıç, Osmanlı Devleti’nin İdare Taksimati: Eyalet ve Sancak Tevcihati (Elazığ: Ceren Matbaacılık, 1997): 16-17, 30, 42-43, 65, 227.


25 The same dependence prevailed at this time in Samegrelno when King Bagrat approved Mamia Dadiani as the new ruling prince after the death of Liparat. Ibid., p. 810.15-18; Vaxushti Bagrationi, Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 232.
Mzechabuk [moiq’sena shuri mzechabuk at’abagisa]” for rendering aid to the Turks during Selim’s campaign and toward the current At’abagi Quarquare IV (1516-1535) for going to Jerusalem with King Giorgi of K’art’li and not with him — presumably an offense against his dignity. Therefore, in 1535 he defeated Quarquare with the aid of Rostom Gurieli and the Dadiani of Samegrelo. In return for his support, Bagrat awarded Rostom the territories of Achara and Chanet’i seized from the Turks, while he ruled Same’xe. Bagrat sought to consolidate his hold by seeking aid from the Persian Shah T’amaz. Unable to send troops, T’amaz promised aid by giving “great gifts” and taking his leave with “great honor” (“did-pativc’emuli”) shown to Bagrat. Quarquare’s son K’aixosro II (1545-1573) beseeched the sultan to help him regain control of Same’xe. The sultan sent troops, and Bagrat and Rostom Gurieli defeated the Ottoman coalition. The Dadiani refused to join Bagrat’s alliance because the Imeret’ian king had not given him any territory for his role in the initial seizure of Same’xe. Further infuriated, the sultan ordered the Pashas of Erzurum and Diyarbakir to attack Bagrat. The Dadiani of Samegrelo again refused to support the Imeret’ian king, but King Lurasab I of K’art’li and the Gurieli offered help. This coalition of Georgian forces was defeated at the Battle of Soxoisti in 1545 because of the “disobedience and rivalry and treason of the Mesxet’ians.” In 1546 Bagrat tried to recapture Same’xe and seize the precious Acquirer icon of the Holy Mother, but the presence of Ottoman troops thwarted this campaign (but not the theft of the icon).

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26 Ibid., p. 811.19-24. The following account of this sixteenth-century history of Western Georgia comes from these two versions of Vaxushli’s text. Ibid., pp. 811-814; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, pp. 232-236. Only specific quotes are cited hereafter.

27 Ibid., p. 812.7-8; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 233.

28 Ibid., p. 812.27; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 234.

29 Vaxushli does not indicate why this icon was so important, but the Ackueri Church in C’ixe-juari (or C’ixis-juari) commanded great symbolic significance as the site where in the mid-fifteenth century the
Shortly thereafter, in response to the Dadiani’s defiance, King Bagrat of Imeret’i seized the Megrel ruler and then invited Rostom Gurieli to join him in the partition of Samegrelo (or Odishi in the text). Fearing a trap, the Gurieli declined to come to Bagrat, explaining to the king that the Ottomans threatened his realm. He advised Bagrat to release the Dadiani and obtain his loyalty by having him swear an oath of allegiance Bagrat (“rat’a shemoimtkic’o dadiani p’ic’it’ da ganuteo”). Rostom Gurieli’s dissembling only angered Bagrat who then thought to blind the Dadiani in revenge but restrained himself for fear that such an act would provoke an alliance against him. He imprisoned the Dadiani all the same. Still, Vaxushti goes on to recount how K’aixosro At’abagi of Samc’xe, who bore “enmity” toward Bagrat, forged this alliance, helping the Dadiani escape from prison and winning over the Gurieli’s support. With the At’abagi’s support, the Dadiani reasserted control over Odishi or Samegrelo. Despite this alliance forged by the sultan’s agent in Samc’xe, the sultan sought vengeance against the Gurieli for rendering support to Bagrat in the Battle of Soxoisti, and Ottoman troops seized Chanet’i from the Gurieli and began to strengthen the fortifications at Bat’umi.

Rostom Gurieli turned to the Dadiani and King Bagrat for aid against this attack. In any event, Bagrat sent his brother Vaxtang with a contingent of 500 troops as a show of goodwill but in actuality to sow discord between the Dadiani and Gurieli. Vaxtang succeeded by reminding the Dadiani that they were bound by an oath, which presumably compelled the Dadiani to believe Vaxtang when he revealed falsely to the Dadiani that

Bishop unsuccessfully attempted to assert the independence of his bishopric from the Georgian Church centered in Mc’xet’a in K’art’i. This scheme was part of Quarquare Jaqeli At’abeg’s plan to break away completely from K’art’i. Therefore, it is probable that the icon in question was the most famous and “powerful” icon of the church, and Bagrat’s theft was intended to weaken the at’abeg’s power. *Istoriia Gruzii*, vol. I: *S drevneishikh vremen do nachala XIX veka*, S. Dzhanashia (Janashia), ed., p. 302. In order to restore peace and honor between Imeret’i and Samc’xe, King Bagrat’s successor, Giorgi II (1565-1585), returned the icon to the at’abagi early in his reign.

the Gurieli planned to capture him. The Dadiani returned to Samegrelo, the Gurieli abandoned his campaign against the Turks (after driving them back across the Choroxi River), Vaxtang returned to Imeret’i, and the Ottomans built the fortress of Gonio thereby strengthening their presence in southern Guria.

This series of events spanning half a century and comprising the core of Vaxushti’s description of the reign of Bagrat demonstrates the way in which political autonomy was understood and preserved in terms of values like vengeance, generosity, and oaths of allegiance. Acts of loyalty or treason defined historical memory. Efforts to forge lasting unity among the Western Georgian polities fell into the background more frequently than not as the supreme value motivating political behavior was autonomy of person and polity. Stated differently, restoring unity to Western Georgia or the former Kingdom of Sak’art’velo was not the primary objective of these various sovereigns; therefore, historical personages cannot be appraised simply in positive and negative terms — enlightened or self-centered with regard to their efforts to support the creation of a national kingdom. Judgments about the time would be more pertinent if based on how individual princes upheld their own autonomies. Bagrat’s reign consists of shifting alliances forged across religious lines and inspired by perceptions of obligations to uphold one’s position as an autonomous ruler allied with another sovereign and to respond aggressively to violations of those bonds of loyalty. Guria’s small size and strategic location in this borderland zone made the Gurieli-s especially vulnerable to changes in allegiance and compelled them to cultivate a keen sensitivity to the strategies that upheld autonomy and inspired loyalty from their people and neighboring rulers.

In the course of the sixteenth century, Guria’s vulnerability became more apparent as the Ottomans asserted suzerainty over Western Georgia while the Persians did the same in Eastern Georgia. The Treaty of Amasi (1555) gave official recognition to
this division of the Georgian lands. The precarious enterprise of upholding Gurian sovereignty entailed not only the loss of land but also the gradual conversion to Islam of the inhabitants of the southern parts of former Guria. The pivotal region in this process of conversion to Ottoman rule and Islamic faith was Samc’xe, which under the hereditary rule of the Jaqeli family (designated at’abagi-s or atabegs in the thirteenth century) facilitated the dismemberment of the united kingdom in the fifteenth century. The region gradually came under Ottoman rule in the first half of the sixteenth century. The Jaqelis initially resisted Ottoman encroachment, but in the early decades of the seventeenth century they converted to Islam and won the title of hereditary pashas of what became known as the Pashalik of Axalc’ixe. Their conversion demonstrates their commitment within the Ottoman Empire to uphold their latitude to broker alliances in the Georgian lands and to remain lords of Axal’cixe.

31 On the onslaught of the Ottomans into the marchlands of Samc’xe and Guria, see Allen, History of the Georgian People, p. 148. The division of the Georgian lands and intensified Ottoman presence in Western Georgia was reflected in maps of the period. F. De Witt’s map, composed in Amsterdam in 1670, subsumes the territories of Western Georgia under the title “Turcarum Tribut (arius),” while K’art’li and Kaxet’i were called “Peperarum Tribut (arius).” De Witt referred to Guria as a kingdom by the appellation “Guriel R(egnum).” Similarly, a later French map of 1692 (by Sr. Sanson) refers to Guria as “Rayaume de Guriel,” again a title that resonates with the Ottoman word “melik.” Evidently, this practice of calling Guria a “kingdom” and the Gurieli prince a “king” was not so uncommon for the seventeenth century when Guria emerged as a more autonomous polity. In a letter of 1618, King T‘eimuraz I of Kaxet‘i states that the ruler of the Gurieli’s land was “king” Mamia. Thus, in his letter of 1621, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich calls Mamia II a “tsar.” Dzh. Gvasalia, “Territoria Gruzii na evropeiskikh kartakh,” pp. 100-105. Similarly, Bak’radze notes that at least from the sixteenth century, ruling Gurieli-s sometimes referred to themselves as xelmcip‘e or “sovereign,” and their wives used the title dedop‘ali or queen. Arkheologicheskoe puteshstvie, p. 289.

32 W.E.D. Allen, “The March-Lands of Georgia,” p. 155. The first beg or bey to convert to Islam was Bek’a III (Sap’ar Pasha, 1625-1635), who in 1625 poisoned his nephew Manuchar III and assumed rule of the Saat’abeg. He introduced Ottoman administrative practices, including special taxes on the Christian population, into the region. His conversion marked a turning point in the history of Samc’xe-Axalc’ixe insofar as the Jaqelis subsequently demonstrated a persistent pro-Turkish orientation. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the sultan confirmed the appointment of the pashas from the Jaqeli family. In 1744, the sultan abolished the Jaqelis’ hereditary right to the title of at’abagi /atabeg and incorporated Samc’xe into the regular system of Ottoman government. A. Gugushvili, “The Chronological-Genealogical Table of the Kings of Georgia,” pp. 142-144; D. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoe puteshstvie, p. 223.
Interestingly, Bak’radze noted that the process of conversion must have been well underway before Bek’a’s conversion in 1625. He discovered that many of the precious icons and other religious treasures from the Zarzma monastery near Axalc’ixe (in Samc’xe) were removed and deposited in the newly constructed Zarzma church in the Shemok’medi complex in Guria in the latter half of the sixteenth century as a response to the Islamicization of this region. Accordingly, the atabegs of Axalc’ixe came to play a crucial role in brokering alliances in Western Georgia on behalf of the sultan and even approving various princes as rulers of the Western Georgian lands. Therefore, it is not surprising to see a parallel process of conversion occur in neighboring Achara and the southern reaches of Guria beginning in the latter half of the sixteenth century during which time the Ottomans more or less consolidated their rule through local derebeys or “lords of the valley.” In light of this growing Ottoman-Muslim presence, Brosset underscored the particular borderland position of Guria and Samegrelo (Odishi), by saying they “floated between the sultans and the grand princes” of K’art’li.

33 Evidently, members of the noble Gogitidze family brought precious icons from the Zarzma monastery when they relocated in Guria during this period of Islamicization. D. Bak’radze, “Kavkaz v drevnikh pamiatnikakh kristianstva,” pp. 70-71, 130-133; Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, pp. 119, 289-290. Again the difference in the age of these two Zarzma churches, — the one in Samc’xe dating to the eleventh century, and the one in Guria to the end of the sixteenth (1572) — underscores the relative newness of Guria’s religious monuments.

34 See A. Bryer, “The Last Laz Risings and the Downfall of the Pontic Derebeys, 1812-1840,” BK, vol. XXVI (1969): 191-192. A rough equivalent in Georgian to derebe would be xevist avi. It should be emphasized that the process of conversion in Achara and Kobulet’i appears to have been slow. Thus, Bak’radze notes that in the time of Solomon I of Imereti’i (1752-1766, 1768-1784), a priest from the mountain village of Xino near the border of Guria and Achara (in Achara) left his parish and came to Guria because Islam was spreading into the Kintrishi valley. And by the second half of the nineteenth century, when Georgians like Dimitri Bak’radze showed a heightened interest in these lands, the population was clearly Muslim and speaking Turkish. D. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, pp. 300, 15-16.

Vaxushti writes his history of these larger processes not in these terms, of course, but through the idioms of loyalty and deceit. In his account of King Giorgi’s reign (1565-1585), Vaxushti depicts relations between the sovereigns in Western Georgia through marriage alliances made and betrayed, vengeance sought, and blood-price (sixili) paid. For their part, various Gurieli-s entered into alliances, first with the Dadiani of Odishi, then with King Giorgi, and finally with the Ottomans.\(^{36}\) In writing the history of Western Georgia, Vaxushti relies on various conventions for depicting expressions of loyalty and allegiances. Repeatedly he tells us that one sovereign displayed “great honor (didit’a pativit’\(\acute{\text{a}}\))” to another.\(^{37}\) The exchange of gifts frequently expressed this mutual regard for one another.\(^{38}\) Oaths also bound rulers,\(^{39}\) as did the giving of hostages,\(^{40}\) or just bribes (k’rt’ami), as was often the case between Western Georgian rulers and the Islamicized at’abagis of Same’xe.\(^{41}\) But the most powerful expression of obligation to a neighboring

\(^{36}\) Again, Vaxushti attributes the motivations of these actors to memories of deceit and the desire for vengeance for an offense suffered, as when Giorgi Dadiani abandoned his wife, the daughter of Rostom Gurieli. This act offended Rostom’s son, Giorgi, who in turn abandoned his wife, the daughter of Levan Dadiani (the father of Giorgi), and entered into an alliance with King Giorgi by marrying the king’s widowed aunt. This alliance compelled the Dadiani to flee to Turkey where he received troops from the sultan and threatened to conquer Guria. Consequently, Giorgi Gurieli sought peace with the Dadiani, who seeking blood vengeance demanded the payment of blood-price for abandoning his daughter. The Gurieli complied. So Vaxushti’s history proceeds.... *K’art’lis c’xovreba*, vol. 4: *Baalishvili Vaxushti, S. Qaurch’ishvili*, ed., pp. 815-816; *Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo*, pp. 236-237.

\(^{37}\) Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 872.10; *Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo*, p. 276. Or, again, Peter the Great received Arch’i1 (occasionally King of Imereti but from K’art’li) “with honor (pativit’\(\))” (p. 873.7; p. 277).

\(^{38}\) Examples of gift-giving include: *Ibid.*, pp. 836.23-25, 850.24-27, 852.6-8, 881.4-5; *Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo*, pp. 251, 261, 262, 282.


\(^{40}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 833.3, 844.5-6, 853.16-17, 863.5-6, 865.12-13; *Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo*, pp. 249, 256, 263, 269, 271.

ruler was secured through marriage alliances. These occur constantly in Vaxushti’s history, and their violation, as we have seen, incurred blood vengeance and threatened the greatest reprisals and social discord.

Indeed, while Vaxushti’s reliance on these conventions suggests that this idiom of loyalty and deceit was taken for granted by his readers, he seems most interested in recording how various actors tested and changed the rules. Several transgressions caught his eye. Among the Gurieli-s, Vaxushti reserves his greatest censure for Svimon Gurieli, who in 1625 murdered his father Mamia to become the new Gurieli, if only momentarily. Later in the century, Giorgi Gurieli, who ruled Imereti at the time, “angered God” by abandoning his wife and marrying the long sought-after Imereti Queen T’amar, his own mother-in-law. More subtly, Vaxushti notes how at the end of the seventeenth century Mamia Gurieli sought to place Svimon of Imereti on that throne and so forced him to abandon his wife, the daughter of Giorgi Abashidze, and marry his own sister. Offended by this transgression, Abashidze raised troops and told Mamia Gurieli to murder Svimon. Mamia did not wish to do this himself and so ordered others to do it for him. Hence, Svimon, having risen from bed to relieve himself, was murdered. Elsewhere beyond Guria, Svimon Abashidze invited King Giorgi of Imereti.

42 Marriage alliances abound in Vaxushti’s history as focal points of his narrative and catalysts for alliances while their violations served as pretexts for vengeance. Examples include, ibid., pp. 815.17-23, 842.18-24, 849.26-29, 871.1-4, 874.24-28, 877.22-24-878.1-4; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, pp. 236, 255, 260, 275, 278, 280.

43 Vaxushti is careful to note that Svimon murdered his father in his sleep, certainly a violation of the accepted rules for seeking vengeance or duelling. Vaxushti conveys the extraordinary scale of this transgression when he states that “God became enraged and [Svimon] killed his father” (“ganirissa ghmerti da mokla mama t’ws’i”). Fearing an alliance of Svimon Gurieli and King Giorgi against him and repelled by this crime, Levan Dadiani gathered troops and attacked Svimon, capturing and binding him, and installing K’aixosro as the new gurieli. Ibid., p. 826.25; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 244.

44 Ibid., p. 846.3-6; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 258.

to a feast (*nadimsa*) where Svimon’s servants murdered the king, seized the rest of the guests, and sold them into captivity.\(^{46}\)

Vaxushti portrays Levan Dadiani II (1611-1657) as an exemplar of deceitful conduct. He describes him as “evil, shrewd, proud, crafty, and vengeful.”\(^{47}\) All of these qualities imply an unpredictable, self-centered nature, in the sense that he would not have felt bound by custom or necessarily constrained by commonly-held values. He confirmed his disposition through several dishonorable, even heinous acts. For instance, having entered into an alliance with K`aixosro Gurieli, Levan continually ravaged Imereti, especially during holidays. Interestingly, to convey the unpredictability and therefore strangeness of this strategy, Vaxushti employs the convention whereby some “scoundrel” — a *paata cucksit’a* — is said to have prompted Levan to attack on the holidays, almost as if the devil whispered it in his ear.\(^{48}\) This same *Paata*, who was hated by Levan’s wife, accused her of adultery, prompting the Dadiani to seize her with her sons and blow them all out of a canon.\(^{49}\) But his greatest transgression was the allegedly unprecedented sale of captives. Following a battle between King Giorgi of Imereti and Levan Dadiani, at which Levan prevailed and took prisoner many grandees and common people, the same scoundrel (though designated simply as *cucksit’a*) advised Levan to force the captives to purchase their freedom with silver. From this time, Vaxushti claims, this practice took

\(^{46}\) Vaxushti acknowledges the scale of this transgression by giving the precise date of its occurrence in 1720. *Ibid.*, p. 880.12-15; *Istorii tsartsva gruzinskogo*, p. 282.


\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*, p. 828.5-7; *Istorii tsartsva gruzinskogo*, p. 245. Vaxushti reserves use of this ambiguous character, *paata cucksit’a*, for his account of Levan Dadiani and on a few other occasions. Nakashidze renders *cucksit’a* as *negodiia*, meaning “scoundrel.” *Cucki* means ignoble, base, and hence, dishonorable. This same *paata* appears again as the instigator for Levan’s attacks on Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter (p. 829.11-17; *Istorii tsartsva gruzinskogo*, p. 246).

root in Imereti.\textsuperscript{50} Shortly thereafter, Vxushti mentions another instance of this practice by which the Imeretians forced Megrel captives to purchase their freedom, indicating that a full-fledged trade in captives had begun involving sale to the “Tatars.” The number of raids and impropriety (ujeroca) in general increased in Imereti.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, Vxushti relates how one of Levan’s soldiers allegedly sold a captive to the “Muslims,” prompting the Catholicos (kat’alikoz) to invite him to a meal at which he served the Dadiani grilled dog because evidently for him “nothing was sacred” \textit{[ara ars aracminda].}\textsuperscript{52} Levan Dadiani’s capacity for deceit knew no bounds.\textsuperscript{53}

The character description of Levan Dadiani is more of an exception. In this world of frequent incursions and political fragmentation, Vxushti usually describes the various sovereign rulers in mixed terms, reflecting the myriad strategies engaged in by rulers to remain autonomous. Thus, the same Svimon Gurieli who killed his father, when

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 826.17-24; \textit{Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo}, p. 244. Following Brosset, I interchange the word slave and captive. As he notes, the Georgian word t’qve that is generally used by Vxushti means a captive or prisoner of war: someone deprived of their freedom by force of arms, whether by armies coming from outside the Georgian lands or by rulers of one or another polity within the Georgian realm. More importantly, he asserts that this practice was sanctioned by “the mores [moeurs] of the country,” and that generally in Imereti, Samegrelo, and Guria proprietors would sell even their own vassals to generate revenue. M.-F. Brosset, \textit{Histoire de la Géorgie depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au XIXe siècle. Introduction de tables de matières} (SPB: L’Académie impériale des sciences, 1858): lxxxiii.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 828.10-13; \textit{Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo}, p. 245.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 829, fn. 1; \textit{Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo}, p. 246, fn. 1. Vxushti ends the anecdote by saying the Dadiani took offense at the kat’alikoz’ gesture and purchased the captive (t’qve) from Istanbul and punished the soldier involved. But he did not cease to sell those in bondage.

\textsuperscript{53} Vxushti makes this point explicitly when he states that: Levan “did not fear God,” imprisoning and ruining Christians, and therefore, he received his recompense from God and died in 1657. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 832.18-20; \textit{Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo}, p. 248. It should be added that in his more recent history, Alexandre Manvelichvili depicts Levan as a powerful ruler who “modernized” Samegrelo through the creation of a currency, a “national industry,” and trade with Persia and Turkey, though he opposed together with King Rostom of K’art’li the “national aspirations” embodied in the alliance between King T’eimuraz of Kaxet’i and Giorgi IV of Imereti. Levan and Rostom stood for the Persian cause; therefore, the Ottomans supported Giorgi and later Alek’sandre of Imereti and succeeded in ravaging Samegrelo and killing Levan’s son. According to Manvelichvili, Levan killed himself on his son’s tomb, an act which must explain Vxushti’s reference to “recompense from God.” A. Manvelichvili, \textit{Histoire de Géorgie}, pp. 304-305.
confronting the malicious Levan Dadiani in battle, is described as “powerful, valiant, courageous,” all apparent positive qualities of a fully autonomous individual and ruler.\textsuperscript{54} More typical of the times was a mixture of attributes like those of Giorgi Gurieli, who had the unfortunate fate of falling in love with the Imeret’ian king’s wife; he also engaged in the trade of captives. Giorgi was “powerful, courageous, an outstanding marksmen, impious, blood-thirsty, and a merciless seller of captives.”\textsuperscript{55} In addition to Levan Dadiani, those embodying negative attributes, like the Bishop Svimon K’ut’a’t’eli, were sellers-of-captives, godless, and “sworn criminals” (literally “deceitful oath-maker,” c’re-p’ic’i), even murderers, fornicators, and lovers-of-silver.\textsuperscript{56} These character deficiencies epitomize the attributes of the deceitful individual insofar as they convey a sense of unpredictability, defiance of communal beliefs and values, self-centeredness, and simple moral weakness. These qualities would have diminished the capacity of a given ruler to assert his autonomy by standing beyond the control of others and by winning loyalty through acts of generosity and steadfast valor.

What strikes the reader about this history is the inerminable cycles of violence associated with efforts to preserve autonomy. Similarly, it highlights the ways in which changes in structural factors — like increasing Ottoman, Persian, and, later, Russian encroachment — generate alterations in strategies to uphold loyalty. This is particularly

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 827.8; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 245. Similarly, Vaxushhi lists the attributes of Mamuka, the brother of King Alek’sandre of Imeret’i and foe of Levan Dadiani, as “powerful, manly, handsome, agile, and very courageous” (p. 830.16-18; p. 247).

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 840.18; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 253. Other individuals exemplifying positive and negative attributes include a confidant of Levan Dadiani, Kac’ia Ch’ik’ovani (p. 842.16-17; p. 255), and King Alek’sandre of Imeret’i, who in addition to being manly, brave, and generous was also “dissolute, an idler, shameless, and a seller-of-captives” (p. 857.15-17; p. 266).

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 851.6-7; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 261. See also the description of Giorgi Lip’arit’iani (p. 851.16-17; p. 262), and Gabriel Chqondideli (p. 883.2-3; p. 283). Added to this list of generic character flaws was also the greed (angaari, vec’ismqoquare) of King Giorgi VI of the early-eighteenth century (p. 870.22-24; p. 275). Vaxushhi claims that these deficiencies in Giorgi caused several dynastic families in Imeret’i to replace him with Mamia Gurieli as king, who ruled for a year in 1711-1712.
true of the seventeenth century. Over the span of this century Western Georgia gradually
descended into a state of civil war that lasted well into the eighteenth century (1661-
1721). According to Vaxushti, the apparent breakdown in order plunged the region into a
period of moral depravity, which received its most explicit expression in the
intensification of internecine warfare, particularly between dynastic houses in and
between Samegrelo and Imereti, and in the massive growth of the slave trade. We have
seen how he alleges that Levan Dadiani began the ignoble practice of forcing ordinary
captives to purchase their freedom with silver.\textsuperscript{57} By mid-seventeenth century, Vaxushti
believed Western Georgia had attained an unprecedented level of depravity, epitomized
by the slave-trade, enough to prompt him to make general comments about the deplorable
situation in Imereti and Odishi.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} Vaxushti knows full well that Levan did not begin the general practice of forcing prestigious captives,
that is, rulers and their kin, to purchase their freedom, but this was usually conducted between one or
another ruler of a Georgian-Christian polity and a non-Christian ruler, like the Ottomans, the at‘abagi of
Samek‘xe, or the Circassians among other of the mountain peoples who occasionally raided the lands of
Western Georgia. See, for example, the incident in 1532, when Rostom Gurieli had to purchase his father
Mamia from the “Jik‘et‘i-s”. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 811.5-14; \textit{Istoriiia isartsva gruzinskogo}, pp. 232-233. Furthermore,
already in antiquity, a trade in slaves from the eastern littoral of the Black Sea was established and
continued in the medieval period under the Genoese and then the Ottomans. What seemed to disturb
Vaxushti and travellers through the region was the scale of the slave-trade in the seventeenth century that
involved the sale of captives to the “Tatars” or Muslim Turks as well as the apparently new practice
whereby a ruler of one Georgian land forced captives from another Georgian land to purchase their
freedom. During his tenure as Habsburg ambassador to the Ottoman court in the mid-sixteenth century,
Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (who never travelled to the Georgian lands) remarked on how the practice of
thieving in Samegrelo was apparently “held in high esteem” to such an extent that only those not skilled in
this art, who are “looked upon as degenerate and hopeless by his brothers, and even by his father,” are
often sold into captivity. \textit{The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq}, Edward S. Forster, trans.
Procopius, \textit{History of the Wars}, V.iii.16-17, pp. 80-81; David Braund and G.R. Tsetskhladze, “The Export
[Janashia], pp. 78-79. For the early modern period, in addition to Busbecq, see the fifteenth-century
accounts of Josafa (Giosofat) Barbaro and M. Ambrosio Contarini in \textit{Travels to Tana and Persia}, William
Thomas, trans., and Lordy Stanley of Alderly, ed. (New York: Burt Franklin Publishers, 1964): 90-91, 117-
118; E.S. Zevakin and N.A. Penchko, “Ocherki po istorii genuezskikh kolonii na zapadnom Kavkaze v
XIII i XV vv;” \textit{IZ} 3 (1938): 91-94.

\textsuperscript{58} Already at the beginning of the seventeenth century, he notes that the principal members of the clergy in
Western Georgia assembled to define punishments for the transgressions that they noticed with increasing
alarm and to anathematize any and all who committed acts of murder, the banishment of women, and the
The descent into civil war and the escalation of the slave-trade constitute studies in themselves and, unfortunately, cannot occupy the space they warrant in this study.\textsuperscript{59} Rather, the central issue for this study pertains to how historical change affected strategies to uphold autonomy and inspire loyalty among the subjects of Georgian dynasts. Clearly, the stronger Ottoman military presence and an increase in the demand for slaves (as tribute and otherwise) during the seventeenth century reinforced the political fragmentation that received official sanction among Georgian sovereigns in the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{60} The social dislocation wrought by the civil war also would have

\textsuperscript{59} The central issue spawning a larger struggle in Western Georgia was the instability of the Imereti\'an throne following the death of King Alek\'sandre in 1660. The aspirations of the Muxtranian rulers of K\'art\'li to rule Imereti\'i exacerbated this instability, as did the ploys of the powerful dynastic families in Imereti\'i to install their own candidates, and the constant meddling by the Ottomans. Between 1661 and 1711 no fewer than sixteen people held the throne, including Demetre Gurieli (1668), Giorgi Gurieli III (1681-1682), Mamia Gurieli III (briefly in 1701, 1711-1712, and 1714), and Giorgi Gurieli IV (for three months in 1716). Allen, \textit{History of the Georgian People}, p. 178, fn. 1. For the Gurieli-s, \textit{K\'art\'lis c\'oxvreba}, vol. 4, pp. 839, 845-847, 862, 874-878; \textit{Istorii\a tsarts\va gruzinskogo}, pp. 253, 257-258, 269, 275-280. A detailed and lucid, English-language history of the civil war in Western Georgia still awaits its historian. Those who have ventured into the murky waters of this period have been quick to withdraw. Allen, \textit{History of the Georgian People}, p. 178; Henry J. Armani, \textit{The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia, 1800-1815: In the Light of Russo-Ottoman Relations}, Ph.D. dissertation (Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1970): 12, fn. 32, and p. 21; D.M. Lang, \textit{Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy}, pp. 53, 105. Also Manvelichvili, \textit{Histoire de G\'eorgie}, p. 306; and \textit{Istorii\a Gruzii}, vol. 1, S. Dzhanashia [Janashia], ed., pp. 373-378.

\textsuperscript{60} On the different sources of demand for slaves in the Ottoman Empire see Y. Hakan Erdem, \textit{Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800-1909} (NY: St. Martin\'s Press, 1996): 1-55. He writes that until 1600, the enslavement of captives of war was the single greatest source of slaves in the empire and that this practice continued up to the 1828-1829 Russo-Ottoman War. In addition, as noted by classical sources (see note above), kidnapping especially among the Laz was a regular source of slaves (pp. 44-46). He has nothing to say about the payment of slaves by the Western Georgian rulers as tribute to the Ottomans, though he acknowledges this as a prominent source of slaves elsewhere. More controversial and pertinent to the discussion at hand are his remarks on the "abandonment and sale of children" by their parents seeking to find a better situation for them. He notes, however, that this was not an extensive practice until the Circassians migrated into the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century (pp. 48-52). Still, as a reflection of how little the topic of the Georgian slave-trade has been investigated, I would argue
spurred on the trade in slaves as serfs faced disrupted crop cycles and nobles pressed demands. What is more difficult to explain is how this development and others — like the more prominent role of the Russians in the region, the intensification of the Persian-Ottoman rivalry, and problems of reproducing the royal line in Imereti — engendered a turn to the apparently ignominious trade in captives as construed by Vaxushhti and others. What becomes clear from the sources is that eventually individuals from all social strata of society, including the clergy themselves, took part in this trade. To be sure, as noted above, it may have been seen as an accepted social custom, but the scale that the trade achieved in the seventeenth century and the increase in the apparently arbitrary seizure of “captives” outside of battle demand a more detailed explanation. All that can be offered here is that the internecine warfare and the factors listed above fostered a downward cycle of economic production and disintegration that sanctioned an increase in the trade in captives, meaning not just captives of war, but also victims of kidnapping and other

that this practice was probably quite extensive in the seventeenth century given the political turmoil and consequent economic and social dislocation in the region.


62 One of the most outstanding foreign critics of the slave-trade in seventeenth-century Western Georgia was Jean de Chardin, who appeared in Samegrelo in the midst of the civil war (1672-1673). He recounts a story that exemplifies the lengths to which individuals would go to turn this trade to their own ends. He claims that a certain individual in “Mingrelia” sought to marry a woman with whom he was in love despite the fact that he was already married. In order to procure the sum of money needed to fund his wedding to this woman, he invited twelve priests to his home to serve a mass and offer a sacrifice...themselves as it turned out. After the mass and the slaughter of an ox, the host fed his guests at a lavish feast where they took a “Hearty Cup,” at which point the host had his servants seize them, shave their heads, and sell them into captivity to the Turks. But because he still did not have sufficient money for his wedding, he sold his wife to make up the difference. Chardin, The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies, p. 90. See also Bernardo Maria, “Courte relation du commencement, du progres et de l’état de la Mission géorgienne, écrite par ordre du très-révérend P. Séraphin de Mélicocca, capucin, préfet de la même Mission, par le P. Bernardo Maria, Napolitain, missionnaire en Géorgie, aux éminentissimes cardinaux de la sacrée congrégation de propaganda fide,” Translated from Latin by M.-F. Brosset, Nouveau journal asiatique vol. 10 (Septembre 1832): 193-218; originally published in 1672; and W.E.D. Allen, History of the Georgian People, pp. 282-288. Allen stresses the massive proportions of this trade from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century and calls for a more detailed study of this forced trade on the ethnography of the Middle East (p. 284).
coercive seizures.\textsuperscript{63} It should be remembered that the sale of serfs was already sanctioned by law, though the Church unsuccessfully prohibited the sale of serfs to Muslims under the threat of severe penalties.\textsuperscript{64} A deterioration in social, political, and economic relations apparently blurred the boundary between the sale of serfs and captives.\textsuperscript{65} Chardin intimates how this kind of transgression could have transpired within the paradigm of what the participants perceived as honorable conduct. He mentions that “They [the Mingrelians] Study Opportunities to fall out with their own Vassals, meerly to find a Pretence to Sell ‘em, with their Wives and Children.”\textsuperscript{66} This observation suggests that those seeking to sell their vassals or someone else sought a pretext, generated within the realm of honor and offense, that would give them license to realize their ambition. Accordingly, to sell one’s vassals or to seize another’s children without such a pretext would apparently have constituted a transgression in the eyes of the community. At the same time, the Italian Capuchin missionary, Father Bernardo Maria, indicates that the poorest members of Samegrelo, Guria, or Imeret’i could use the slave-trade to seek

\textsuperscript{63} For a brief but poignant description of this downward cycle see Istorya Gruzii, vol. I, S. Janashia (Dzhanashia), ed., pp. 373-378. Chardin claims that the trade produced up to 12,000 captives per year out of Samegrelo at the time of his visit and that the export of slaves constituted the chief source of revenue over silk, linen, hides, honey, and other products. Later, he mentions that as tributaries of the sultan, the politie of Western Georgia sent 7,000-8,000 slaves per year. Surely these figures are exaggerated, but they indicate the scale of the trade. Chardin, The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies, pp. 89-90, 106. Jean Baptista Tavernier, the French noble merchant and traveller who made six trips to the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia between the years 1631-1667 but who never actually visited Western Georgia, recounts how the Dadiani’s ambassador came to Istanbul when Tavernier was there with a suite of more than two hundred individuals. During the course of his visit he sold two or three persons per day in order to defray costs. Tavernier, The Six Voyages of John Baptista Tavernier, p. 125.


\textsuperscript{65} Avaliaani, Krest’ianskii vopros v Zakavkaz’e, vol. I: Krepotnoe pravo i istoriia krest’ianskoi reformy, pp. 4-7. Avaliaani notes that the sale of serfs in general soared in the course of the eighteenth century, with the Church taking an active part, and ended only in the 1820s (pp. 46-48).

\textsuperscript{66} Chardin, The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies, p. 90.
vengeance on brutal landlords by selling themselves and their children into bondage for the most modest wages. 67

The slave-trade represents a critical era in the history of Western Georgia and challenges the scholar to examine its practice on its own terms, in the light of strategies to uphold the autonomy of all households in the region. Few would dispute that the slave-trade reflects an epoch of political fragmentation, economic decline, social disintegration, and even moral dissolution. If autonomy of polity and person was most highly valued, the slave-trade sought to deprive its victims of that autonomy by stripping them of property and often family, and forcibly removing them from the community. On the other hand, studies of slavery in the Ottoman Empire indicate that selling one’s children might well have occurred in order to provide them with a better livelihood and hence greater autonomy. 68 It may be easy to agree with Chardin in his moral condemnation of the trade, but moral condemnation explains little about how the trade operated as a strategy to uphold one’s livelihood and social status amidst prolonged upheaval. Furthermore, all too easily, moral condemnation later turned into historical and ethnographic narratives that clearly sought to place the inhabitants of Western Georgia among the “barbarians,” hopelessly captive to their Muslim neighbors and the latter’s character flaws. Thus, citing Chardin as a source for his history of the region, Edward Gibbon wrote a narrative that severed the “Mingrelians” from their legendary past. “Not a vestige can be found of the art, the knowledge, or the navigation of the ancient Colchians.” Describing the Mingrelians of his day, Gibbon wrote:

67 Bernardo Maria, “Courte relation du commencement, du progrès et de l’état de la Mission géorgienne,” p. 197. On the other hand, Tavernier asserts that a strategy employed by those who had beautiful daughters and wished to save them from the slave-trade was to place them in a nunnery. Tavernier, The Six Voyages of John Baptiste Tavernier, p. 124.

68 See, for example, Y. Hakan Erdem, Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800-1909 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).
...the exercise of fraud or rape is unpunished in a lawless community; and the market is continually replenished by the abuse of civil and paternal authority. Such a trade, which reduces the human species to the level of cattle, may tend to encourage marriage and population; since the multitude of children enriches their sordid and inhuman parent. But this source of impure wealth must inevitably poison the national manners, obliterate the sense of honour and virtue, and almost extinguish the instincts of nature: the Christians of Georgia and Mingrelia are the most dissolute of mankind...  

Despite this sweeping judgment of the Mingrelians and Georgians, Gibbon notes that these lands produced the most beautiful specimens of the human race and that however ignorant, the inhabitants continued to display "a singular dexterity both of mind and hand" and "a bold and intrepid spirit."  

More significant for the region, the kind of character judgment formulated by Chardin and imposed by Gibbon found expression in Russian accounts through the nineteenth century, the effect of which was to perpetuate an essentialist image of the natives that forever cast them in the light of ignorant and fallen Orientals, but Christian, even if in name only, and thereforeredeemable.  

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69 Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, J.B. Bury, ed., vol. II (New York: Heritage Press, 1946): 1381-1382; italics in original. Gibbon's appraisal merely echoed Chardin's judgment, which was derived in large part from his encounter with the Theatin missionary, Don Maria Joseph Zampi, who had already lived in Western Georgia for twenty-three years at the time Chardin met him in October 1672. Upon meeting the missionary, Zampi exclaimed to Chardin: "Sir,...God forgive those People that advis'd ye to come this way, the Mischief they have done ye. You are come into the most Wicked and Barbarous Country i' the World; and the best Course you can take is to return back to Constantinople with the first Opportunity." Unfamiliar with Meqruil, Chardin states that he relied largely on the manuscript Zampi had written about religion among the Megrels and which he presented to Chardin as a gift. He characterized Zampi's perceptions of the Megrels thus: "The Mingrelians, says he, are fall'n into the profoundest Abyss of Ignorance and Darkness, that the Understanding of Man was ever plung'd in: in regard the people have not the least Idea of Faith or Religion...." This leads Chardin to conclude: "And this, I believe, may suffice to shew that there is not the least shadow of Religion among the Mingrelians." Chardin, The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies, quotations on pp. 112 and 93, respectively.  

70 Ibid., p. 1382.  

71 Chardin's vision of the Megrels and Western Georgian inhabitants in general finds a clear voice, for example, in the general survey of Western Georgia written in the mid-nineteenth century by Captain Lavrent'ev, Statisticheskiiia opisaniiia gubernii i oblastei rossiiskoi imperii, vol. XVI: Kavkazskii krai, part
remainder of this study especially as it became interwoven into Russia’s civilizing mission in the nineteenth century. In contrast to the severe character judgment of Chardin and others stands the testimony of another Italian missionary, Dionijo Carli, who visited the Georgian lands in the 1680s and wrote: “It is most amazing that despite all the difficulties endured by the wars,...[and] despite the fact that their country is surrounded by hostile and Muslim countries, the Georgians dare to manifest this astonishing firmness and steadfastness, thanks to which they have preserved their Christian faith. Without a doubt this evokes admiration.” Suggesting a more nuanced view toward these inhabitants, Carli asserted that they “rule their country with such art and refined politics that even Machiavelli himself would not be able to manage.”

Thus, in response to the question of why the rulers of the Georgian lands did not unite during this period and instead perpetuated the division of the realm, the historian Giorgi Paichadze argues that some rulers in fact sought co-operation but that “extremely trying concrete conditions and the extremely complex, one might say, near hopeless situation” prevented such efforts from bearing fruition. That is, in the calculus to preserve autonomy, division prevailed over unity, and the exigencies imposed by the prolonged struggle for control over this borderland zone demanded participation in the slave trade. By the late-eighteenth century, the trade in slaves became interwoven into the Russian ideology of incorporation, symbolizing one of the most prominent practices that depopulated the Georgian lands and allegedly nearly rendered the Georgian population extinct.

But in the course of the eighteenth century, before the permanent incursion of the Russians, circumstances changed and political stability returned temporarily to Western


73 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
Georgia. In particular, with Ottoman support King Alek’sandre V (1721-1740, 1741-1752) stabilized the Imeret’ian throne, and the collapse of the Safavid dynasty granted the Ottomans temporary suzerainty over all the Georgian lands (1723-1735). Alek’sandre’s successors, Kings Solomon I (1752-1784) and Solomon II (1789-1810) took the initiative to create alliances with their neighbors, including the kings of K’art’li and Kaxet’i, to subvert Ottoman hegemony. A crucial aspect of this period is the role played by the Russians, the theme of the next chapter. In brief, until the final two decades of the eighteenth century, the Russian presence remained weak, erratic, and directed mainly at Eastern Georgia; therefore, the rulers of the Western Georgian domains had to rely on their own time-tested acumen to preserve autonomy through expedient alliances.74 Thus, after banning the slave trade upon ascending the throne, Solomon I faced the threat of an Ottoman invasion. In 1757, together with Mamia IV Gurieli and Kac’ia Dadiani of Samegrelo, he defeated a Turkish force allied to members of the Abashidze clan at the Battle of Xresili.75 He then turned to Kings Erekle II of Kaxet’i and T’eimuraz II of

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74 Throughout the eighteenth century the Russians would consistently concede hegemony over Western Georgia to Turkey. This posture was exemplified by the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca that settled the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774. Although the Russians were the victors in the war and removed the Turks from most of Western Georgia as part of their first campaign in the region (marking the first time Russian troops crossed the Daryal Gorge), Article 23 of the treaty stipulated that Russia cede back to the Ottomans control of all fortresses seized during the war. Subsequently, even as Potemkin pursued a more aggressive policy in Eastern Georgia, orchestrating the famous Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783 that extended Russian protection over the united Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i, Russia refrained from taking similar actions in Western Georgia and refused to meet the requests of King Solomon II and his fellow sovereigns for Russian protection. G. Veshapeli, *Edinstvo Gruzii i russkii protektorat* (Moscow: Tip. Ia.G. Sazonova, 1917): 9; Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretiia,” pp. 133-139, 169-170; Kortua [K’ort’ua], *Russko-geuzinskie vzaimootmosheniiia,* pp. 102, 128-130, 191, 197, 201-202, 205, 290-291; Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya: XVIII yuzil sonundan kurtulus savasina kadar Türk-Rus Isikleri* (1798-1919) (Ankara: Ankara universitesi basimevi, 1970): 27-35. As Armani asserts: “[T]he Empire never seriously entertained the idea of using drastic measures in Imeretia until it was compelled to do so because of Solomon II’s arrogance,” which became manifest in 1794 (p. 163).

K’art’li and signed a pact of mutual assistance in times of war. A year later in 1759, he convened a council of leaders from the Church and principalities of Western Georgia, including those of Mamia Gurieli and Kac’ia Dadiani, in which all the princes signed an agreement upholding the ban on the slave-trade and pledging unity against Ottoman aggression. Most significantly, in 1790 the chief sovereigns of the Georgian lands — Erekle, Solomon, Grigol Dadiani, and Sviron Gurieli — signed a broader agreement of solidarity that granted Erekle the power to conduct foreign relations on their behalf, especially with regard to Russia.

Nonetheless, as dramatic as these efforts were towards forging a unity within Western Georgia and more broadly through the Georgian lands, a unity committed to the ban of the slave-trade and undermining Ottoman control in the west, both the Gurieli-s and Dadianis remained steadfast in upholding their autonomy. Indeed, whatever pledges they might have made to Solomon, Mamia Gurieli and Levan Dadiani refused to participate in the siege of P’ot’i during the Russo-Ottoman war and even provided aid to the Ottoman troops in the fortress. In 1782 Solomon I marched into Guria to subdue the recalcitrant Sviron Gurieli who at that time was allied with the Ottomans. A coalition of Gurian and Ottoman troops defeated Solomon, who retreated to Imeret’i where he

76 Solomon renewed this pact with Erekle in 1773 following the Russian campaign in Western Georgia during the Russo-Turkish War, 1768-1774. Veshapeli, Edinstvo Gruzii, p. 8.


78 The agreement is reproduced in Veshapeli, Edinstvo Gruzii, pp. 31-33.

79 Rextviashvili, Imeret’is samep’o, p. 239; K’ort’ua, Russko-gruzinskie vzaimootnosheniia, pp. 123-124; Butkov, Materialy, vol. I, p. 284, fn. 1. Throughout the war, as attested in Russian correspondence and other documents, Russian officials were concerned about the persistent discord between Solomon and his fellow sovereigns in Western Georgia. Cf. Masalebi XVIII saukunis, pp. 471, 481-483; Güldenstädt, Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie, pp. 369-370.
allegedly suffered a fit of apoplexy and died a short time later.⁸⁰ Solomon II faced another coalition that included the Gurieli and Dadiani shortly after all signed the 1790 pact.⁸¹ In the wake of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, when Russia again withdrew from the region and ceded control of Western Georgia to the Ottomans, the Turks could not uniformly reassert their hegemony, much less conquer the region outright.⁸² At best, they rendered support to the Abashidzes who consistently sought to undermine the two Solomons, especially during the succession crisis that brought the young Solomon II to power. Similarly, despite his intentions and pronouncements, Solomon II was too besieged by dynastic families within his own realm to enforce hegemony over Guria.⁸³ The Gurieli-s might profess subservience to Solomon as a strategy to win Russian support, but given Catherine’s reluctance to engage in the affairs of Western Georgia, they were just as quick to uphold their autonomy with aid from the Ottomans or atabegs of Axalc‘ixe. Given this haphazard and changing political configuration, Guria floated as an autonomous principality amidst contending polities — the Ottomans, who actually ruled part of Guria, Imeret’i, Samegrelo, К’арт’ли-Kaxet’i, and, now, Russia.

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II. Gurians in the Borderland Zone

Thus far, the discussion has focused on the political alliances forged across several centuries in Western Georgia. I have emphasized how they were made, sustained, and broken. I have also stressed how they in no way conformed to strict religious identities. The practices included the use of oaths, marriages, military assistance, and feasts. The dynastic families that made such alliances were expected to display generosity, courage, and martial prowess. By contrast, selfishness, greediness, craftiness, and "ungodliness" were among the negative character traits that marked unpredictable behavior and hence lack of trustworthiness and a short-lived commitment to an alliance. Finally, I have underscored the extreme volatility of political alignments in light of Ottoman encroachment, the growing tensions between the Ottomans and Safavids, and eventually the appearance of the Russians. This exposition has mostly chronicled the behavior of dynastic families, the elites, in their dealings across political boundaries. I now take a closer look at the structure of dynastic rule in Guria itself.

Blurred Boundaries

During this prolonged period of upheaval and political fragmentation a more vivid picture emerges of Gurian society that highlights how self-help or survival strategies underlay the the principality's autonomy and social order. At issue in developing this perspective is how autonomy of family and social status were preserved in the face of blurred territorial boundaries and shifting tributary relations with outside powers. That is, on the face of it, Guria's highly vulnerable existence as an autonomous principality in a borderland region generated a series of blurred boundaries, both physical and, to an extent, social and cultural. The change in territorial boundaries is most obvious even if difficult to define precisely. What stands out from an examination of this period of Ottoman hegemony is that no strictly delineated physical border existed between the
Gurieli’s domains and the Ottoman Empire. This boundary would be more clearly
delineated under Russian rule in the 1830s both as a geographical and ideological border.
Rather, it seems that by virtue of their control of key fortresses and the tribute paid to the
Ottomans from local lords in southern Guria, like the T’avdgiridze clan, the Turks
extended their rule more over subjects than territory per se; or that they controled
territory through the allegiance of the inhabitants.84 More elusive was the change in
cultural affiliations that came with the gradual Islamicization of the southern regions, a
process that entailed not just a conversion to Islam but also a slow appropriation of the
Turkish language.85 Well into the nineteenth century commentators observed how even
Gurians living in “Russian” Guria displayed a number of Ottoman customs and donned
Ottoman garb.86 Ottoman currency was the common currency of exchange long into the

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84 This contention needs more research to clarify it, but I make it here based on the vagueness with which
chroniclers and scholars like Vaxushti defined Guria’s borders. I also follow Peter Sahlins who remarks
that sovereignty in medieval and early-modern Europe was asserted over subjects more than territory. Cf.

85 To be sure, the encroachment of the Ottomans must have sparked in some inhabitants a steadfast defense
of their Christian faith. We have seen how Ottoman control of Samec’xe in the sixteenth century caused
some families to flee Zarzma to Guria. A. C’agareli (Tsagareli) claims that many inhabitants of the
pashalik of Axalc’ixe resisted conversion by binding themselves with rope and jumping into the sea. He
cites no sources for this event nor does he disclose any of the circumstances surrounding it. “Guria,”
these manifestations of Christian defiance, it seems clear that the vast majority of inhabitants who
eventually fell under Ottoman rule accommodated themselves to their new overlords by conversion. In
1873 D. Bak’radze observed that those Gurians who were living in “Turkish Guria” including parts of
Achara still spoke a Gurian dialect of Georgian but Turkish was quickly supplanting Georgian. On the
general acculturation of the inhabitants, see Arkeologicheskoe pubeshstvie, pp. 15, 21, 38-39, 44-45. See
also Güldenstädt, Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie, pp. 326, 371; and V.Ia. Lisovskii,

86 Cf. I. Dunkel’-Velling, “Iz zapisok o Gurii,” Kavkaz no. 10 (5 Feb., 1854): 38-40; N. Dubrovin, Istoriiia
voiny i vladychestva russikh na Kavkaze, vol. I: Ocherk Kavkaza i narodov ego naseliatiuschikh, book II:
century as well, indicating how much the economic life of the principality was oriented to the south.\textsuperscript{87}

At the same time, among Guria’s Christian population, syncretism prevailed. Christian faith and rituals manifesting that faith were infused with non-Christian beliefs and folk practices. In his chronicle of how Gurians celebrated certain holidays through the year, a school inspector from Gori, T. Mamaladze, records numerous folk beliefs that animated Christian piety. Lightning was a manifestation of St. Giorgi’s lance (laxvari) or sword (mexi) killing one of the innumerable evil spirits inhabiting the mountains and valleys of their land. Each parish possessed its most powerful icon to be used to ward off curses or prevent illness. The icon of St. Giorgi called the “Lomis-kareli” icon found in a church in the region of Surebi was considered the most powerful icon in Guria. As part of the celebration of the New Year, Gurians sang a song to “Aguna” who was the protector of their vineyards. Illness required divination through the mediation of a sorceress. Belief in witchcraft was rampant as was fear of being caught by the evil eye that could harm human, livestock, crops, even armaments. During the celebration of “Dadegi” or the traditional new year commemorated on September first, Gurians fired guns the night before this holiday to scare away witches. In Guria the khinjali or dagger was the best weapon against all impure powers apparently because it was double-edged unlike sabers whose flat end could harbor such spirits. Primarily agriculturalists, the Gurians performed all kinds of rituals to protect their crops and livestock.\textsuperscript{88} Indeed,


\textsuperscript{88} T. Mamaladze, “Narodnye obychai i pover’ia guritsev,” \textit{SMOMPK} 17 (1893): 23, 26, 34, 66-67, 106-109, 112-113. See also Noe Zhordania’s memoirs in which the future president of Georgia (1918-1921)
viewed in the context of this cosmology of folklore and Christian faith, the religious world of Gurians appears more pliable serving immediate needs rather than doctrinal ones demarcating distinct cultural boundaries.

As discussed in the introduction, the wide dispersal of homesteads blurred the boundaries between villages and, indeed, between the human and natural worlds. Guria (and Western Georgia at large) was characterized by isolated households dispersed through the thick forests and loosely organized as settlements. This point is fundamental to understanding why the Ottomans would have been averse to extending their rule over this region. As the traveler Jean Chardin asserted in the late-seventeenth century about the configuration of homesteads in Samegrelo (Odishi), “the People live scatter’d upon and down the Country, so that where-ever the Turks should build their Fortresses, they would not be able to Command, within their reach, above Seven or Eight Houses.”89 In a report to Count Panin at the beginning of General Todtleben’s infamous campaign in Western Georgia during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, Prince Mouravov wrote that villages in King Solomon’s realm consisted of few households spread five or ten versts (approximately three to seven miles) through thick forests so that in actuality the king did not possess distinct settlements. As a consequence, he wrote that the Turks occupied four places in his kingdom (K’ut’atisi, Shorapani, Baghdad’ti, and C’uc’xvat’i), which supports Chardin’s observation about the difficulties of ruling such a landscape.90

In his description of the Kingdom of Imereti’ti (which extended to Samegrelo and Guria),

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Vaxushti remarks: "Except for a few places, from the forest the charm of the country is not apparent before one's eyes, for when seen from the height of a mountain all of Imeret'i appears as a dense forest without habitation."\(^91\) In the Russian period, observers continually commented on the isolated and concealed homesteads of Guria and surrounding regions.\(^92\) Writing about Samegrelo the great historian of the Russian conquest, Nikolai Dubrovin, echoed Vaxushti's observation and harkened back to the time of Colchis stating that if the landscape appeared simply as uninhabited forest, upon closer look one saw a forest covered with vineyards and fruit orchards concealing the dispersed homesteads of its inhabitants in a kind of "poetic chaos."\(^93\) In a more systematic appraisal of the economy of Guria, D. Nosovich distinguished Guria above all other regions by the separation of its homesteads which he asserted had no relation to any "village." Furthermore, he remarked that each homestead possessed individual strips of land often separated from one another by miles. Not exactly an orchard, a vineyard, garden, or ploughed field, the household combined all these together; houses were often overgrown by various nut trees and grapevines.\(^94\) While the isolation of homesteads accentuated their independence or autonomy as distinct economic and social units and

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\(^{93}\) N. Dubrovin, Istoriia voiny i vladychestva russikh na Kavkaze, vol. I: Ocherk Kavkaza i narodov ego naseliaishchikh, book II: Zakavkaza, p. 215. Dubrovin adds, "The Imeretian, just like the Mingrelian and Guria, loves space [prostor] and wants to have at hand near his house the ploughed field, grape vines, mulberry, and fruit trees" (p. 217).

manifested a defensive posture against incursions, they also demonstrated the blurred boundaries between households and between households and settlements.

As suggested, this investigation of the physical distribution of homesteads raises a larger question pertaining to the nature of Ottoman hegemony and, later, Russian rule of the region during the first several decades of the nineteenth century. In particular, the question that arises in this cursory examination of Guria’s political survival during the prolonged period of Ottoman dominance is why the Ottomans did not just conquer the principality and Western Georgia as a whole. During the short-lived period of Ottoman rule in Eastern Georgia following the collapse of the Safavid Dynasty, they sought (somewhat unsuccessfully) to execute direct rule of K’art’li and Kaxet’i through the dissolution of kingship and the appointment of administrators loyal to their empire.

In Western Georgia they were close enough to perpetuate the divisions between polities through support rendered to one candidate or another vying for power and yet they did not control outright the results of this power struggle. How are we to understand Ottoman influence and intentions? Interestingly, D.M. Lang postulates that the “Ottoman government could probably have annexed the country outright, but preferred to keep it as a sort of nursery for slaves and for women for the sultan’s seraglio,” all the more so since Islamic law forbade the enslavement of non-Muslims living under direct Ottoman (Islamic) rule.\textsuperscript{95} At the same time, Kirzioglu speculates that, at least initially, the Ottomans shunned direct rule because of their low estimation of the inhabitants’ mores, while also acknowledging the burdens of endemic piracy.\textsuperscript{96} Both views suggest that the Ottomans perhaps could have but chose not to incorporate this region directly into the empire.

\textsuperscript{95} Lang, \textit{Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy}, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{96} Kirzioglu, \textit{Osmanlılar’ın Kafkas-Alleri’ni Fethi}, pp. 9, 12.
While these views deserve greater scrutiny, this historical study emphasizes that the Ottomans were unable to extend direct rule over the region for the same reasons that the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines (and the K`art`velians) before them could not. Simply stated, it was too burdensome because of the natural conditions — including dense forests, mountains, and the malaria-infested coastline — and because they did not have the resources to sustain a sufficient military presence. Indeed, until the nineteenth century, the Sublime Porte devolved power to the local derebeyler or valley lords in the Pontic region of eastern Anatolia, who ruled as virtually independent lords.97 Despite the presence of a nominal Ottoman military presence in Western Georgia, successive sultans found it more expedient to exert their will in the region through the pashas of Axalc`ixe and Erzurum. While this exposition of the latitude exercised by local rulers underscores the specific political culture that prevailed in Western Georgia, Chardin’s observation seems more suggestive even still: the “People” had devised survival strategies that enabled them to thwart or discourage attempts to impose direct rule upon them, a point to which we return below.

Even within Guria’s traditional social structure, whose terminology and hierarchical strata were inherited from K’art’li during the period of the united kingdom, boundaries could be blurred. Unlike elsewhere in the Georgian lands, Gurian serfs owned serfs and possessed the right to conduct land transactions and commerce without first procuring the consent of their lord. Similarly, gentry nobles (aznaurebi), who were traditionally obligated to render allegiance to an aristocratic house or dynastic lord (i`avadi) but who were “free” from dues and labor obligations, sometimes lived free from any lord and possessed the right to own other nobles as well.98 In addition to gradations


of social status among the dynastic families and gentry nobles, variations in status among serfs could blur boundaries. Serfs exhibited different social levels and differed in rights and obligations. Household servants (msaxurebi) were freed from in-kind and monetary taxes and manual labor obligations in the noble’s fields and might only have to serve their lord once or twice a year. Beneath them were the serfs who owed either a monetary tax or in-kind payment, or who had to perform certain labor obligations for their noble lord (mebegre, from begara meaning corvée and/or tax). The lowest level of serfs in terms of the lack of rights were the mojalobe or serf households that were fully obligated to their lord as a family. They were also known simply as glexi or serfs in the sense of having to submit fully to their lords’ demands. Hence, social groups and allegiances were not uniform or linear but highly varied incurring an assortment of obligations that might range from the requirement to provide the ball for one of the ball-games played for the celebration of St. Giorgi, to the provision of food for a wedding or a visit by the lord and his suite, to the more regular performance of labor obligations in his fields.

**Social Status in Guria**

A central argument underlying this study, however, is that if a certain blurriness can be detected in territorial, cultural, and social boundaries — especially when construed in terms of the volatile circumstances impinging on the lives of Gurians in their frontier

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99 In Georgian this group of serfs were called in the singular mebegre from the word begara meaning corvée or labor dues that could also mean monetary tax. To add to the confusion, Trzhashkovskii states that serfs who owed their lords a certain amount of plowing were a sub-group of the mebegre called met’oxe from the word t’oxi meaning plow. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-197.


principality — the Gurians were not confused about their social status or position in the community. Unclear boundaries did not lead to indistinctness of place in community. I would argue that even major political, economic, and social changes from the sixteenth century — involving the devolution of power to the dynastic families, Ottoman encroachment, and the intensification of the slave trade with all the accompanying social and economic dislocation — did not blur the boundaries in Gurian eyes of one’s social status; perhaps, these factors altered the rules of conduct, expanded or contracted the latitude for asserting one’s autonomy within that status, but they did not change the fundamental social identities altogether. The question is how, in the face of these changes and blurred boundaries, Gurians preserved social status construed as obligations, rights, and allegiances. Again, I stress the importance of Guria’s location and the strategies employed to compel others’ loyalty and uphold family autonomy as the principal factors that imparted stability to the unequal social order.

1. The Cohesion of Guria’s Political Order

An interesting facet of Guria’s political history is the fact that the turbulence associated with increased foreign intervention, the slave-trade, and broad social and economic dislocation did not threaten the stability of the Gurieli-s’ hold on power within the principality. That is, unlike dynasts in neighboring Samegrelo and Imeret’i, the prominent dynastic houses in the principality rarely sought to unseat the Gurieli-s, and within the sovereign house itself, power struggles seem to have remained fewer than elsewhere. This observation supports the conclusion that Guria enjoyed more social

\[102\] Few examples of rivalries and dynastic tensions stand out in the early-modern history of Guria. I have found only two examples in Vaxush’ti’s history of meddling by other dynastic families in the Gurieli-s’ affairs. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Imereti’ian king and Demetre Gurieli sent a member of the Machutadze family of Guria to kill K’aixosro Gurieli who had established himself as Gurieli with Ottoman support. K’art’lis c’xovreba, vol. 4: Batonishvili Vaxush’ti, S. Qausch’ishvili, ed., p. 834.13-22; Istoria tsartsva gruzinskogo, pp. 249-250. In the early-eighteenth century Bezhan Nakashidze and an unnamed
cohesion among the few but powerful dynastic houses and the Gurieli-s than did the Dadianis in Samegrelo and Bagratid kings of Imeret‘i. The history of these other sovereign houses in the seventeenth century in particular is riddled with rivalries, dissension, and coups led by such powerful families as the Ceret‘elis and Abashidzes who actually ruled Imeret‘i on occasion.103

Several points help to explain the relative internal peace prevailing in Guria. First, Guria’s small size accounts in part for the lack of internal dynastic tension. With the gradual Ottoman encroachment into the southern lands of the Gurieli-s through the sixteenth century, the sovereign princes lost their hold over Bat‘umi and Gonio by the early seventeenth century. Over time the Ottomans gradually gained a foothold in southern Guria and pushed to incorporate that region into their empire. This region would eventually be called “Turkish Guria” (and K‘vemo Guria or “lower Guria”).104

erist‘avi of Guria unseated only momentarily Giorgi Gurieli with help from the Dadiani whose daughter was married to Bezhan’s son. Ibid., p. 878.10-16; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, pp. 280-281. In neither case, however, did a member of a dynastic family — whether the Machutadzes or Nakashidzes — actually attempt to rule Guria in place of the Gurieli family. Rivalries within the Gurieli family occurred more often but, again, seem to have been relatively rare. I have already noted the particularly gruesome example of such a rivalry with the murder by Svimon Gurieli of his father Mamia in 1625. Various Gurieli-s participated in other contests for rule earlier in 1583 and later in 1685. Ibid., pp. 819-820 and p. 849; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, pp. 239-240 and p. 260. As discussed in the next chapter, at the outset of the nineteenth century when the Russians were making a bid to assert suzerainty over the region, they encountered a succession crisis in the Gurieli house. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, pp. 325-327; and, more generally, see Brosset’s brief genealogy of the twenty-two Gurieli-s who reigned from the late-fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries (with an average reign of about fifteen and a half years), Histoire de la Géorgie, vol. II, Book I: Histoire moderne (SPB: L’Académie impériale des sciences, 1856): 650-651.

103 Thus Vaxushhi records how during the years of the civil war in the early-eighteenth century Giorgi Abashidze managed to unseat Mamia Gurieli as King of Imeret‘i and install himself with the aid of the sons of the dynastic noble families and members of the gentry nobility. Abashidze ruled Imeret‘i for five years. “But Abashidze ruled and all of Imeret‘i was administered by him.” (“Xolo mt’avroda abashidze da ganegboda mis mier qoveli Imeret‘i”). Ibid., p. 862.23-24; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 269. This incident was one of several instances when Giorgi ruled Imeret‘i. See Ibid., pp. 858.15-20; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 266; Ibid., p. 860.16-17; Istoriiia tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 268.

104 Cf. “Description géographique du Ghouria, extrait d’un original russe,” Nouveau journal asiatique vol. 10, series 2 (December 1832): 539. I have not been able to ascertain who the author of this short description is. Brosset translated the report for the journal but fails to mention the author. See also Orest Evetskii, Statisticheskoe opisanie zakavkaszkago kraia, pt. I, pp. 2, 58, and pt. II, p. 175. In turn, by the
Thus, even though Vaxushti included Bat’umi and Kobuleti in his description of the principality, as Güldenstädt did, in actuality these towns and their environs belonged to the Ottomans. Güldenstädt was present for the Russian campaign against the Turks, and he witnessed the shifting boundaries of the principality and noted that churches stood empty and much of the countryside was ravaged. In terms of territory, therefore, Guria was more akin to a region of Imereti like Racha than it was to that kingdom as a whole or to a principality the size of Samegrelo. In fact, Vaxushti records that Racha, Argueti, Lech’xumi, and similar regions in Imereti and Samegrelo were ruled by their own dynastic families that constantly subverted efforts by the ruling kings and Dadiani princes to extend control over their entire domains. The difference was that even though the kings of Imereti on occasion won the Gurieli-s’ recognition of their suzerainty over Guria, everyone acknowledged the Gurieli-s’ de facto right to rule their principality.

second half of the nineteenth century, this region would be included in larger descriptions of what came to be commonly referred to as “Turkish Georgia.” See Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoе puteshestvie, pp. xiv, 1. Ch’tataralishvili defines k’vemo Guria, or “lower Guria,” as the land between the Ch’olok’ and Choroxi Rivers. Guris samt’avros sheert’eba suspect’i an, pp. 5-6. It should be noted that if the Islamicization of Same’xe began gaining momentum in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the same process occurred much later in Achara and southern Guria as the Ottomans consolidated their presence there mainly in the eighteenth century. Thus, Islam spread into the Kintrishi River valley in present-day Achara only during the reign of King Solomon I of Imereti (1752-1784), forcing the bishop of the church at Xino to abandon his see and move to the monastery of Gamoch’enebuli on the border of Guria and Imereti. Xino is located inland up high on the mountain ridge defining the present border between Achara and Guria and at the time was apparently under nominal Gurian sovereignty; the Bishopric of Xino encompassed all the lands of southern Guria down to the Choroxi River. D. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoе puteshestvie, pp. 92-93, 300.

105 Güldenstädt, Geograficheskoе i statisticheskoе opisanie, pp. 326, 369.

106 In addition to the Abashidzes, Vaxushti records that particularly during the turbulent years of civil war families like the Lort’k’ip’andizes, Ch’xidzes, Lip’arit’ianis, and Erist’avis wrought havoc on the Bagrati d kings of Imereti, by supporting rival contenders to the throne, attempting to rule themselves, or periodically breaking away from the kingdom or principality as a renegade territory. Cf. Ibid., pp. 838-6-10, 839.19-23 - 840.1-2, 845-851, 853-862, 869.14-23, 873.23-24-874.1-11, 877.17-18; Istoria tsartsva gruzinskogo, pp. 252-252, 257-261, 263-269, 274, 277, 280, etc.

107 Vaxushti describes this state of affairs for the reign of King Bagrat III in the first half of the sixteenth century as follows: “But the Dadiani-Gurieli were rulers within their boundaries and were subservient to King Bagrat....” Ibid., p. 810.3-5; Istoria tsartsva gruzinskogo, p. 232. A good source for elaborating the nature of the Gurieli-s’ sovereignty are their charters, several of which Bak’radze translated and included in his study of Guria (to be addressed below).
Occasionally, we find an Imeret’ian king like Solomon II (1789-1810) serving as a
mediator in an on-going dispute between various Gurieli-s competing for power, but the
Imeret’ian kings seem to have intervened little in Gurian internal affairs.\(^{108}\)

Secondly, as suggested by these comments, Guria was not only small but stood in
a very vulnerable position with regard to the territorial ambitions of the Ottomans. As we
have seen, the principality slowly shrank in size, threatening the very integrity of the
Gurieli-s’ sovereignty. This external threat would seemingly have reinforced the loyalties
at least of the princely and chief noble (aznauri) families toward the Gurieli-s. A charter
(sigeli) of 1572 apparently written by Vaxtang Gurieli to commemorate the construction
of the Zarzma Church at the monastery complex of Shemok’medi affirms this view.
Drafted at a time when a rivalry existed between Vaxtang and Mamia Gurieli (the latter
actually ruling) and when the Ottomans had forced the evacuation of the original Zarzma
Church in Same’xe, it states that because of “our sins and lack of fidelity,” the “faithless
and godless Hagarites” corrupted the Christian saat’abago and strengthened the faith of
Muhammad there. Vaxtang stresses co-operation with his brother Mamia and the
allegiance to this act of his majordomo (sail’t-uxuc’esi), Ramaz Machutadze, and other
officials of his court down to local servitors.\(^{109}\) Even if we allow for the propagandistic
tone of this declaration, its description of the evacuation of Zarzma clearly articulates the
perceived threat to the Gurieli-s’ realm posed by the Ottomans and the need for working
together.

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\(^{108}\) For Solomon’s role as arbiter between Levan and Vaxtang Gurieli, see Bak’radze, *Arkheologicheskoe
puteshestvie*, pp. 325-326. In the final years of his reign, Solomon evidently commanded Mamia V Gurieli
to impose stable prices on household goods in an attempt to curb the exploitative practices of certain
merchants and to improve the welfare of the population at large (p. 329).

A third related point is that the principality had few princely families (sing.: 
*t’avadi*; pl. *t’avadebi*). These families possessed their hereditary estates or territories 
within Guria as did all dynastic families in the Georgian lands. Thus, for example, the 
Machutadze family’s estate was centered in *Samachutadzo*, a name composed of the 
circumfix “sa...o” designating “the place where the Machutadzes live” (as with 
*Sak’art’velo* and *Samegrelo*) and conveying an ancient right to lordship. Although on 
ocasion styled “king” (G: *mep’e*; T: *melik*), the ruling Gurieli was most commonly 
designated “chief prince of the principality of Guria” (*guriis sam’t’avros mt’avari*), and in 
this sense this individual was the chief among the other *t’avadebi*. They also occupied 
all the prominent posts in the Gurieli’s administration, including manager of the Gurieli’s 
court and estates (*saxlt’uxuc’esi*), chief judges (*mdivanbegebi*), and chief of police 
(*bok’ault’uxuc’esi*); and over time these posts became hereditary.

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110 Cf. Güldenstädt, *Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie*, p. 371; and A. Nordman, “Puteshestvie po 
Vaxushth identifies the Amilaxori, Beridze, Berezhanzi, and Kverghelidze families among others. *K’art’lis 
c’xovreba*, vol. IV: *Batonishvili vaxushth*, p. 37.1-5.

111 Based on the inscriptions in its frescos, Bak’radze claims that the church, found in the Machutadze 
family’s village of Nigoi is probably the oldest in Guria dating to the fourteenth century. 
*Arkheologicheskoe puteshstvie*, p. 255. On the other hand, according to Bak’radze those ruling the region 
of Sajavakxo apparently disappeared long ago and the Erist’avis (formerly known as the Sharvashidzes) laid 
claim to their territory (p. 228). At the same time, as a further indication of the changing state of Guria’s 
boundaries and autonomy, the region of Sajavakxo was long disputed between the Gurieli-s and kings of 
Imeret’i (p. 218).

112 As noted, the Gurieli on occasion was called *xelmcip’e* or “sovereign,” *batoni* or “lord” or “master,” and 
even “khan,” meaning “prince” or “lord” and reflecting the ruler’s tributary status to the Ottoman sultans. 
Bak’radze, *Arkheologicheskoe puteshstvie*, pp. 123, 130, 289, 307; and Brosset, “Copie figurée 
de quelques cachets géorgiens,” *Bulletin scientifique* VII:12 (1840): 167; and his “Monographie géorgienne 

113 K’. Ch’xatarashvili, *Guriis sam’t’avros sheert’ebra ruset’yan*, pp. 7-8. His study provides an extensive 
list of administrative posts from the *saxlt’uxuc’esi* down to the heads of rural districts (*mouravebi*), forest 
wardens (*tqismc’velta’*), and the chief of wines (*migvhvnet’uxuc’esi*). Depending on the importance of the 
position, a prince, noble, or servant (*msaxuri*, the highest member of the serf estate) could occupy it. As 
suggested by these titles, the positions and structure of Guria’s administration, although fewer in number, 
were derived from K’art’li-Kaxeti’. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Captain Adam Trzhaskovskii, 
who was ordered to compile a detailed description of Samegrelo and Guria in the wake of the 1841 Gurian
quoted above, the Machutadze family held the prestigious position of saxli'urxc'esi, for example.

Given Guria’s precarious location, straddling the boundary with the Ottoman Empire and the southwestern lands of K’art’li, it appears as though the dynastic families found it more beneficial for their principality’s autonomy and their status within Guria to support the Gurieli family rather than pose as contenders for power. As noted, this conclusion is further borne out by the fact that the princely families of Guria seem to have interfered little in the transfer of power from one Gurieli to the next. At least from the sixteenth century, virtually every Gurieli who came to power relied on the sanction or outright support of Imeret’ian kings, the Dadianis, at’abagis, pashas, or sultans of Turkey, a situation that underscores the fragility of Guria’s autonomy and seems to have reinforced social cohesion among the princely families and Gurieli-s.\(^\text{114}\) Nonetheless, this

\[\text{114} \quad \text{rebellion, observed that the division of princely families into three ranks did not obtain in Guria but that certain of these families were held in higher esteem and enjoyed greater privileges than others. Adam Florianovich Trzhaskovskii, “O sosloviiakh Guri (Iz zapisok Kapitana Trzhaskovskogo),” Kavkaz no. 40 (1847); reprinted in Sbornik svedeni o kutaisskoi gubernii, vol. 5 (K’ut’a’isi: Gubernskaia Typo-Litografiia, 1886): 191. For information about Trzhaskovskii, see M.O. Kosven, “Materialy po istorii etnograficheskogo izuchenii Kavkaza v russkoi nauke,” Kavkazskii etnograficheskii sbornik II (1958): 206-207. As regards the variation in rank, Toumanoff relates how the Machutadze family occupied the post of saxli iuxc’esi, or “mayors of the palace of Guria” and were known from the early-fifteenth century. Similarly, the Nakashidze family were “Receivers of the Ambassadors of Guria.” SCCH, p. 272. An early-nineteenth-century source has the Machutadzes as chiefs of the Gurieli-s’ army. “Description géographique du Ghouria,” Nouveau journal asiatique, p. 533. Another document from this time names the four mdivanbegibi or judges who were made members of the ruling council that was established between 1828-1830 to replace the Gurieli’s government. They were members of the Erist’avi, Gugunava, and Nakashidze princely families. AKAK, vol. IV, no. 359. Kekelia reiterates these names in his reconstruction of the names of judges in Guria, adding that the T’avdgi ridze family supplied the judge (mdivanbegi) for the Kobulet’i and Achara regions. He also states that we still do not know who the Chief Judge was for the early-Russian period. The names of seven judges have come down to us from between the 1780s and the dissolution of the principality in 1828. Drevmegruzinskie zakonodatel’stvo, p. 108. On the hereditary possession of these offices, see D. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, p. 285.}\]
observation about the loyalty shown to the Gurieli family by Gurian princely and noble families remains tentative until further research confirms this conclusion. It seems likely, for example, that rivalries between princely families and their noble supporters at times exacerbated dynastic rivalries among the Gurieli-s, making the transition between rulers contentious. But the general point stands that only members of the Gurieli family ruled Guria across several centuries (in contrast to Samegrelo and Imeret`i).

More broadly, rulers and religious authorities in Guria exhorted their subjects to live as good Christians in an effort to enforce loyalty and uphold the social order. As depicted by the act cited above and the descriptions of rulers discussed earlier, belief in God provided the ideological foundation of perceived. Only non-believers who did not fear God allegedly could sell their own people to the Muslims; weak faith let the Ottomans seize Samc`xe and promulgate Islam. It is unclear whether emphasis on the Christian faith came in response to the growing Ottoman presence, but in the eighteenth century, professions of faith served as the cornerstone of the alliances between Georgian rulers and between Georgian rulers and their Russian counterparts. Subsequently, for much of the nineteenth century, this belief crystallized into an ideological boundary, buttressing the precisely demarcated geographical border that separated the Georgian lands from those of the Islamic world. Nonetheless, at least from the sixteenth century as evidenced in acts from Guria, the Gurieli-s invoked fear of the Christian God to compel their subjects’ loyalty. Thus, Mamia IV Gurieli (1726-1744) offered protection to the nephew of the Father Superior, Mat’e Gogitidze (the descendant of the Gogitidze who brought the precious icons from Zarzma), by threatening those infringing on his rights without outside interference. The transfer of power in Guria through the seventeenth century proceeded as in the sixteenth.

115 One instance of princely recalcitrance occurred at the end of the sixteenth century, when two members of the Zhordania family from Lanch`xuti allegedly sought to overthrow K`aixosro Gurieli who was ruling for the young Mamia. D. Kereselidze, “Lanchkhutskoj sel`skoe obschestvo, Kutaisskoi gubernii, Ozuretskago uezda,” SMOMP, vol. 22 (1897): 223-224.
with “the weight of our sins and [the fact that] they would be cursed by God and all the saints.”

This kind of religious damnation represented the strongest expression of moral condemnation and was intended to maintain the integrity of the hierarchical social structure. In an act from the same period, the Metropolitan of Shemok’medi states that Giorgi Sabashvili requested from him an act that threatened a curse and anathema (shech ’venebis cigni), enforced by the power of “my Savior, my vestments, my icon and cross, and my congregation (krebuli),” against a named serf and his family if they fled from Sabashvili; and anyone who might offer them refuge would face a similar curse, a shortened life, and demise in the after-life. On the other hand, Bak’radze asserts that the depravity of the times in Guria and “all of Western Georgia” demanded such measures:

...neither clan ties [nat’esaoba], nor feelings of religious veneration, nor fear of God’s wrath in this life or of eternal torments in the after-life, [these] feelings, evidently characteristic of each member of Gurian society, might not restrain the common inclination toward evil [R: k zlu; G: borotebisadmi]; neither freedom of person nor the right of property was respected. Beginning with the ruling prince himself and ending with the weakest of peasants, each took advantage of the appropriate opportunity to seize a relative and sell him for 50-100 marchili to his neighbor or to a stranger.

Even the Gurieli-s sought protection from the threat of transgression. In an act of 1817, Davit’ Gurieli, the son of the ruling Gurieli (Mamia V) sought the protection of the new Metropolitan, “of distinguished descent” (he was the son of Nikolai Erist’avi), by

116 D. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, p. 299. Bak’radze states that the clergy in Guria and Georgia at large “generously” distributed these curses which usually took the form quoted here (p. 316).


118 Ibid., p. 328; Ark’eologiuri mogzauroba guriasa da acharashi, p. 274.
returning the noble (aznauri) and serf households and fields that a Gurieli had previously taken from the now deceased Metropolitan Mak’sime by an act of violence and lawlessness. “Out of love for him [Nikolai] and hope for your protection,” Davit’ returned these possessions and ended all claims to revenues or yields from them.\(^\text{119}\)

With help from God, the Gurieli family tried to uphold the social order in the face of social disintegration. In the oldest act found by Bak’radze dating to the reign of Rostom Gurieli (1534-1564), Rostom and his wife T’inat’in, after listing the lands and privileges they were granting a noble, asserted:

...By descent you belong to the great nobles, and if someone brings violence or injustice against you, or in general permits himself in their relation to you any kind of dishonor or offensive act [upatiuroba da ukadrisi sak’mel], we will ourselves investigate both the blood-price and the dishonor ....If someone breaks into your church or your house, then, before all else, we will accuse him of a crime against God and [His] image [i.e., the church’s icon], and thereupon we will impose on him a fine which God and the priest will determine.\(^\text{120}\)

Charters issued by various ecclesiastical officials, usually on behalf of the ruling Gurieli, pronounce the threat of a curse on those who disregard or otherwise violate their obligations to their lords.\(^\text{121}\) Bak’radze states that the format of these curses was similar across time in Guria and the other Georgian lands, threatening to incur the curse “by my

\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 327; Ark’eologiuri mogzauroba guriasa da acharashi, p. 273-274.

\(^{120}\) Bak’radze translates the Georgian, didi aznaurishvili, to mean “respected nobles” (pochetnykh dvorian), which corresponds to the category of nobles known as sapatio kac’i or “honorable man, noble,” from the word pativi, honor, respect. This was a special designation applied to the highest strata of aznauri nobles. See Trzhaskovskii, “O soslovii Guri,” p. 193. I translate the Georgian word didi as “great” which carries a sense of glory and honor, from dideba. Arkheologichskoe puteshestvie, pp. 283-284, or Ark’eologiuri mogzauroba, p. 237.

\(^{121}\) Examples can be found in Ibid., pp. 304, 316.
Savior, my icon and cross and vestments; and one will be bound and committed to
damnation in body and soul...”

The vertical allegiances from the lowest serf to the Gurieli family itself were
understood in terms of a patriarchal, familial structure. The Gurieli-s and aristocratic
class in general offered protection to their servitors as fathers to their children; they
affirmed their right to rule such patronage networks through displays of generosity,
judicial fairness, and force of arms if need be. In return, they demanded loyalty affirmed
through the payment of levies and dues, the performance of labor obligations, and
participation in military campaigns. Thus, in a charter of 1823 conferring the position of
mouravi (or chief administrator) on Rostom Nakashidze for the settlement of
Shemok`medi, Mamia V states that Nakashidze was expected to maintain peace among
the population and aid it in fending off “dishonorable enemies.” Citing his generosity
and mercy as the motivations for his pledge, in 1789 Svimon Gurieli promised the son of
a deacon not to exact any kind of taxes from him now or later. As a result of the
depredations of the Ottomans and their allies in the late 1780s, Vaxtang Gurieli displayed
his munificence to the Metropolitan of Shemok`medi by stating that though he had been
chased out of his church at Shemok`medi, Vaxtang had decided to allow the Metropolitan
to remain in his own domains in Guria by installing him in the church at Jumat`i. Mamia Gurieli requests in a letter that his princes, Lazar and Grigori Nakashidze
assembly some 40-60 of his people at Gurian:`a “out of love for him.”

122 Ibid., p. 316.
123 Ibid., p. 332.
124 Ibid., pp. 314-315.
125 Ibid., p. 332.
The charters that form the documentary foundation of this exposition reveal how social bonds were reinforced. The charters usually name the witnesses present and their position (almost always princes and ecclesiastical officials) to render them official, genuine, and binding. Often they mention that an oath was administered as well to make their injunctions more powerful. And the Gurieli usually appended his seal as a final testament to their official nature. Thus, the drafting and proclamation of charters was a community event that was sustained by the memory of the witnesses and oaths of loyalty.\textsuperscript{126}

2. The Dispensing of Justice

As with the administrative structure, the dispensing of justice was patterned after practices used in K'art'li-Kaxet'i and guided by the law-code of Vaxtang VI (1675-1737), compiled in the early eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{127} The use of Vaxtang's code is attested not only by the existence of copies of the code in Guria but also by the use of ordeals (\textit{shant'i}) for exacting truth from a litigant and blood price (\textit{sisxli}) for punishments.\textsuperscript{128} In his discussion of judicial practices in Samegrelo, Kekelia postulates that local custom must have influenced the judicial process, but he does not elaborate on this influence for lack of research.\textsuperscript{129} In Guria, the ruling Gurieli held ultimate authority in the dispensing of justice, but his chief judges aided him in the day-to-day task of resolving conflicts in

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 323, 324, 327, 334.

\textsuperscript{127} Vaxtang actually consolidated existing law-codes into one compendium from 1703 to 1709. See \textit{Zakony Vaxtanga VI}, D.L. Purc'eladze (Purtseladze) (T'bilisi: Mec'nireeba, 1980), especially the Introduction by Purc'eladze.

\textsuperscript{128} D. Bak'radze, \textit{Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie}, pp. 158-161. Bak'radze notes that in the extant decisions written by various \textit{mdivanbegis}, none contains an actual citation from the code, but he insists that the way punishments were meted out in terms of blood-price demonstrates the reliance on this "Georgian" law-code (p. 343). See also Kekelia, \textit{Drevnegruzinskie zakonodatel'stvo}, pp. 105-106, 116-118.

\textsuperscript{129} Kekelia, \textit{Drevnegruzinskie zakonodatel'stvo}, p. 128.
his domains. It seems that these judges presided over distinct territories though they could also deliberate on a case together. Evidently, they were given wide latitude in prescribing punishments, though this is not clear for Guria in particular.  

Of particular importance for this discussion are two points about the judicial process. First, the ruling prince or one of his judges could dispense justice anywhere in the principality — whether outdoors under a tree or in one of his residences dispersed through his domains. This ambulatory mode of resolving cases brought the prince and his servitors into close contact with his subjects, imparted an informal yet decisive air to the proceedings, and affirmed his authority even in cases that involved landlord-serf relations. Indeed, serfs could raise complaints to their ruling prince about treatment by their landlords. Secondly, an integral aspect of the judicial process involved the use of oaths (sing.: p’ic’i) in ascertaining the veracity of the parties to a case. The oaths were often administered before an icon. With the testimony of a specified number of witnesses, also sworn by oath to tell the truth, the defendant often bore the responsibility under oath to refute the claims of the accused in order to prove his own innocence. The use of oaths (as well as ordeals, for that matter) underscored the importance of an

\[130\] Ibid., p. 133. Kekelia states that Lamberti made this observation about the way the mdivanbegis executed their duties in Samegrelo in the early seventeenth century when he lived there.

\[131\] Ibid., pp. 126-127, 134.

\[132\] In his detailed description of the various oaths used in the judicial process in the different Georgian lands (pp. 221-233), Kekelia states that oaths were not necessarily used at the beginning of a trial but often as a last resort when a verdict could not be reached. This made the act of taking an oath more solemn and binding. He also writes that oaths were used often to resolve land disputes in the absence of accurate surveys. Ibid., pp. 223, 226-227. Bak’radze provides actual cases decided by judges in Guria and recorded, however briefly, in documents dating to the early-nineteenth century. In all cases, the judges resorted to oaths and witnesses to resolve the dispute or ascertain the guilt of a given party. Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, pp. 341-351. See also Allen, History of the Georgian People, pp. 279-280.
individual's integrity as the backbone of the judicial system. In the absence of a specialized group of investigators who could excavate the truth over a possibly long investigation, swearing one's innocence before an icon with the support of up to twenty-four witnesses tested one's testimony as a stalwart member of the local community. Oaths made the dispensing of justice a community affair and permitted the quick resolution of conflicts. As we shall see in the discussion of the Russian period, oaths continued to play a pivotal role in forging an imperial alliance between dynastic rulers and the tsar.

3. The Autonomy of Serfs: On Subsistence Agriculture and Flight

One of the striking features of the charters discussed by Bak'radze is that over the several centuries that they cover, the common folk of Guria appear to be the currency of exchange for providing cohesion to the dynastic social order. What better expression of this role is there than the slave trade? The charters are full of examples of peasants being purchased or otherwise bestowed on one noble family or another to make amends for past sins or as displays of generosity. They were also given away to end disputes. We have seen how the Gurieli-s threatened curses on peasants to keep them from fleeing. By contrast, on occasion they also freed peasants and other vassals from service obligations or promised a family and its offspring that they would not be sold. In other words, they

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133 The use of ordeals (shant'i) played a similar role insofar as their severity, in the form of boiling water, hot irons, single combat, proved an excruciating test of a person's word. See D. Bak'radze, Puteshestvie po Gurii i Achari, p. 159.

134 Ibid., cf. pp. 290-292, 298-300, 302-303, 326-327, etc. Similarly, the section on inheritance rights in Vaxtang VI's law code also depicts serfs as the measure of wealth to be divided in accordance with set procedures. Zakony Vakhtanga VI, Purtseppadze, ed., pp. 106-119.

135 Ibid., p. 302.

136 Ibid., pp. 292, 294, 304.
appear in sources only from this downward perspective. We get little sense of how they actually lived or responded to their role as currency from charters.

Given the hierarchical nature of dynastic society in Western Georgia, the question arises as to how peasants regarded their position at the bottom of the social order. On the one hand, I have been arguing that in Guria, at least, the social order was intricate in its overlapping and variegated sets of obligations and rights and that it was cohesive because of the principality’s specific size and location within the borderland zone. Similarly, I have argued that dynastic rule evolved in Guria in such a way that it reinforced vertical allegiances as well as horizontal ones within families. Serfs enjoyed some degree of legal protection against violations of their person or property.\footnote{Zakony Vakhtanga VI, Purtseladze, ed., articles 52-53, for example, pp. 80-81; and articles 96-97, pp. 104-105.} And yet, given the extreme social dislocation that attended the growing encroachment of the Ottomans, Persians, and then the Russians in Caucasia, it seems certain that peasant life was very precarious. What latitude did laboring persons have to meet the demands of their household and fend off aggressive, exploitative practices. I have referred to the use of folk beliefs and customs to find protection from the evil eye and other such threats to daily life.

Interestingly, in the era of the worst dislocation, the seventeenth century when the slave trade flourished, there is no evidence of any kind of broad-based rebellion or revolt.\footnote{I have not found evidence of specific revolts in Guria, though Ivane Javaxishvili refers to several in Eastern Georgia in the eighteenth century. I. Dzhavakhov [Javaxishvili], “Politicheskoe i sotsial’noe dvizhenie v Gruzii v XIX v.,” K’art’lis eris istoria, vol. V (T’bilisi: T’bilisi State University, 1953): 99. I am not arguing that no revolts occurred in Guria, only that they appear to have been relatively rare and presumably small in size.} The more common expression of outright resistance seems to have simply been flight itself, including the sale of oneself and one’s offspring into bondage.\footnote{Occasionally, the charters cited by Bak’radze refer to runaway serfs. cf. Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, p. 304.} Close proximity
to “Turkish Guria,” including K’obulet’i and Achara, as well as to the pashalik of Axalc’ixe would have made flight relatively easy. But one testament to the way Gurian serfs might maintain their physical safety and autonomy in the face of danger is the consistent references to their love of arms and their martial prowess.\textsuperscript{140} It seems the more recalcitrant of serfs also could have joined up with one or another band of thieves engaged in the trade in contraband and theft of livestock.

Nonetheless, close scrutiny of agrarian life in Guria indicates that serfs managed to exercise latitude and safeguard some autonomy not only by virtue of their legal rights but, more fundamentally, because of the practice of subsistence agriculture. The vulnerabilities of Guria’s borderland position compelled Gurians to engage in modest agricultural production that can only be characterized as subsistence agriculture carried out from isolated homesteads grouped in small, dispersed settlements. Probably because of the high incidence of malaria and generally more humid weather prevailing along the coast and along rivers, most family plots were located in the hills interspersed through thick forests.\textsuperscript{141} Peasants produced for immediate consumption and were able to do so with relatively little effort due to the fertility of the soil, temperate climate, and diverse flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{142} They also enjoyed the legal right to use the landlords’ pastures and forests spread along rivers, throughout the hills and in the mountains.\textsuperscript{143} In the world of raids, wars, and burdensome obligations to the lord, serfs had little inducement or desire

\textsuperscript{140} Chardin makes this point more generally about the inhabitants of Odishi. Jean Chardin, \textit{The Travels of Sir John Chardin}, pp. 91-92. See also Ernest Chantre, \textit{Recherches anthropologiques dans le Caucase}, vol. 4: \textit{Populations actuelles} (Paris: Ch. Reinwald, Libraire, 1887): 64.

\textsuperscript{141} See Bak’radze on this point, \textit{Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie}, pp. 97-98, 114.

\textsuperscript{142} For a discussion of the diversity of plant species back to the days of Colchis, evidenced by recovered pollen samples, see N.C. Mamak’ashvili (Mamatsashvili), \textit{Drevneevksinskaia flora Gurii} (T’bilisi: Mec’neroba, 1991).

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Zakony Vakhtanga VI}, Purtseledze, ed., article 172, p. 147; see Javaxishvili on this point, “Politicheskoe i sotsial’noe dvizhenie v Gruzii v XIX v.,” p. 122.
to produce beyond the needs of their families. Technology was primitive because nature did most of the work; diverse crops provided a sound diet in good times and alternative sources of food in bad (including access to a plethora of animal species in the mountains). Nature’s bounty also permitted peasants to produce most of what they needed and to obtain the rest at local markets in exchange for specialized products produced at home, like silk, wine, honey, pottery, and textiles. The resiliency, relative fertility, and autonomy of existence afforded by the natural climate and configuration of homesteads stands out in travelers’ accounts.

4. The Paradox of Gurian Life as Viewed through Travellers’ Accounts

A paradox pervades travellers’ descriptions of the Western Georgian lands. From at least the fifteenth century various observers noted that the land was bountiful but the common people poor. By contrast, in antiquity, several writers remarked on the relative prosperity of the inhabitants and the land. By the late-medieval period, however, travellers commented on the fallen state of the inhabitants despite the continued bounty of the land. Several excerpts convey this impression. As already noted, most travellers’ accounts pay scant attention to Guria and concentrate on descriptions of Samegrelo and


Imeret‘i. This neglect underscores Guria’s peripheral position even within the peripheral zone of Western Georgia.

In 1474, a year before the Ottoman seizure of Caffa (T: Kefe), marking a significant step in the consolidation of their rule of the Black Sea, the Venetian ambassador to Persia, Ambroglio Contarini, travelled through Samegrelo and Imeret‘i (which he considered a part of “Giorgiania”). Contarini sketched a bleak picture of the inhabitants of these lands, living in thick forests on a meager diet chiefly of millet (G: ghomi) but also including corn and wine. “If they were industrious they might procure as much fish as they required from the river [Rioni, or his “Fasso,” i.e. Phasis]. They are Christians, and worship according to the rites of the Greek Church, but they have many heresies.” In his brief account, we see glimmers of the paradox between a bountiful land and its poor inhabitants and sense the stagnant state of affairs that has settled upon the land as a result of its isolation resulting from the rise of the Ottomans. His reference to the myth of “the poisoner” Medea and her father King Aeetes of Colchis evokes this sense of corruption and innate moral depravity.

In the sixteenth century, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, who was the ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire to Suleiman the Magnificent’s court at Constantinople (1554-1562), never actually visited the Georgian lands but left an often-cited account, based on his conversations with several individuals familiar with Western Georgia, including the Dadiani Prince of Samegrelo who visited Constantinople during Busbecq’s tenure.

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147 *Ibid.*, p. 118. He notes how “Giorgiania” (and specifically K’art’li) “was a better country than Mingrelia; but the customs and way of living of the inhabitants are the same,” and “I had a great desire to get out of that accursed country....” (p. 122).

there. Notwithstanding his not visiting the region, Busbecq bolstered the image of a productive land and lazy people whose moral bearing exhibited signs of weakness and debauchery.

The whole district in which the Colchians live is rich in produce of every kind, which grows practically without cultivation, except wheat and barley, which, it is supposed, would also abound if a little trouble were taken. The inhabitants, however, prefer to be idle. Millet is sown in a slovenly manner and comes up in the greatest abundance, its yield being so plentiful that one crop suffices for two years. He elaborates on this state of affairs by eliciting images of bucolic splendor and moral laxity:

Everywhere in the woods of Mingrelia, under the shade of widespread trees, you can see the common people reclining in groups and keeping holiday with wine and dance and song. They stretch strings on a staff or beam and strike them in regular time with a stick, and to this tune they sing love songs or the praises of their heroes.... Where there is so much leisure and food is so abundant, the standard of morality is not high and chastity is rare.... They are so destitute of manners and politeness that, amongst other habits, they think that they are paying you a compliment and doing you an honour by making a kind of eructation in their throat. There is one accomplishment for which they show real genius, namely, thieving; and skill in theft is held in high esteem.

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151 Ibid., pp. 130-131.
Thievery appears all the more necessary for the local inhabitants because of the general lack of currency that Busbecq claimed existed in the region, a condition which he asserts rendered it impossible for anyone to grow rich.\footnote{152}

In the seventeenth century, Jean Chardin provided an eye-witness portrait of the “Colchians” that greatly expanded the image conveyed by Busbecq’s account. Chardin’s trip through Western Georgia occurred in the wake of several decades of internecine war, which explains the dire circumstances surrounding the lives of those he encountered. Nonetheless, his account reiterates several themes, albeit in a slightly different key, already made familiar by Busbecq and his predecessors.\footnote{153} Having emphasized the predominance of woods in Samegrelo, Chardin turned to the agricultural practices employed by the “Mingrelians”: “The Earth is so moist in Mingrelia in Seed-time, that for fear of softening too much the Land where they sow their Wheat and Barley, they never Plough it at all. They only cast their Grain upon the Top of the Earth, and that is sufficient: for it comes up without any farther trouble, taking root a foot deep in the Mould.”\footnote{154} He too deplores the moral depravity of both the men and women, a condition best manifested by the extensive slave-trade, which at the time of Chardin’s visit (1672-1673) was at its height. Indeed, Chardin saw the slave-trade as a manifestation of the despotic power wielded by lord over vassal.\footnote{155} He also noted the lack of currency and the

\footnote{152}Ibid., p. 128.

\footnote{153}Another earlier account from the seventeenth century that also conjures up an image of poverty amidst a fertile landscape in Samegrelo is provided by the Russian envoy, Fedot (Fedor) El’chin, to the Dadiani of Samegrelo, Levan II (1611-1657). His journey was the first recorded trip by Russians to the Black Sea coast of the Western Georgians. D. S. Likhachev, “Povesti russkikh poslov kak pamiatniki literatury,” in Puteshestviia russkikh poslov XVI-XVII vv, D. S. Likhachev, ed. (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1954): 331; and the actual account, “Stateinyi spisok F. Elechina,” reproduced by Likhachev, ibid., especially pp. 224-225. See also the survey of his expedition in M.-F. Brosset, Perеписка, на иностранных языках, грузинских таиро с российскими государями, от 1639-1770 г. (SPB: Imp. A.N., 1861): lv-lx.


\footnote{155}Ibid., pp. 84-85, 89-90, 106.
prevalence of bartering in Western Georgia.\textsuperscript{156} At the same time, he adds that "Mingrelia breeds very good Blood; So that the Men are very well shap’d, and the Women very handsome."\textsuperscript{157} His attention to the natural beauty of the inhabitants underscored the fertility of the soil as well as the state of corruption into which the inhabitants of Western Georgia had fallen.\textsuperscript{158}

In his extensive description of the Georgian lands, Vaxushti Bagrationi restored some of the prosperity to the people and replaced criticism of their moral depravity with a more innocent, happy-go-lucky characterization. He wrote about the cultivated crops: "All plants and grains grow there in abundance, though rice and cotton as well as wheat are rarely sown. But barley and millet [ghomi] are found there in abundance and are what the people eat...; a single laboring man, possessing only a hoe, can set up a household, provide food for his family, and pay the tax."\textsuperscript{159} He characterized the Imeret’ians as follows:

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\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p. 91.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 84. Of the Georgians, Chardin writes: "The Complection of the Georgians is the most beautiful in all the East; and I can safely say, That I never saw an ill-favour’d Countenance in all that Country, either of the one or other Sex: but I have seen those that had Angels Faces; Nature having bestowed upon the Women of that Country Graces and Features, which are not other whre to be seen: So that 'tis impossible to behold 'em without falling in Love..." (p. 190).
\textsuperscript{158} I have explored the relationship between images of Georgian beauty and moral degradation depicted in various descriptions in a paper, "Conjuring 'The Most Beautiful Women in the World' in Nineteenth-Century Descriptions of Georgian Women," presented as part of the panel, "Empires and Genealogies of Identity," at the national convention of the AAASS, 26 September 1998, Boca Raton, Florida.
\end{center}
...they are neat, dress beautifully, just as they are dexterous on horseback and in the use of arms and armor, quick, sweet of tongue, agile, ardent, brave in battle and strong, though they lose heart quickly as in all other endeavors; they are generous and acquisitive, caring only for today and giving no thought to the morrow; they are singers and outstanding scribes...  

Despite Vaxushti's more sympathetic portrait of these inhabitants of Western Georgia, we can still detect in his description traces of the familiar dichotomy between the fertile land and poor peasants.  

As we shall see in the next chapter, this image persisted through the nineteenth century during the period of tsarist rule and became woven into the ideology of incorporation, exerting a strong influence on Russian perceptions of the local Georgian inhabitants. The central point underlying these descriptions is that for all the variation in perceived poverty and prosperity, in the light of nature's bounty, these accounts point to a certain threshold of prosperity beyond which no one seemed capable or willing to move. In times of war invaders ravaged the land and imposed a gnawing poverty; in times of peace, peasants seemed content to satisfy their immediate needs, to entertain generously when demanded, and to adorn their persons with ornamented daggers.

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161 Johann Anton Güldenstädt (1745-1781), who travelled to Caucasia at the behest of Empress Catherine II to undertake a scientific survey of the land, peoples and resources of the region, provided a more pronounced rendition of the paradox. See his Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie Gruzii i Kavkaza (SPB: Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1809): 294-295, 358, 361. The Russian translation was one of the author's study compiled from his trip to the Caucasus in 1770-1773, and first published in German in 1787-1791.

162 One example of the enduring vitality of this image occurs in the account written by Edmund Spencer. He says of Imeret'ı and its inhabitants: "This beautiful country abound in all the choicest productions of nature: with a soil capable of nourishing a vast population, it is blessed with a climate the most salubrious and bracing to the constitution....The few natives we encountered bore every mark of extreme indigence—were slovenly in their dress, and in everything appertaining to their domestic concerns....These people have their best energies chilled by despotism and slavery, with scarcely any interest in the land they cultivate, beyond that of producing a miserable subsistence for their families...." E. Spencer, Travels in the Western Caucasus, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1838): 7-8.
(kinjali), swords, and clothes when possible. In other words, it was not the land that imposed the general poverty observers noted over five centuries. Were one to carry out a more extensive study of travellers' accounts, it is likely that variation would occur in depictions of relative prosperity but not in the basic dichotomy between bountiful land and poor peasants.

An insight into this paradox is provided by the seventeenth-century Italian missionary, Father Archangelo Lamberti, who spent nearly twenty years in the Georgian lands, primarily in Samegrelo (1630-1650). He wrote that the Mingrelians pretended to be poor in order to deceive the Turks and stifle any temptation to invade. The allusion to artifice points to a larger notion of peasant survival strategies and notes how they accommodated themselves to the exceptionally variable world of the Caucasian borderland zone. That is, rather than seek an explanation of peasant poverty simply in terms of innate moral degeneracy or a propensity for idleness, these accounts offer an alternative view into Gurian history that illuminates the ways in which the inhabitants of Western Georgia eeked out an existence that was intimately connected to stronger powers beyond the principality’s borders. They also point to the autonomy exercised by the inhabitants of the region and therefore underscore the importance of the practices and strategies employed to compel honorable conduct to preserve the autonomy and social order of a small principality like Guria with its specific geo-political position in the Caucasian borderland.

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163 Nikiphor Tolochanov, the Russian envoy to Imereti (1650-1652), presented an interesting description of the clothes of the Imereti-ans. See Allen, History of the Georgian People, p. 347.


165 Quoted in Lang, Last Years, p. 50, fn. 3. Interestingly, Procopius alludes to a similar desire of the Laz to conceal their homes from the invading Persians, when he states, "... but in reality they [the Laz] did not wish to display their own homes to the Persians." Wars, Dewey, transl. vol. I, II.xxxix.23 (p. 535).
III. Conclusion

As suggested by an exposition of the alliances forged by Guria’s ruling princely dynasty, autonomy was a group enterprise. Even if devised through marriage, buttressed by bribes and princely hostages, these alliances stood for little without the support of the rest of the Gurians. From this vantage point we enter the realm of social history, move to “the rest of the people” to whom Toumanoff paid less attention. Given the enduring entanglements with powers lying beyond Guria’s shifting boundaries, what immediately strikes the scholar of Gurian social history is that Gurians lived in a highly changeable, complex world in which the daily task of social reproduction depended on a precarious balance with powers beyond those boundaries. Indeed, in the case of Guria the dichotomy between the “village shell,” to invoke Moshe Lewin’s phrase, and the world beyond was less readily apparent or delineated than that of the Russian peasantry about whom Lewin writes.¹⁶⁶ In the Russian case, Maureen Perrie describes how “the very existence of Russian peasant society demanded a complex strategy of survival,” a strategy devised to meet the obligations to the state in a “hostile environment” of poor soils, reduced sunlight and erratic rainfall. One might add the dimension of space to Perrie’s characterization. Russian peasants lived in communities spread across a vast, flat landscape. The core of the peasants’ strategy was the commune (mir or obshchina) and the village assembly (sel’ skii skhod) that deliberated on and executed their collective commitment to reproducing the social order. The traditional commune was centered in distinct peasant villages.¹⁶⁷ The survival strategies created by the Gurians were far different. Living in a land of fertile soils, diverse flora and fauna, a variegated landscape


from flood plains to mountains (all in an area forty miles square bordering a major sea), Gurians had no commune and generally did not live in villages.

As significant as the ecological differences were in shaping the inhabitants’ mode of existence, the severity of the Russian peasants’ environment and the fertility of the Gurians’ does not completely explain the profound differences in their survival strategies. Rather, as I have suggested in the foregoing discussion, the social world beyond the confines of their settlements was of equal importance. In the case of the Gurians, theirs was a more volatile existence when assessed in terms of the frequency of raids, invasions, and the proximity of multiple sovereign powers, whether in the form of the dynastic houses of Samegrelo and Ap’xazet’i, the feudal kingdoms of K`art’li-Kaxet’i and Imeret’i, or the empires of Anatolia and later Russia. And Guria was the smallest of these lying at the juncture of all of them (except Ap’xazet’i).

More broadly, in the field of peasant studies, Robert Redfield and Eric Wolf advance the premise that peasant societies do not exist in isolation but in an exploited relationship to an outside world.\textsuperscript{168} Simply stated, in light of this approach, Gurian cultivators of the soil were more intimately linked to the world beyond their settlements both in terms of the frequency and spatial distribution of contacts. There was an immediacy to those contacts as well. No comparable paradigm of the Russian peasants’ belief in the tsar ‘-batyushka — “the faraway but powerful benefactor,” the “little-tsar father” — animated the Gurians’ lives.\textsuperscript{169} Their benefactor was the Gurieli family. Even if peasants in Russia existed in a “historically commanding nexus” of peasants, nobles, and the state, they possessed a socio-cultural “filter” — that “intense web of beliefs,


religious, ethical, and political, all marked by their own minting" — whose power to interpret the intrusions of outsiders was at least in part a function of the temporal and spatial distance of those intrusions (certainly for the pre-emancipation period). Just as the southern boundaries of Guria were difficult to define, so too were the boundaries between the individual household, settlement, and the outside world less apparent.

This is a difference in orders of magnitude not modes of existence. Both Russian and Gurian rural inhabitants lived in relationships with a world beyond the village or settlement that were unequal and intimate, both existed in a rural “nexus” in Lewin’s terms. In the long run, however, I am arguing that these differences were significant in the way they shaped the lives of the inhabitants themselves, or, in Perrie’s words, their “survival strategy”: the relative proximity of the outside world to the individual homestead in Guria instilled in Gurians of all ranks a respect for social latitude and political acumen. Ultimately, in this countryside of isolated households, dispersed settlements, and frequent intrusions — of blurred boundaries, in short — the Gurians developed an array of practices that were designed to uphold the autonomy of their families while also enforcing loyalty to the larger community that came to be Guria.

The contrast is also important in that the Russian officials who eventually ruled the Georgian lands more often than not brought with them preconceptions about the Georgian countryside that were derived from the world of the Russian muzhik. These preconceptions influenced the way they understood the Gurian social order. In this light, the differences are significant in how they illuminate the prolonged cultural clash of colonizer and colonized that erupted in Guria in a series of rebellions that spanned the nineteenth century. Autonomy was the supreme value governing political and social relations in the Georgian lands. Ultimately, the Georgian polities needed the challenge to

their autonomy posed by Russian imperial tutelage to forge a national movement. Through the nineteenth century efforts to impose an imperial code of conduct that made the tsar the primary object of loyalty would eventually clash with local notions of honor and the status and loyalties it generated. The task confronting the historian, therefore, is to trace the transformation of a dynastic social system into a modern national consciousness. How did the dynastic loyalty infuse national consciousness? How did the Russians subvert, redirect, or alter local notions of loyalty? Addressing these questions provides great insight into the Russian incorporation of Western Georgia and more specifically the transformation of Guria from a principality into a regular administrative district of the empire. I contend that the tradition of rebellion that developed in Guria in the course of the nineteenth century resulted from imperial efforts to translate dynasticism within Guria into an idiom of imperial rule.
PART II.

THE INCORPORATION OF GURIЯ

INTO THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE
CHAPTER FOUR
THE IDEOLOGY OF CONQUEST AND THE PROBLEM OF WESTERN GEORGIA

The following two chapters focus on the confrontation between Russian imperial ambitions in Guria and the principality's long tradition of autonomy in the precarious borderland of Western Georgia. The central argument underlying the examination of this confrontation is that the local dynasts entered into an alliance of protection with their Russian overlords as a way of preserving their autonomy. As we have seen, this practice of forging expedient political alliances was the chief mechanism by which the Gurieli-s (and other dynasts in Western Georgia) upheld their autonomy. In this light, the alliance that they formed with the Russians at the beginning of the nineteenth century continued this practice.

For their part, the Russians recognized that the success of their mission in Caucasia was dependent on winning the loyalty of their fellow Christians, most notably the Georgians and Armenians. The Russians were desperately short of monetary and human resources, especially during the era of the Napoleonic wars that followed the annexation of the Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i (Eastern Georgia) in 1801. Therefore, in order to procure resources in the region, particularly in the form of conscript labor, foodstuffs, and monetary revenues, they were very much dependent on local knowledge which could be obtained by affirming the goodwill of the Russian government toward their Christian counterparts. They also faced formidable natural obstacles in topography, climate, and diseases as well as powerful indigenous and international resistance to their presence, particularly from the Ottomans and Persians (and, at times, from European
powers like Britain and France), who recognized the immense strategic importance of this region. Additionally, for those more sensitive to the purported legal obligations imposed on Russia by the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk, the blatant violation of the treaty by the abolition of kingship in K’art’li-Kaxet’i and the annexation of the Eastern Georgian lands by the Empire in 1801 was morally wrong and demanded some sort of rectification in Russian policy on the ground. Finally, from the time Catherine II (1762-1796) initiated the campaign to establish a permanent presence south of the Caucasus range in the latter half of the eighteenth century, officials in her government disputed the wisdom of this move. Division within the imperial regime and vacillation by the empress herself hampered the extension of empire into the Georgian lands.\(^1\) This array of obstacles underscored the need to recruit the local Georgian dynasts as allies in the Russian effort to extend the empire in their domains.

The cornerstone of this alliance was both parties’ Orthodox Christian faith. As fellow Christians the Russians and Georgians saw themselves fighting a common Islamic foe. Recognition of this Christian kinship dated back at least to the sixteenth century when various rulers of the Georgian lands exchanged embassies with the Russian tsars. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the Russians imbued this idiom of Christian faith with a new vision of their *mission civilisatrice* which, in the least, justified expansion into the Transcaucasia in terms of the principles of Enlightened autocracy, and

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\(^1\) Nikolas Gvosdev has most recently examined the terms of this significant debate and concluded that no "imperial ‘master plan’ for dealing with the region" existed. See his *Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, 1760-1819* (Oxford: St. Martin’s Press, 2000): 104. Gvosdev is certainly not the first to draw this conclusion. Although written much more from the Georgian perspective, D.M. Lang admirably recounts the vacillations and debates among within the court of Catherine II, Paul I, and Alexander I that underscore the disagreement over Russian policy towards Caucasia. D.M. Lang, *Last Years*, especially chapters 11-13. See also O.P. Markova, "Finansovo-ekonomicheskoe obsledovanie gruzii v pervoi treti XIX v.," *IZ*, 30 (1949): 172-210. In a similar vein, Svetlana Lur’e argues that no coherent ideological framework guided the Russian imperial project in Caucasus and throughout the Empire. S.V. Lur’e, "Rossiiskaia imperiia kak etnikul’turnyi fenomen," *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost’* no. 1 (1994): 56-64.
which, in its boldest expression, asserted that the Russian version was superior to all others. The core of this civilizing mission was the contention that Russia was saving the Georgians from imminent peril, if not extinction. That is, despite the tenuousness of their presence and the division in their ranks, Russian administrators projected a bold face of imperial saviors to their Georgian allies as the ideological justification for their incursion into Caucasia, and the Georgians came to accept this justification of Russian hegemony over their domains. I have already referred to this concept as the Extinction Thesis, and the present chapter examines its emergence in the latter half of the eighteenth century as the cornerstone for how Russian officials and Georgian dynasts understood the terms of the alliance that they forged.

How the alliance actually functioned, how the Russians upheld their commitment to protect the dynasts of Western Georgia as imperial overlords, and how the dynasts responded to this Russian presence constitutes the focus of the following chapter. As we shall see, though changes in personnel, policies, and international developments abounded through the first half of the nineteenth century, the commitment to alliance and specifically to inspiring loyalty to the tsar, in body and mind, remained a constant goal of the Russian imperial regime as much out of necessity as ideological aspirations. While the Gurieli-s professed allegiance to Russia in accordance with the terms of this imperial condominium, they also sought to uphold their sovereignty. Both sides sought to realize their political ambitions within this condominium that was based on their common Christian faith, whereby acting like a good Christian entailed demonstrating support for one another. Hence, the Russians were sensitive to the local system of dynastic rule and allegiances and actively tried to transfer those allegiances to the tsar himself. Yet, as they came to recognize the strategic importance of Western Georgia and the need to establish a stronger footing in the region, they initiated a series of reforms which, in the eyes of the dynastic rulers, violated the terms of the alliance. These initiatives sparked rebellions in the region in 1810, 1819-1820, and 1841 that expressed this sense of transgression, and,
ultimately, these rebellions led to the dissolution of sovereignty in Guria and the transformation of this dynastic principality into a regular administrative district of the empire. The examination of this process of incorporation seeks to understand how the Russians may have abolished sovereignty in Guria, but the tenuousness of their presence and the normative constraints imposed by the ideology of their alliance required that they uphold the social structure of dynasticism in Guria and limit their economic reforms until after the Crimean War.

I. Russia’s Slow Encroachment on the Georgian Lands

The foregoing remarks have argued that in surveying the history of the Russian conquest of Caucasia, while it is imperative to recognize the vacillations and polemics that animated the long affair, we also need to examine the ideological justification that grew bolder as Russia’s commitment deepened. What is particularly striking about the ideological overtones of conquest, at least in the initial sixty years, roughly 1770-1830, is the discrepancy between the two levels of analysis: that is, between the tenuousness of the Russian presence on the ground and the lofty ideals professed by the new imperial administrators.

This disparity characterizes Russian involvement in Caucasia back to the sixteenth century when various kings of the Georgian lands began in a more concerted way to exchange embassies with the rulers of Muscovite Russia. The dilemma of

\[2\] Numismatic and written evidence suggests that at least from the tenth century merchants, soldiers, monks, and princes from Kievan Rus’ began coming into contact with their counterparts from the K’art’velian lands in large part facilitated by their mutual ties to Byzantium. Illustrating these early contacts were two “diplomatic marriages”—the first involving a daughter of the Georgian King, Demetre I to Iziaslav, Prince of Kiev (1146-1154) in 1154, and the second in 1185 between Queen T’amar of Sak’art’velo (1184-1213) and Iurii Bogoliubskii, son of Prince Andrei of Suzdal’. Monastic ties on Mt. Athos that developed in the eleventh century may have been more substantial, but those ties that developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were sporadic and eventually broken by the Mongol and Timurid invasions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Diplomatic ties resumed on a more solid footing after the accession of Tsar Ivan III (1462-1505). In general, the rising fortunes of Muscovy under Ivan contrasted markedly with the declining
Georgian kings and princes until the end of the eighteenth century was that European countries and the Vatican were reluctant and unable practically to render assistance to the Christian countries of Caucasia after the establishment of Ottoman rule in Constantinople. As a result, these small polities looked to Russia for assistance in protecting Caucasia from the increasingly prolonged struggle for dominance between the newly ascendant Safavids of Iran (and their successors of the Afshar and Qajar Dynasties) and the Ottomans.\(^3\) For their part the tsars of Muscovy wanted to establish a permanent trade route along the western littoral of the Caspian Sea with Iran and India, a vision reflected clearly in early Russian maps of the Caucasian isthmus. One version of the *Book of the Great Map* (*Kniga glagolemaia bol’shoi chertezh*), attributed to the son of Tsar Boris Godunov and published in 1613, allocates four-fifths of its attention to Caucasia to the eastern Caucasus with little attention paid to the depiction of the western

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\(^3\) Meskhiia & Tsintsadze, *Iz istorii russko-gruzinskikh vzaimootnoshenii*, pp. 32-33. Although the Genoese established an extensive network of colonies in the Black Sea basin during the late-thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, they did not set up any colonies in the lands of Western Georgia south of Sebastopolis or Soxumi in Ap'xazeti. The Genoese appear to have carried on trade with the Circassians, Kabardinians, and Ossetians, including the trade in slaves, which, evidently did not directly involve the Megrels or Gurians in Western Georgia. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans succeeded in pushing the Genoese out of the Black Sea altogether. E.S. Zevakin and N.A. Penchko, “Ocherki po istorii genuezkikh kolonii na zapadnom Kavkaze v XIII i XV vv.,” *IZ* 3 (1938): 78-115. Also, David M. Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1638-1832* (New York: Columbia University, 1957): 17; Allen, *Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings*, vol. 1, p. 16; and V.V. Bartol'd, “Islam na chernom more,” in *Sochineniia*, vol. VI: *Raboty po istorii islama i arabskogo khilifata* (Moscow: “Nauka,” 1966): 659-665.
regions. This depiction of the Caucasus remained paramount in subsequent recensions of this map.\(^4\) The Russians saw in their fellow Christian kings possible allies to secure these routes and subvert the Islamic hegemony over much of Caucasia. Despite these ambitions which were discussed by various embassies through the seventeenth century, diplomatic initiatives produced little more than symbolic alliances. The Russians were ill-equipped to realize their aspirations, though these alliances did provoke the consternation of both the Ottomans and Persians. Shortly after Ivan IV’s seizure of Astrakhan in 1554 and his marriage to a daughter of the Chieftain of Kabarda in 1561, the Ottomans with their Crimean Tatar allies attempted to construct a canal between the Don and Volga Rivers in 1569 to reassert control over the Caspian steppe, leading to the first clash between the Ottomans and Muscovites.\(^5\) Indeed, W.E.D. Allen asserts that the coming of the Russians to the northern Caucasus in the subsequent quarter century marked the beginning of the “modern period of Caucasian political history.”\(^6\)

The precariousness of Russia’s position in the lands south of the main Caucasus mountains is exemplified by Tsar Fedor’s proclamation of suzerainty over the Kingdom


of Kaxet'i.\(^7\) Between 1586 and 1594 Tsar Fedor (1584-1598) and King Aleksandre II of Kaxet'i (1574-1605) exchanged three embassies in an attempt to extend protection to the besieged king in Eastern Georgia and make him a vassal of Muscovy. Having already kissed the cross as a sign of his submission to the Muscovite tsar during the first Russian embassy to Kaxet'i (1587), Aleksandre proclaimed during the second embassy that, “We have been autocrats in the Iberian realm for … more than a thousand years. But God has now willed it that the Sovereign Tsar has accepted me under his royal hand for the sake of the Christian faith, and has raised me from the earth to heaven by the mercy which he showed to me in his royal letter patent...”\(^8\) Shortly thereafter, Tsar Fedor marked this event by styling himself, among other titles, “Lord of the Iberian Land, of the Tsars of Georgia and of Kabardá, of the Tcherkess and Mountain Princes.”\(^9\) Yet, in recognition of the actual balance of power in Caucasia, which at the time allocated Eastern Georgia to Persia’s sphere of influence, Tsar Fedor Ivanovich was careful to omit this newest addition to his title in his correspondence with Shah Abbas I.\(^10\) Indeed, despite this dramatic ritual symbolizing the extension of Muscovite protection over Kaxet'i and signalling the advent of Russian power south of the Caucasus mountains, the Georgian lands would remain, as they had since their settlement millenia before, oriented to the

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\(^7\) For an overview of Russian embassies to Kaxet'i up to 1658, see Brosset, “Notes: Correspondence en grec des rois géorgiens du Cakheth avec la Russie, pendant le XVIIe siècle,” Bulletin scientifique IX:23-24 (1841): 349-380.


\(^9\) Quoted in Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p. 9; also, Allen, *History of the Georgian People*, p. 164. Based on the Russian rendition of these titles as supplied in Potto, I would argue that “‘gruzinskikh tsarei’” should be translated “Georgian Kings” and not “Tsars of Georgia” as Baddeley does. V.A. Potto, *Kavkazskaia voïna*, vol. I, p. 16.

south. As if to clarify this point to Tsar Boris Godunov several years later, in 1606, Konstantine, the younger son of King Alek’sandre and a convert to Islam, murdered his father and brother Giorgi to demonstrate his loyalty to the ascendant Shah Abbas I of Persia (1587-1624).\(^\text{11}\) The devastating defeat of Russian troops (estimated at 7,000) by the Shamhal of Tarku in 1605 underscored the fragility of Muscovy’s presence in Caucasia.\(^\text{12}\)

Russian advances into Caucasia in the seventeenth century were ineffectual but not without significance for bolstering Iranian support for King Rostom (also known as Khusrau-Mirza, 1632-1658) of K’art’li and his Muxranian successors, who ruled K’art’li largely as Muslim overlords (1658-1723) or, more specifically, as Iranian governors.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Vaxushti Bagrationi, _Istoriia tsartsva gruzinskogo_, Trans. N.T. Nakashidze (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1976): 143; W.E.D. Allen, _Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings_, vol. II, pp. 457-460. The ramifications of this event for relations between Muscovy and the Georgian kingdoms were readily apparent to the Russian ambassador Tatishchev who, at the time of the murders, was in K’art’li attempting to negotiate a treaty of protection as well as a marriage alliance involving the son and daughter of Boris Godunov and the Bagratid ruling house of K’art’li. King Giorgi X (1600-1606) had accepted the proposed dynastic marriage alliance on condition that Boris Godunov send 500 streltsy with armaments. As it happened, Boris Godunov agreed to send 150 streltsy, but even that number did not make it to K’art’li as the Poles invaded Muscovy and, in the ensuing turmoil of the Time of Troubles, the son and daughter of Boris Godunov were killed. Relations between Muscovy and the Georgian kingdoms waned for several years. At the same time, the ascendency of Shah Abbas ensured that Muscovite Russia would have been unable to extend its power to the Georgian lands in any event. Mesxia (Meskhia), _Iz istorii russko-gruzinskikh vzaimootnoshenii_, pp. 54-56; Henry John Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia, 1800-1815: In the Light of Russo-Ottoman Relations,” Ph.D. dissertation (Georgetown University, 1970): 44-49; Allen, _Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings_, vol. II, “The Embassy of Tatishchev and Ivanov,” especially pp. 448-468.

\(^{12}\) Allen, _Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings_, vol. II, pp. 549-550; Boris Nolde, _La formation de l’empire russe_, vol. II (Paris: Institut d’études slaves, 1952): 322-323; Lang, _Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy_, p. 15; Meskhia & Tsintsadze, _Iz istorii russko-gruzinskikh vzaimootnoshenii_, pp. 50-51. Bennigsen asserts that this loss signified Russia’s defeat in the first round of the “strenuous struggle” for dominance of Caucasia between Iran, Turkey and Russia in the second half of the sixteenth century. Bennigsen, “Peter the Great, the Ottoman Empire, and the Caucasus,” p. 312.

\(^{13}\) As a reflection of the cosmopolitan nature of Caucasian society, Rostom was married in 1633 to Mariam, sister of Levan II Dadiani of Samegrelo, that is, a Christian wedded to Rostom by Christian as well as Muslim rites. She was a great patron of Georgian literature and Georgian Orthodoxy. She evidently devoted great effort to restoring churches in her native Samegrelo, even recruiting the Russian iconographer, Ivan Danilov Kostromitin, who came to Georgia in 1637 in the embassy of Prince Volkonskii, to work in Georgian churches. The greatest monument of her love was the transcription of a
During his long reign through the mid-seventeenth century, T'ëimuraz I, King of Kaxet'î, sought the aid of Imeret'î, the Turks, and the Russians to offset the influence of Persia in Eastern Georgia.¹⁴ His acceptance of Russian protection in 1639, followed by his dispatch of his grandson to Moscow in 1653 and his own journey in 1658 to the court of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645-1676) exacerbated tensions with the Iranian shahs and King Rostom of K'art'îli. Muscovy was unable to project its forces south of the Caucasus regardless of its alleged role as “Lord of the Iberian Land.”¹⁵ In the eighteenth century, Peter the Great’s ill-fated campaign down the western coast of the Caspian Sea — what Bennigsen refers to as his “military promenade of an army of 50,000 men”¹⁶ — demonstrated clearly the devastation that Russian encroachment without a sustained military presence could bring upon the Caucasian peoples. Far from liberating the Christian Caucasian peoples from their Muslim rulers, his intervention precipitated the occupation of many of the Georgian lands by the Turks and the downfall and eventual exile of King Vaxtang VI to Russia. More importantly, the Ottomans responded to Russian encroachment by supporting for the first time a supreme religious rather than a dynastic leader resulting in the spread of the Naqshbandi sufi order in Daghestan. This

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¹⁴ T'ëimuraz I reigned as King of Kaxet’î, 1606-1616, then as King of K’art’îli-Kaxet’î, 1623-1632, and finally as King of Kaxet’î 1632-1663. It should be noted, however, that for all his intent to wrest K’art’îli away from its Iranian-supported governor-kings, T’ëimuraz was a scholar of Persian who translated several works into Georgian. Allen also observes that at times T’ëimuraz even resorted to alliances with the Persians to further his objective to reassert his kingship over a united K’art’îli-Kaxet’î. In this regard, T’ëimuraz exemplified a king in the borderland zone of Caucasia through his myriad expedient political alliances and shifting loyalties. Allen, History of the Georgian People, pp. 166-173.


¹⁶ Bennigsen, “Peter the Great, the Ottoman Empire, and the Caucasus,” p. 316.
support would persistently plague Russian efforts to subdue the Caucasian mountain peoples for the next century. Thus, up to the final decades of the eighteenth century, Russia was unable to project sustained military power south of the Caucasus mountains for fear of antagonizing the Ottomans and Iran in what was increasingly becoming the “great game” for hegemony over Caucasia. Moreover, Russia’s other preoccupations in foreign policy (the Livonian War, 1558-1583, or the Northern War in the era of Peter the Great 1700-1721, for example) and internal disturbances (like the Time of Troubles and the Old Believer Schism) impeded Russia’s ability to establish a footing in Caucasia. For the purposes of this study, it should be emphasized that prior to the embassy of Fedor Elchin in 1639-1640, Russia had little contact with the rulers in Western Georgia, and

17 Ibid., pp. 317-318.

18 The exchange of embassies therefore rose and fell in number during the three centuries between Russia’s initial encroachment on the northern Caucasus and the annexation of 1801. Thus, for example, between 1586 and 1620 some twenty embassies were exchanged. Allen, Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings, vol. II, p. 561. This number decreased over the next several years and again rose during the mid-seventeenth century only to taper off again during the Northern War of Peter the Great’s reign. At the same time, it should be pointed out that familiarity between Georgians and Russians grew with the establishment of a Georgian colony in Moscow beginning in the seventeenth century. Thus, for example, the son of King T’emuraz I, Erekle, grew up at the court of Tsar Alekhei Mikhailovich, living in Moscow from 1653-1660 and then again from 1666-1674. Another prominent Bagratid figure who spent time in Russia was Arch’il II (1647-1713), King of Kaxet’i and then Imereti. He sent his two sons, Alek’andre and Mamuka to Moscow where Aleksandre ended up a friend of Peter I. Paichadze, Georgievskii traktat, pp. 42-45; and B. Nolde, La formation de l’empire russe, vol. 2, p. 364. This colony grew dramatically after the arrival in Moscow of King Vaxtang VI and his suite of more than a thousand compatriots in 1725. In fact, during the mid-eighteenth century, the Georgian colony in Moscow constituted the cultural “center” of Georgian scholarship. Brosset mentions that of the 1125 people who participated in the great emigration to Moscow with King Vaxtang VI, 636 were servants. The majority of the princes and their officers spent the remainder of their lives in Moscow. M.-F. Brosset, “Monographie géorgienne de Moscou,” Bulletin scientifique IV:18-19 (1838): 279-302; G. Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), “K voprosu o kul’turnykh sviashakh Rossi i Gruzii v pervuiu polovinu XIX v.,” VI nos. 5-6 (1946): 76-89; also Levan Losifovich Maruashvili, Vakhushti Bagrationi, ego predshestveniki i sovremenniki. Geograficheskie trudy i puteshestviia (Moscow: Izd-vo Geograficheskoi literatury, 1956): 26. Several members of Vaxtang’s suite ended up serving Russian rulers in military campaigns, including, for instance, Antoni Romanovich Mouravov (Tzial-Mouravi), who in 1769 was appointed chargé d’affaires during the Russian-Georgian campaign against the Ottomans during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. Masalebi XVIII saukunis meore naxevis ruset -sak’art ‘velos urt ‘iert’ obis istorii ‘vis / Materialy po istorii russko-gruzinskikh otnoshenii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka, Valerian Macharadze , ed., vol. 1, pt. 3 (T’bilisi: T’bilisis universitetis gamome’emloba, 1988): 172-173, 305-306.
subsequently, the majority of embassies went to the kings of Eastern Georgia. None went to Guria.\textsuperscript{19}

Russia’s tenuous relationship with Caucasia can be characterized politically as the kind of steppe politics that the rulers of Muscovy engaged in with the various mountain and nomadic peoples to their south and east. Alliances were temporary and multi-polar. Michael Khodarkovsky describes the opposing perspectives of such alliances this way: “From the beginning, Moscow judged the natives [of Siberia] to be the subjects of the tsar, while the natives saw in the Russians merely another military and trading partner.”\textsuperscript{20} In the case of the Georgians, however, the lord-vassal relationship was more highly charged because both sides were fellow Christians, and, as King T’eimuraz I reminded Fedor Volkonskii, who led a Russian embassy to Kaxet’i in 1637-1639, Christianity entered Georgia (“Gruzia”) much earlier than it did Russia.\textsuperscript{21} If Muscovite Church officials could invoke their Church’s status as the “Third Rome” and the protector of


\textsuperscript{21} Brosset, Perepiska na inostrannykh iazykah, pp. xlv-lxix. Still, T’eimuraz was quick to recognize his domain’s subordinate status in ecclesiastical affairs when he added that if the Muscovite prelates found any deviation in Georgian Church practice, he would rectify it.
Orthodoxy in the East, the Georgians could point to the antiquity of their faith. Thus, Orthodox Christianity served as the cultural and ideological foundation of the relationship between the Georgian polities and Muscovy, with the latter asserting lordship over Iberia and the kings of all three Georgian kingdoms. The influence of Orthodoxy on relations between rulers of the Georgian lands and the Russian tsars can be seen not only in the inclusion of prominent clerics among the personnel of the embassies, but also in the kind of information that the Russian embassies sought in Eastern and Western Georgia. In addition to seeking out strategic information on the number of towns, inhabitants, products of the soil, political alliances, and relative military strength, the embassies consistently sought to appraise the strength and integrity of Christian faith in the Georgian domains based on external manifestations of that faith. Thus, they were charged with locating the principal churches of a given kingdom, tabulating the chief religious relics, and observing the ritual practices of the inhabitants.\footnote{See, for example, \textit{ibid.}, pp. xxix-xxx, xliii-xliv, lv-lx; and “Stateinyi spisok Fedota Elchina,” in \textit{Puteshestviia russkikh poslov XVI-XVII}, p. 224; and Ia. S. Lur’e and R.B. Mui\-ller, “Arkheograficheskii obzor: Stateinyi spisok F. Elchina,” \textit{ibid.}, pp. 355-356.}

Despite the inability to substantiate this claim through actual military assistance, the tsars demanded and various Georgian kings professed a suzerain-vassal relationship, whereby a king like Aleksandre of Kaxet’i called himself the tsar’s “slave” (\textit{khlopa}), and Tsar Fedor “my great sovereign,” swore fealty to him, and “kissed the cross” to mark the exchange of imperial rescript.\footnote{Allen, \textit{Russian Embassies to the Georgian Kings}, pp. 146-149. Meskhia and Tsintsadze explain the protocol involving the exchange of an imperial rescript, kissed and signed by the vassal king in the Georgian lands, and the imperial rescript he later received in recognition of his acceptance of the tsar’s protection. \textit{Iz istorii russko-gruzinskikh vzaimootnoshenii}, pp. 44-46.} At the same time, given their location in the dynamic borderland zone of Caucasus, the rulers of the various Georgian lands well understood the
limitations of Russian power and did not miss an opportunity to enter into alternative alliances with an Ottoman sultan or Persian shah to uphold their autonomy.24

II. From Symbolic Lordship to Imperial Hegemony

Recognition of this shared faith galvanized relations between these two sides and in the final decades of the eighteenth century began to demarcate a distinct ideological boundary between these Christian polities and their neighboring Islamic powers. Limitations of resources and other international and domestic concerns kept Russia out of Caucasian affairs from the time of Peter the Great’s Caspian campaign until the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774. To be sure, following Peter I’s successful conclusion of the Great Northern War, Caucasia figured at least vaguely in the general aim of establishing an imperial presence on the Black Sea through direct confrontation with the Ottoman Empire and its allies, the Crimean Tatars. But the central arena for achieving this objective was the Danubian provinces and the southern steppelands of old Kievan Rus’, eastward to the northern Caucasus. Peter’s expedition of 1722 down the western shores of the Caspian Sea revealed how vulnerable Russian troops were in the Caucasus, even if it occurred at the propitious moment when the Safavid dynasty faced a grave threat from an Afghan invader. After gaining nominal control over Derbent and Baku in the eastern Caucasus and three provinces of northern Persia (Ghilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad) in 1723, Russia was soon forced to abandon these gains. Disease, a shortage of supplies, and a strong Ottoman presence across the southern Caucasus, together with the rise of Nadir Shah (Tahmasp Quli Khan) as the new ruler of Persia by 1734, demonstrated that

24 In fact, King Alek’sandre later broke his oath to the tsar (at the time, Boris Godunov) when he allied with the Turks. Brosset, Peregiska, p. x; cf. C. Lemercier-Quelquejaj, “Co-optation of the Elites of Kabarda and Dagestan,” in Marie Bennigsen Broxup, et al., eds., The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World (London: Hurst & Co., 1992): 22; recall also the observation by the Italian missionary about the Machiavellian shrewdness of the Georgian princes quoted in chapter three.
in the tri-partite struggle for control of Caucasia, Persia and Ottoman Turkey still held the
day against Russia. Indeed, in what proved to be their final successful stand against
Russia’s bid for control of the southern steppe and Danubian provinces, the Ottomans
thwarted the Russians’ advance on the Crimea, the Dniestr basin and the province of
Moldavia in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1735-1739. In his appraisal of Russia’s
unsuccessful attempt to gain control of the Ukrainian steppelands and Crimea, John
LeDonne remarks that Russia still “remained unable to conduct offensive warfare in the
steppe” and that it would take another generation and the experience of the Seven Years
War with Prussia (1756-1763) to provide an ascendant Russia with the logistical
capability and military experience to wage sustained warfare across the extensive
steppe.

While Russia’s march to the Black Sea does not represent an inexorable
expansionist agenda, these developments in Russia’s military power clearly reflected the
transformation of Muscovy into an imperial state. Whether construed as a participant in
what Marshall Hodgson calls the “Great Western Transmutation” or more simply
“modernization,” by the reign of Catherine the Great, Russia’s efforts to enact substantial
socio-economic and cultural reforms using European models made it a veritable
European imperial power finally capable of controlling the steppeland and establishing a
more durable presence in what the Russians called Transcaucasia (Zakavkaz’ e).

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25 By the Treaty of Rasht, 1732, negotiated with Persia, Empress Anna agreed to evacuate the three
northern provinces of Persia. In 1735, the Russians left Baku and Derbent in the face of Nadir Shah’s
victories in Shirvan, Eastern Georgia, and Armenia. John P. LeDonne, The Russian Empire and the World,

26 Ibid., quote p. 99; also pp. 100-102.

27 Hodgson defines this transmutation as “a decisively higher level of social power than was to be found
elsewhere.” He elaborates its meaning through an exposition of the emergence of a self-reproducing
“pattern of multiple technical specialization” manifested in the cultural, economic, and social spheres. In
illuminating the attributes of “technicalism,” Hodgson asserts that “the greatest advantage of the highly
technicalized lands has been the continuity and effectiveness of their traditions, which have served to
Of particular relevance to this study is the ideological articulation of this transformation, and specifically the invocation of Orthodox Christianity as the foundation of the continuing Russian confrontation with the Ottoman Empire. With Muscovy’s ascendancy in the eighteenth century, the tsarist government merged its traditional claim to be the protector of Orthodox minority populations with an Enlightenment discourse in what would become a specific version of the mission civilisatrice. Increasingly in the eighteenth century as Russia’s rulers deepened their commitment to reform and to the principles of Enlightened monarchy, Orthodoxy assumed a central position in justifying Russia’s foreign-policy initiatives toward the Ottomans. After initial success in his Transcaucasian expedition, Peter the Great flirted with the possibility of marching into the Georgian lands, proclaiming that “Christians cannot refuse to protect Christians.”

They did refuse then, and again during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1735-1739, when the initial Russian negotiating stance sought to wrest parts of Moldavia and Wallachia from Ottoman control as an independent Orthodox polity. Nonetheless, this discourse, positioning Russia as the protector of Orthodox minority populations under Ottoman suzerainty, assumed great significance as Russia sought to reach across the Caucasus to “save” the Georgians. Indeed, unlike the situation with the Orthodox minorities in the Balkans (except for the Romanian principalities), the Georgian domains were not in the Ottoman Empire but maintained a precarious autonomy bordering the empire. In effect,

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29 Ibid., p. 100. In her plan to partition the western territories of the Ottoman Empire submitted to the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II in 1782, Catherine the Great revived the plan to constitute the Danubian Principalities as an autonomous Orthodox principality to be called Dacia to be ruled as a Russian protectorate under an Orthodox prince. Ibid., pp. 107-108.
through the latter half of the century, Russian and Georgian rulers forged a more durable alliance founded on their shared Orthodox faith, conveyed in terms of a lord-vassal relationship, and dedicated to the proposition that the Russians were acting to save the Georgians from extinction.

Initially, what I call the Extinction Thesis involved only the claim that the Russians were saving the Georgians from physical extinction. This stance provided the Russians with an ideological justification to the Georgians for their presence south of the Caucasus, while also providing both the Russians and Georgian proponents of Russian rule with a justification for the dissolution of kingship in K’art’li-Kaxet’i in 1801. Then, having entrenched themselves in both Eastern and Western Georgia during the first half of the nineteenth century by dissolving all local autonomous and integrating these domains into the Russian imperial administrative and judicial systems, the Russians claimed and, to an extent, the Georgians affirmed, that the Russians were now saving the Georgians from spiritual and moral debilitation that four centuries of Islamic and “Asiatic” rule had wrought on the once glorious lands of Colchis and Iberia of antiquity. This view constituted the essence of the Russian civilizing mission in the Georgian lands in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The threat of extinction framed the hierarchical relationship of sovereign to subject, while Orthodoxy provided the ethical language for enforcing honorable conduct on individuals from both sides and for upholding the general integrity of that unequal relationship. This ideological framework effectively allowed for the radical reorientation of the Georgian lands to the “northern sun” represented by the Russian Empire. Unlike the use of this discourse in the Balkans, where the Russians at least initially invoked Orthodoxy as a constraint on Ottoman behavior, in the Georgian lands both sides used this discourse to compel appropriate conduct from the other in a new, precarious imperial relationship. At the same time, the history of the development of this relationship between Russian overlords and Georgian vassals reveals a growing tension between an idiom of vassalage grounded in their
common faith and traditional feudal social structure and the modernizing agenda of the Russian government set on transforming its new imperial possessions into productive colonies populated by agrarian producers for the marketplace.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774

The turning point in Russian-Georgian relations came in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774, for Russia sent troops for the first time over the Caucasus into the Georgian domains and pledged itself to upholding the autonomy of the various Georgian polities. Indeed, it was during this war that Russians first acknowledged the efficacy of using the Caucasus as a diversionary front to advance their goals against the Ottomans in the Balkans. In addition, though the Caucasian front played a minor role in the war, it proved extremely important in the long run insofar as Russian and Georgian successes against Turkish forces in Western Georgia demonstrated firsthand the strategic importance of this region as a staging area for Russian military campaigns into eastern Anatolia and Persia. In its barest outlines, the war in the Caucasus progressed as follows. Once the Ottomans declared war on Russia (25 Sept. 1768), Catherine the Great took advantage of the request from King Solomon I of Imeret’i that the empress send him military aid to forestall an Ottoman invasion and help stabilize his rule. The first

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31 Lang stresses the military implications of this campaign, despite the minor role of this front in the war and General Todtleben’s reprehensible conduct. D.M. Lang, “Count Todtleben’s Expedition to Georgia, 1769-1771, according to a French Eyewitness,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies XIII:4 (1951): 881.

32 Interestingly, prior to this embassy, sent in June 1768, Solomon had already sent an envoy in 1766 requesting asylum in Russia because the Ottomans had seized control of his chief town of K’ut’at’isi (K’ut’ aisi) and installed his cousin, T’emuraz, as surrogate king. In keeping with Western Georgian political history, T’emuraz was supported by Giorgi Gurieli, the Dadiani of Samegrelo, and the erist’avi of the Imeret’iian province of Racha. Rather than submit to the Ottoman demand that he resume the payment
contingent of Russian troops, numbering some 400 soldiers and commanded by the infamous Count Gottlieb Heinrich von Todtleben, entered the Georgian lands in late summer, 1769. Todtleben immediately set off for the Kingdom of Imeret’i where he laid siege unsuccessfully to the fortress of Shorap’ani which held a garrison of only twenty-three Turks. In the next two years Catherine sent reinforcements so that Russian troops grew to 4,000 by the time of their withdrawal in 1772. Nonetheless, because of his irascible character, tensions between the German general and his Georgian allies quickly soured. The most resounding victory for this strained alliance came at the hand of the gifted military leader, King Erekle II, who alone defeated a much larger Ottoman force at the Battle of Ap’sinda (1770) in the pashalik of Axalc’ixe. Irritated that Erekle had won this battle without him, Todtleben returned to Western Georgia where he seized the fortresses of Shorap’ani and Baghdat’i, as well as the Imeret’ian capital of K’ut’at’isi (K’ut’a’isi), but only after King Solomon had allowed the Turkish troops to vacate the town the night before. Todtleben then attempted to take the coastal fortress of P’ot’i in alliance with the Dadiani of Samegrelo, who was the arch-enemy of Solomon. As the siege dragged on, Catherine the Great decided to replace Todtleben at the end of 1770 with Major General A.N. Sukhotin. Acting against the advice of his Georgian advisers, Sukhotin resumed the siege in the spring of 1771, only to lose some 800 men to fever; the Russians never took the fortress. Acting on his own, King Erekle won additional

of tribute in the form of slaves as the condition to regain his throne, Solomon fled to the woods of Imeret’i and dispatched his envoy to Catherine’s commander in the northern Caucasian settlement of Kizliar seeking asylum. While waiting for her response, he then fought a pitched battle against T’emuraz and his allies and won. Solomon thus regained his throne all the while awaiting word from the empress. Catherine’s initial response to Solomon came before the Ottoman declaration of war, and therefore, in order not to arouse Ottoman ire, she denied his request but held out hope that she might grant him asylum at a future date. Hence, the two rulers were already corresponding when the Ottomans declared war on Russia. In an effort to win Solomon’s allegiance and prevent Russian encroachment in Western Georgia, the sultan reversed his stance toward Solomon and, acting through the pasha of Axalc’ixe, sent Solomon a saber and begged his forgiveness for any previous “sins,” promising none in the future but demanding the payment of tribute all the same. Feeling as though he had no choice, since Catherine had still not sought an alliance with him, Solomon was forced to sell more children into slavery. *Masalebi XVIII sau kunis*, pp. 157-164.
victories over the Ottomans in T’rialet’i, but without additional Russian support, he could not prosecute the war further into Ottoman territory. His ultimate goal was to recapture Georgian lands lost to the Ottomans over the centuries. Though the war dragged on until 1774, Catherine withdrew the bulk of the Russian troops by the end of 1772 because of the Pugachev Rebellion that broke out that year.33

On the face of it, this first sustained Russian military expedition in the Georgian lands was plagued by incompetent leadership, disease, and only nominal military victories.34 As substantial as the Russian presence had been for two years, it was fleeting and quickly reduced to an insignificant garrison in Tiflis. Yet, outside the arena of the war itself, the Russian presence exuded the air of an Enlightened imperial power. Several aspects of this imperial presence deserve attention. Most important for this discussion is the language of the alliance between Catherine’s court and Kings Erekle II of K’art’li-Kaxet’i and Solomon I of Imeret’i. To begin, in his initial cries for help to Catherine before the outbreak of war, Solomon beseeched the Russian commander of Kizliar to


34 Overall, largely because of the successes enjoyed by Kings Erekle and Solomon in the Saat’abago of Axalc’ixe and Imeret’i, the Russian campaign in the Georgian lands during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 achieved its goal of diverting Ottoman troops away from the Balkan front. Lang, Last Years, pp. 173-175; K’ort’ua, Russko-gruzinskie vzaimootnoseniia, pp. 125-127. Due largely to the incompetence of Todtleben and his successor, General Sukhotin, the Russians lost 3,000 men and spent half a million rubles on the Caucasian campaigns. Lang also notes that one reason the Russians decided not to create a second front in Georgia against the Ottomans in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1787-1791 was the memories of his debilitating campaign in the first war. Last Years, pp. 177, 210.
convey to his empress that his kingdom faced virtual devastation and destruction because of his refusal to pay the slave tribute to the sultan anymore. Already some 80,000 Ottoman troops had plundered his domains, destroying, profaning, and burning his churches and icons and carrying some 800 Christian souls into captivity. He stressed to the commander that Muslims “are the unremitting enemies of Christianity” (dauc’xromelni mterni arian k’ristianobisa) and that if he persists in his refusal to pay the tribute, then he must leave his domains with his princes, nobles, and peasants for safe haven in Russia. He insisted that he would rather lose “his physical wealth and glory and honor [pativi]” than sanction the destruction of “our soul.” Therefore, facing imminent peril at the hands of another Ottoman invasion and internecine strife, removed from his throne by a previous Ottoman attack, and forced to live in the Imeret’ian forests, Solomon requested asylum in Russia. Solomon’s request contains all the elements of what would become the foundation of the Georgian-Russian imperial condominium. Casting about for a possible ally to salvage his kingdom, Solomon invoked the threat of destruction and their shared religious faith to win the protection of “the most pious and gracious sovereign.”

Having regained his throne but still enduring the Ottoman occupation of his chief fortresses, Solomon formally asked Catherine in 1768 to take his kingdom under her protection or at least to provide him with military aid to rid his kingdom of the Turks. In this request he is more lavish in his praise of Catherine and explicit in his expression of servitude. Addressing her as “the mother of all Orthodox Christians near and far,” and “falling on my knees, [seeking] forgiveness and mercy from [your] maternal generosity, I beseech your Imperial Majesty: first, to save us from the hands of the tribes [and] Ottomans (uc’xot’eslt’a, osmant’a / inoplemmnikov, izmail’tian) and to take us, our land

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35 The Georgian text of Solomon’s letter (20 October 1766) and the Russian translation appear in Masalebi XVIII sau kunis, doc. nos. 31 & 32, pp. 225-228.
and our people under Your powerful imperial protection as an eternal slave and to reckon
us among [Your] servants and the empire of Your Imperial Majesty.” Solomon
implores Catherine to take his kingdom under her protection since he has “been thirsting
for many years to spill my blood for the law of Christ;” in return, he promises that he will
not spare his life to uphold “the eastern Orthodox faith and law” by spilling his blood
against the Turks.  

After the Ottomans declared war on Russia and once Catherine II decided to
create a diversionary front in the Georgian lands, she became interested in Solomon’s
appeal for aid. In a document discussing how to bring the rulers of the Georgian
kingdoms into the war, an anonymous author highlights the precarious existence of the
Imeret’ians and K’art’velians, who are explicitly grouped together as “Georgians.”

In general, all of Georgia has for a long time lived in poverty from
its neighbors, the Muslims and barbarians living in the Caucasus
mountains; they all kidnap them [the Georgians] into captivity and
bondage; calm, peace and safety do not exist in those parts, where each
[person] sooner or later can be drawn into eternal captivity and bonds, and,
in order to protect their subjects, who have been gradually decreasing in
number, the Georgian rulers have been forced into an incessant movement
and to turn first to one place and then to another.  

This statement portrays the vulnerability of the Georgians and helps to establish for
Russia a role as savior of the beleaguered Christian peoples.

Speaking on behalf of Empress Catherine, Russian foreign minister, Count Nikita
Ivanovich Panin, wrote to Solomon with a pledge of military support and favorable
treatment in any peace treaty, provided the allies prevail in return for Solomon’s rallying
his troops to the imperial cause together with King Erekle of K’art’li-Kaxet’i. Panin

36 Ibid., doc. nos. 71 & 72, pp. 274-277. The Russian translation renders “Ottomans” as “Ismailites.”
37 Ibid., pp. 275, 277.
38 Ibid., doc. no. 76, pp. 286-287.
applauds Solomon for carrying on as "a champion and defender of Christianity, one who has undertaken a laudable and salutary deed against the dishonor of one trying to oppress and destroy the Orthodox faith in your homeland." Indeed, Panin declares that Russia now finds itself at war with the Ottomans for no reason other than the Porte's "hatred for Christianity and [its] habitual treachery toward it...." In waging war against the Ottomans, Solomon is acting as "a servant to Christianity and to her Imperial Majesty, the most-gracious sovereign, as an Orthodox monarch who now has not one but many motives."

In her charter of alliance with King Solomon, Catherine the Great states that she has sent General Todtleben to Georgia "for the liberation of this region from the abusive enslavement" carried on by the Ottomans. She too applauds Solomon for the bravery he has shown in defense of Christianity and for allying with his relative, King Erekle. She also proclaims that taking Imeret' i under imperial protection remains a matter of destiny. In the meantime, in recognition of Solomon's "devotion to Us and to Our imperial throne, and [your] zeal, in general, for Orthodox Christian law," Catherine is awarding the king with the Order of St. Andrew. This last gesture would have resonated with Solomon's knowledge of Georgian history, insofar as the Georgian Church advanced the claim at least from the eleventh century that the Apostles Andrew and Simon spread Christianity to Western Georgia. The same day she issued another charter to Solomon, the Dadiani of Samegrelo, the Gurieli, and the erist 'avi of Racha calling on these men to lay aside their differences in order to carry on the common defense of Orthodox Christianity.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{39}} \text{Ibid.}, \text{doc. no. 78 (30 Nov. 1768), pp. 289-290.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{40}} \text{Ibid.}, \text{doc. no. 208 (16 Dec. 1768), pp. 480-481. Catherine's charter to King Erekle of K'art'li-Kaxet'i appears in doc. no. 205 (16 Dec. 1768), pp. 473-475. This charter is much longer than that to Solomon because at this time, Erekle had requested and received status for his lands as an official Russian protectorate. Erekle, too, received the Order of Saint Andrew, doc. no. 192 (27 Nov. 1768), p. 458.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{41}} \text{Rapp, } IHC, \text{ pp. 316-317, 357-359 372-382.}\]
present Imeretia is in an impoverished state of the most deplorable regret: the law is
oppressed and the people are plundered.” She stresses that it is “extremely lamentable”
to hear about the quarreling and fighting among Christians as she has heard occurring
between the leading families of Western Georgia. For its part, Russia finds itself at war
with the Ottomans for “no legal reason at all, but [the Porte] violated [the peace] by its
characteristic treachery, [and] we have expanded our view not on our own behalf but for
all of Christianity.” Russia is acting out of sympathy for fellow Christians, she insists,
and affirms that the highest motive for action is for leaders and proper Christians alike to
work for the salvation of all the souls of those under their charge. Lay aside all disputes
and differences and unite to overthrow the enemy: “in this event, they can obtain the
eternal protection of Our Empire for themselves and their descendants and their lands” as
well as affirmation of their faith in the peace treaty with the Porte. This proclamation to
the sovereign rulers of Western Georgia clearly expresses Russia’s selfless motivation in
taking on the role of savior of Christian peoples and also enjoins them to act like proper
Christians, if they want to win Russian protection and defeat the common Muslim enemy.

In any event, the Russians prevailed in the war and, to an extent, honored their
promise to safeguard Georgian interests in the peace-treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (or
Kuchuk Kainardji) in 1774. Because of the way it addressed the Russian-Ottoman border
from the Danubian principalities to the Caucasus, John LeDonne calls it “in a very real
sense the first partition of the Ottoman Empire.” Though the Russians did not gain
large tracts of land along their southern borders, they did win an Ottoman commitment
“to [let them] protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches” in the Ottoman
Empire. In addition, the Ottomans committed themselves to not oppress Christians in

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42 Masalebi XVIII saukunis, doc. no. 209 (16 Dec. 1768), pp. 481-482.

43 LeDonne, Russian Empire and the World, p. 105.
Greece, the Danubian Principalities, and Western Georgia. More specifically, Article 23 stipulated that the Russians return the fortresses in Western Georgia that they had seized from the Ottomans, including K’ut’aisi. The Russians were also obligated to recognize Ottoman suzerainty over Western Georgia and therefore not to engage in the affairs of the region. At the same time, the Ottomans had to promise that they would no longer demand tribute in slaves or any other form from the potentates of that region. Though they were allowed to reoccupy the fortresses they had lost, they could not in any way interfere with the local administration of Guria, Samegrelo, and Imeret’i nor with the observance of the Christian faith. In effect, the treaty reinforced the precarious autonomy of the inhabitants of Western Georgia, only the size and success of the Russian presence in the region had increased the risk of encroachment by Ottomans, Persians, and Russians alike. The kings of the Georgian lands, especially Erekle II of K’art’l-Kaxet’i, grasped the inherent dangers in this new configuration of power. Not only did the treaty not uphold Russia’s promise to extend protection over his eastern Kingdom, but the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region in 1772 raised the specter of retribution from the Persians and Ottomans. Thus, Erekle complained to Panin: “The departure of the troops of Your Imperial Majesty has plunged us into the greatest misfortune, and we

44 Ibid., pp. 105-106. In addition to these commitments, the treaty recognized an independent “Tatar nation” centered in the Crimea, and it mandated the incorporation of Kabarda in the northern Caucasus into the Russian Empire. It also rendered the Sea of Azov a closed Russian sea and integrated the district of the Zaporozhian Cossacks into the empire. In effect, Küçük Kaynarca laid the foundation for Grigori Potemkin’s “eastern system,” which envisioned the annexation of the Crimea and the creation of a line of forts in the northern Caucasus running between the Terek and Kuban watersheds. The more strategic objective of these goals was to foment dissent among Greeks, Georgians, Romanians, and other “co-religionists” that could be harnessed to remove the Ottomans from the frontier zone. Ibid., p. 107.

45 Interestingly, the language of the treaty was sufficiently vague in its use of the term Gruzii or “Georgia” that the Ottomans construed this clause about the reach of their sovereignty to mean all the Georgian lands while the Russians meant simply the lands of Imeret’i (including Guria) and Samegrelo in Western Georgia. See Lang, Last Years, p. 206.

46 Boris Nolde quotes article 23 of the treaty. La formation de l’empire russe, pp. 373-374. See also, Kortua, Russko-gruzinskie vzaimootnosheniia, pp. 127-130; Kurat, Türkiye ve Rusya, p. 35.
have fallen into a deplorable and intolerable state which is produced when the soul separates from the body."\(^{47}\)

One other, less recognized, dimension of this first Russian venture into the Georgian lands deserves our attention. This is Russia's espousal of an Enlightenment mission in the Caucasus as part of the justification to save their fellow Christians. Indeed, the written record of Russia's campaign in the Georgian lands exudes an air of superiority and elevated civilization that permeates the traditional idiom of the lord-vassal relationship and the commitment to protect their Orthodox kin. In her instructions to the chargé d'affaires, Prince Anton Mouravev and General Todtlen, Empress Catherine insisted that the two commanders demonstrate tact and goodwill toward the Georgian sovereigns and that they demonstrate the merits of an orderly army. She maintained that, together with sound advice and leadership, such conduct would inspire in Solomon a respect for "European enlightenment" and would kindle in his subjects the desire to mimic it: "[T]hey will recognize in the activities of the people here [i.e. Russians] and the benefits of artillery the uses mainly of the European way before the Asiatic in the execution of battles and raids, and it will be a most suitable time to implant in them [the Imeret'i-ans] the desire for imitation."\(^{48}\) This declaration of Russia's role in spreading European enlightenment contrasts with earlier views of Russian ambassadors of the superior position of the Russian Orthodox Church as the pillar of eastern orthodoxy. Here we find a marked shift into the secular, European world of Enlightenment embodied by orderly troops and powerful weaponry. Furthermore, Catherine's instructions highlight the ambiguous view the Russians had of their Christian kin in the Georgian lands insofar as they saw the Georgians as occupying a space between Europe and Asia.

\(^{47}\) Quoted in \textit{ibid.}, p. 371.

\(^{48}\) \textit{Masalebi XVIII saukenis}, doc. no. 114 (28 May 1769), pp. 342, 348 (quote).
If their Christian faith made them Europeans, their history under Islamic rule rendered them “Asiatics.” This perspective on the Georgians would subsequently help justify Russian interventionist schemes as a concerted effort to redeem fallen Christians who long ago in the age of Iberia and Colchis imbibed the spirit of Greek civilization.

As a further reflection of Russia’s alignment with European notions of civilization, Catherine sponsored the first scientific study of Caucasia at the time of the Russo-Ottoman war. The expedition of Johann Güldenstädt (1741–1781) under the auspices of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences stretched over six years, 1768–1774, and passed through the Georgian lands in 1771–1772 with the protection of Georgian and Russian troops stationed in the region. Güldenstädt was a doctor of medicine and a naturalist, who was charged with gathering information regarding climate, crops, minerals, topography, ethnography, and whatever else he deemed of interest to the Academy. The result of his extensive exploration of the Caucasus, which in Georgia took him to Kaxet’i, K’art’i, Imeret’i, Samegrelo, and Guria was his two-volume study, *Reisen druch Russland und im caucasischen Gebirge*, published posthumously in 1787–1791. The novelty of Güldenstädt’s work is that it stands on its own as a source generated by the empirical observation of the doctor himself rather than compiled from the observations of previous travelers. The data is much more detailed than that provided

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by the Russian embassies and its presentation more systematic and objective, or free of value judgments and unbridled commentary. In particular, Güldenstädt provides the most extensive and precise geographical description of the Georgian lands of any foreign account up to that time. He breaks down each region into sub-regions, names the prominent villages of each, and often includes the travel time between villages. Through this careful scrutiny of districts, we get the first glimpse of micro-climates within a territory like Samegrelo or Imereti and a sense of the ecological complexity that especially characterizes Western Georgia. His gaze is steady and consistent in its observation of climate, crops, currencies, agricultural cycles, basic vocabulary words, even schematic ethnographic descriptions of wedding and burial rites.\(^{50}\) The most striking difference between his account and those of many of the earlier Russian embassies is that his pays less attention to the religious life and architecture of the Georgian peoples. Whereas the embassies included ecclesiastical personnel specifically charged with appraising the veracity of the faith proclaimed by those peoples, Güldenstädt examined them and their domains more as a uniform field of inquiry that could be described through the nascent field of statistics.

And yet, when Güldenstädt’s scientific eye turns to examine the body politic, as it were, he displays his ignorance of the social, political, and cultural differences that distinguished the various Georgian lands. “The statistical and political formation of Imeretia in no way differs from that of Kartulinia: there are the same ranks and the same relations between them; there is the same military and meager judicial system, the same court and government officials, only less idle and [with] fewer titles.”\(^{51}\) In this realm,

\(^{50}\) J.A. Güldenstädt, *Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie Gruzii i Kavkaza*, pp. 262-273, 286-351, 380-384. Interestingly, he follows the account of the ethnogenesis of the Caucasian peoples from T’argamos as given in *The Life of the Kings*.

Güldenstädt sounds much like his predecessors who composed travel accounts in earlier ages, though he delivers these characterizations in terse prose. "The state of the subjects of Imeret'i is in the same enslavement, and the inhabitants also content themselves by the same village crafts; there the cultivation of grape-vines and grain and livestock is less important, and in general the people are poorer, which must be attributed in part to the mountainous situation and to their climate." Likewise, the subjects of the Dadiani in Mingrelia, "are in the same servitude reinforced by the same arbitrary taxes and laws, and [they have] the same crafts and are lazy in their execution and generally very poor." More than any other region, Güldenstädt asserts (though he never went there), Guria bore the burden of Turkish influence, and because of the continual stealing of people and livestock and the destruction of homes, there was little hope for improvement. The simplicity of this analysis reflects more his preference for the things of the physical world than a moral compulsion to assert the superiority of European civilization, though this sense of superiority appears in the statistical framework itself and his occasional praise for the efforts of the Russians to liberate Western Georgia from the Turks. More

52 Ibid., p. 285. Cf. "The power of the Kartulian king over the law and over the life, death, and property of [his] subjects, . . . is little or not at all limited. More than anything, however, he needs the friendship of his strong princes, without which his throne would easily fall [to another], especially when they took the side of the Porte" (p. 274). Here is a simplistic acknowledgment of the power of Georgian dynasticism.

53 Ibid., p. 358. As "a part of Georgia," Mingrelia also has the same government, p. 362.

54 Ibid., p. 369.

55 Thus, he asserts that "Soon after the Russian troops arrived under the command of Count Todtleben to liberate Georgia, they cleared Imeretia of the Turks in a short time." Ibid., p. 283. His claim that Todtleben liberated K'ut'aisi and delivered it to Solomon is a similar exaggeration of what actually occurred (p. 285). In fact, Solomon's troops had already laid siege to the fortress when Solomon and Todtleben arrived, and the night before Todtleben "stormed" the citadel, Solomon let the Turks withdraw their forces. Butkov, I, pp. 282-284; Land, Last Years, p. 171. On the other hand, it is clear from other passages of outright exaltation, that Güldenstädt did not compose them but that his translator did long after Güldenstädt died and soon after the Russian annexation. Hence, K. German opens the chapter on government in K'art'li with remarks about how depopulated the region was and how the inhabitants could not possibly defend themselves against the depredations of their neighbors, nor work the mines, establish
importantly, in his attribution of character to environment, Güldenstädt points to the
challenge facing the Russians as proponents of enlightened rule. That is, if bountiful
nature with its feverish climate in which the Georgians lived explains their lazy,
debauched characters, the Russians would have to transform their souls by reinvigorating
the Christian faith and increasing their productive activities through systematic
development projects.

On balance, however, his account exudes a freshness of perspective that reflected
the recent arrival of the Russians in Caucasia as serious contenders for hegemony over
the isthmus. With the establishment of a permanent administration in Eastern Georgia
after the annexation of 1801, those charged with collecting information about the
Georgian lands would follow the example set by Güldenstädt, but they would also look
further back in history to anchor their perspective in older accounts of those domains and
thereby legitimize the rather unorthodox rule of Russia over a land that had always been
oriented toward the south.

Güldenstädt’s expedition established him as the foremost authority in Russia on
the territories to the north and east of the Black Sea. 56 No less important, his trip initiated
a series of similar studies about the Caucasus by mostly Germans in the service of
Catherine that amounted to a firm foundation of scientific inquiry into the peoples,
resources, and ecologies of Caucasia. 57 It should be noted, however, that for all the


57 Subsequent leaders of expeditions or persons who wrote scientific accounts about the Georgian lands at
the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries included, P.S. Pallas (1768-1774, 1793-1794),
F.K. Biberstein (1797-1798), the Pole Jan O. Potocki (1798), Jacob Reineggs (1779, 1782-1783),
and J. Klaproth (1807-1808). Of course, Klaproth’s expedition was the first to occur under Russian rule in
K’art’i-Kaxet’i. M.O. Kosven, “Materialy po istorii etnograficheskogo izucheniiia Kavkaza v russkoi
nauke,” Kavkazskii etnograficheskii sbornik 1 (1955): 286-288, 291; and M. Polievktov, Evropeiskie
territory that these trips covered, none reached Guria, indicating the peripheral position occupied by this principality. More broadly, Güldenstädt’s expedition provided the foundation for the development of what could be termed Russia’s “exhibitionary complex” in and about Caucasia. As elaborated by Tony Bennett, this term connotes a set of institutions — museums and exhibitions most notably — that served as sites “for the development and circulation of new disciplines (history, biology, art history, anthropology) and their discursive formations (the past, evolution, aesthetics, man) as well as for the development of new technologies of vision.” Insofar as Güldenstädt collected a wide array of specimens and generated the first systematic, albeit rudimentary, tabulations of languages and peoples in the region, he made it possible to display the region in a variety of venues to the larger imperial public or obshchestvo. Indeed, as K. German stated in the preface to his 1808 Russian translation of Güldenstädt’s work, “The goal [of this translation] is to inform the Russian public of the geographical and statistical information from Güldenstädt’s travels regarding Georgia and the Caucasus, which in many respects are still unknown lands that have joined the Russian state; still more [this information] in short extracts can undoubtedly be useful to the officials of that region.”

Still, Russia’s new presence in Caucasia revealed the glaring lack of data needed to maintain even a foothold south of the Caucasus mountains. Catherine the Great articulated this lack of information when she charged her College of Foreign Affairs to

58 Again, one of the most knowledgeable Russian servitors in Caucasia at this time prior to the annexation was Stepan Danilovich Burnashev, an accomplished cartographer and officer in charge of the Russian troops stationed in K’art’i, 1783-1787. Next to his relatively detailed description of K’art’i, depicted in his work, Kartina Gruzii (Kursk 1793), his account of Imereti is merely a summary sketch. M. Polievktov, Evropeiskie puteshestvenniki XIII-XVIII vv. po Kavkazu, p. 25.


60 J.A. Güldenstädt, Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie Gruzii i Kavkaza, preface, verso.
find out the fundamentals of Georgian geography. Were there any accurate maps in the College depicting the Georgian lands? Did any Georgian sovereign have ports on the Black Sea? On one map “Teflis” stood on the Black Sea, on another it fell on the Caspian, while on a third, it was in between the two seas: what was its actual location? In their response to Catherine’s questions, officials at the College composed a brief report in which they oriented the empress in Georgian geography, asserting that Gruziia consisted of Mingrelia, Imeretia, Guriel, Kartalinia, and Kakhetia. In its narrow sense, however, Gruziia meant Kartalinia or K’art’li. They correctly stated that Guria was independent of Imeret’i, but they were at a loss as to whether Mingrelia had its own ruler or whether it was ruled by directly by Turkey or Imeret’i. They also located Tp’ilisi in the center of the Caucasian isthmus and acknowledged that Western Georgia had several ports on the Black Sea. Nonetheless, their maps at the College all relegated the Georgian lands to a secondary position, and because the terminology and locations were not verified on the ground but gathered from various sources, they could not be trusted. After all, they argued, until now opportunity or reason had not allowed the collection of

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61 Masalebi XVIII saukunis, doc. no. 77 (28 Nov. 1768), pp. 288-289; and doc. no. 113 (26 May 1769), p. 344. See also Boris Nolde’s discussion of the state of Russia’s knowledge of Georgia at this time, in La formation de l’empire russe, vol. 2, pp. 364-374.

62 Masalebi XVIII saukunis, doc. no. 80 (end of Nov., 1768), pp. 294-295. The ambiguity over the status of Mingrelia or Samegrelo in Russian conceptions of the Georgian lands appears in the correspondence of Catherine II and her advisers who repeatedly asserted that Imeret’i extended to the Black Sea. Cf. ibid., pp. 235, 283.

63 Interestingly, Allen surmises that a relatively accurate map of Western Georgia, composed by T‘imote, Metropolitan of K‘ut‘aia before 1738 and brought to Moscow during the Metropolitan’s ambassadorial visit, was copied and translated into Russian and French explicitly for officials at the College. Nonetheless, he notes that this second map surfaced in Paris as part of the papers of Joseph-Nicholas Delisle’s (Guillaume’s younger brother), who left Russia in 1747 after the completion of the Atlas Russicus. Meanwhile, Brosset found the original map deposited in the Topographical Depot of the General Staff in Petersburg together with papers associated with Peter the Great’s campaign along the Caspian coast. Compilers of later Russian maps seem to have been unaware of the copy deposited in the depot. Allen, “Two Georgian Maps,” pp. 100-103. The Russian military presence in the Georgian lands during this period eventually produced a reliable map by Colonel Stepan Burnashev, who served in Georgia from 1783 to 1787. Lang, “Todtleben’s Expedition to Georgia,” p. 880.
accurate descriptions. In addition, they concluded, "the Georgians’ ignorance of this shortcoming in these matters did not benefit from the example of the European peoples, who have provided the glory and need to bring to light for their countries descriptions and maps that are as accurate as possible."64 Ironically, this assertion reveals the ignorance of these Russian officials at the College of Foreign Affairs not only of the maps produced by Vaxushti Bagrationi in Moscow but also of the acclaim these maps had won from European cartographers who used them to produce their own maps.65

If the Russians acquired significantly more information in a variety of fields than that generated by earlier Russian embassies, those charged with collecting it compiled their observations in reports that rendered the presentation of the data fragmented and inconsistent. In addition, they were still largely dependent on Georgian informants for data about the population, distribution of towns, and borders. The information solicited from Georgian sources was exchanged between sovereign states; the Russians lacked the means to systematically collect on their own the data they may have sought. Given the volatile political alliances that characterized this period of protracted warfare, pitting Solomon against the sovereign princes of Guria and Samegrelo, the accuracy of much of this data was open to question. Thus, for example, in a report compiled by the Metropolitan of Kʻutʻaisi (old form: Kʻutʻatʻisi), we learn that Solomon’s Kingdom of Imeretʻi encompassed all of Guria including the port-town of Batʻumi.66 While Guria may have included Batʻumi within its borders, the Metropolitan’s other assertion about it reflected wishful thinking more than actual fact regarding the extent of Solomon’s sovereignty. Demographic data was rudimentary at best, although the war effort did

64 Ibid., p. 296.

65 Ibid., p. 296, n. 1. Cf. Allen’s remark concerning the quality of Vaxushti’s maps completed prior to 1745: "...each of the Georgian maps is superior to the counterpart in the Atlas Russicus of 1745." Allen, "Sources for G. Delisle’s ‘Carte,’” p. 147.

66 Ibid., doc. no. 85 (14 March 1769), p. 303.
facilitate the compilation of the first demographic survey of K`art’li-Kaxet’i by King Erekle II.\(^67\) Based on figures procured from an unnamed Georgian source, Prince Mouravev stated in his report that the Gurieli Giorgi V possessed five thousand peasant households in his principality.\(^68\) Since no Russian forces fought in Guria, they could not possibly have confirmed the accuracy of such a figure.\(^69\) Nonetheless, the various reports that proliferated from the field contained much useful information regarding crops, topography, approximate distances, trade, fortresses, and political alignments, and they reflected the determination of Russia to project its power into the southern Caucasus as well as the ability of relatively well-trained Russian military personnel to gather a broad base of rudimentary data in a somewhat systematic manner.\(^70\)

In summary, the first sustained presence of Russian troops demonstrated all too clearly the discrepancy between Russian imperial ideals and capacity to realize those ideals. For the purposes of this study, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-1774 laid the foundation for a new imperial condominium that fashioned for both sides a role that was at once traditional in its espousal of Christian virtues and the honorable conduct expected of lord and vassal, and imperial in its commitment to implanting enlightened rule in the midst of what was perceived as a backward, corrupt Islamic domain. Backed by Russian arms and scientific inquiry, this stance heralded Russia’s imperial mission in the region

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\(^68\) *Masalebi XVIII saukenis*, p. 433. This figure is reproduced by Gülデンstädt who most certainly obtained it from Mouravev (see below). J.A. Gülデンstädt, *Geograficheskoe i statisticheskoe opisanie Gruzii i Kavkaza* (SPB: Imperatorskaia akademia nauk, 1809): 372.

\(^69\) Indeed, as Captain de Grailly de Foix states in his account of the war: “The unknown Guriel prince, who bears a Christian name but who is entirely subservient to the Turks, took not the least part in this war.” Lang, “Count Tottleben’s Expedition to Georgia,” p. 882.

but also highlighted the perilous impact that the vacillating Russian presence could have on the Georgian lands. The war initiated more than half a century of intense warfare and conflict for hegemony over Caucasia. At the same time, the lack of historical justification for that presence made the ideological justification all the more significant. As it emerged during the war, the chief components of that ideological stance included an emphasis on a shared Orthodox faith, the threat of the extinction of the Georgians at the hands of Islamic foes, and a belief in the emancipatory power of Enlightenment rule. In turn, this new presence highlighted not just the lack of knowledge the Russians had about their new domains but, equally important, their dependence on local personnel to supply information needed by the imperial administration as well as the military and material support they would require to rule as imperial overlords. Finally, it is crucial to underscore the social aspect of this emerging imperial relationship. The model personage evoked by references to the pious Christian and honorable Georgian or Russian and the envisioned recipient of European Enlightenment was assumed to be a noble. Always relegated to secondary status and background roles, the xalxi or narod (the common people) were the currency of the slave-trade and the substance of militias.

*The Ideology of Annexation*

Following the War of 1768-1774, the disparity between the actual Russian enforcement of protectorate status in the Georgian lands (then promised only to Eastern Georgia) and the articulation of grandiose imperial aspirations and ideals persisted. To be sure, in 1783 Russia concluded the Treaty of Georgievsk extending imperial protection to King Erekle II’s united Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i. Among other things the treaty marked the end of Eastern Georgia’s tributary relationship with Persia or any other power and declared the kingdom’s recognition of Russian sovereignty only. While preserving kingship through the line of Erekle, only the Russian tsar could confirm a new king in
Eastern Georgia; this imperial role was marked by granting the appropriate insignia of kingship and administering "an oath of fidelity and of zeal to the Russian Empire." The kat' alikos of the Georgian Church assumed the eighth place among the Russian prelates and was given a seat in the Holy Synod. The new relationship compelled the Russia ruler to regard the inhabitants of K'art'li-Kaxet'i "as being in close alliance and perfect accord with Her Majesty's Empire," and accordingly to regard Erekle's enemies as her own. Russia also committed itself to maintaining a garrison of two infantry battalions and and four cannon to uphold the accord. Furthermore, the princes and nobles of the Eastern Georgian lands were to receive the same rights and privileges as their Russian counterparts. In turn, protectorate status preserved for Erekle's dynasty the right to control all internal affairs. Finally, in a fourth article of a separate agreement appended to the treaty, Russia affirmed Erekle's ambition to regain lost Georgian lands by pledging Russia to do all in its power "to effect the return of all the territories which, at a former date, have belonged to the Kingdom of K'arthli and Kakheti...."  

Notwithstanding the conclusion of this formal agreement, the dispatch of some 1,800 troops to Tp'ilisi, and the founding of the fortress of Vladikavkaz (meaning "master of the Caucasus") in the northern Caucasus in 1784, events would quickly reveal the empire's inability to uphold its commitment to the Christians of Eastern Georgia, let alone Western Georgia. The following seventeen years up to the annexation of 1801 revealed how dangerous Russia's presence could be for the Georgians when their imperial ally could not muster the military strength to back its promises. While Russian diplomatic pressure in Istanbul and the threat of Russian military force in Eastern Georgia thwarted an invasion of K'art'li-Kaxet'i by Daghestani tribesmen in 1786, King Erekle

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71 Russo-Georgian Treaty Concluded in 1783 between Catherine II, Empress of Russia, and Iраклъ Ираклий, King of Georgia, M.A. Okoumeli, ed. (London, 1919); see also G.G. Paichadze, Georgievskii traktat; Lang, Last Years, pp. 182-186, 205-207; and Nikolas Gvosdev, Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, 1760-1819, especially chapter 4.
was still forced to pay “protection” money to the sum of 6500 rubles per annum to their khan. Erekle’s alliance with Russia also provoked the ire of France, which sought to build an alliance of the Persians and Ottomans against Russia in the Caucasus. Nonetheless, in 1787, Catherine the Great withdrew her Russian forces in direct violation of the Georgievsk accord in order to prepare for another war with the Ottomans (1787-1791). Finally, as Agha Muhammad Khan consolidated his power over the Persian provinces in the early 1790s, Erekle vainly sought Russia military aid in accordance with the 1783 treaty. Despite repeated warnings from Erekle’s ambassador in St. Petersburg of a Persian invasion, the Russians refused to act and stood by when, in September 1795, the new Iranian ruler ravaged Eastern Georgia, reducing Erekle’s meager army of 1,500 men to 150. The blow was devastating to Erekle’s kingdom and to Russian prestige in the Near East. In an attempt to redeem Russia’s stature and consolidate its position south of the Caucasus, Catherine initiated a major campaign in 1796 to capture Persia’s Caucasian provinces, but this all came to naught despite considerable success in the field, for the empress died in November and her son, Paul I, recalled the Russian forces. In sum, as Lang states: “By withdrawing her troops in 1787, failing to send them in time against Agha Mohammed in 1795, and again evacuating Georgia in 1797, Russia had undeniably forfeited any juridical right to demand Georgia’s continued adherence to the Treaty of Georgievsk.” Whatever the juridical repercussions of Russia’s conduct

72 Lang, Last Years, pp. 205-212. By the Treaty of Jassy, concluding this second Russo-Ottoman War in 1791, Russia extracted from the Ottomans a promise not to foment plundering or otherwise harass the domains of Eastern Georgia.

73 Ibid., pp. 212-219. Solomon II, a nephew of Erekle II and successor to Solomon I of Imereti, sent a contingent of troops to aid Erekle but to no avail. Russia had desisted in sending troops because of its being preoccupied with the final partitions of Poland and the French Revolution.

74 Ibid., quote, p. 227; see also pp. 220-226.
toward Erekle, the fact remained that Russia’s imperial ambitions outstripped its ability to realize them in the Georgian lands.

After Catherine’s death, the debate over the value of Russia’s southern expansion resurfaced. For years Catherine’s son, now Tsar Paul I (1796-1801), had sided with the proponents of peace and non-intervention especially along Russia’s southern frontier.75 Hence, when confronted by the death of Erekle II in 1798 and the succession of Giorgi XII (1798-1800), who beseeched the tsar to reaffirm the Treaty of Georgievsk and then to incorporate his kingdom into Russia as a regular province while preserving the Bagratid royal dignity, Paul vacillated. Napoleon’s growing interest in the Middle East, however, set him on a more decisive course to annex K’art’li-Kaxeti, but he died before the actual arrangements for this act could be realized.76 Among the factors that induced him to annex the kingdom while preserving the royal dignity were reports about the potential economic wealth to be procured in Eastern Georgia and about the perilous condition of the general population that a Russian commander estimated at a mere 35,000 households in K’art’li-Kaxeti.77 After Paul’s death, Alexander I (1801-1825) continued this debate in his Council of State and Unofficial Committee, where the issue became one of how to incorporate into the empire Georgia, whether as a vassal kingdom under Russian sovereignty or as a constituent province. In the end, the tsar proclaimed the unconditional

75 Robert Jones, “Opposition to War and Expansion in Late Eighteenth Century Russia,” pp. 43-44.

76 Until shortly before his death, Paul envisioned an arrangement with King Giorgi XII that resembled the relationship of previous kings to the Persian shahs, whereby they stood at the same time as king (mep’e) and viceroy or governor (vali). As Lang also points out, this arrangement would have resembled that of an Indian rajah under British colonial rule. Last Years, p. 232.

77 AKAK, vol. 1, A. Berzhe, ed. (Tiflis: Izdanie Arkhiva glavnogo upravleniia namestnika Kavkaza, 1866): doc. no. 129, pp. 184-186; and Lang, Last Years, pp. 228-241. A geologist, Count Musin-Pushkin, who had recently visited the area stressed Eastern Georgia’s abundant mineral deposits and great economic and strategic potential for trade with Persia and India, defense against Persia and Turkey, and security of the North Caucasian line. On the other hand, General Lazarev was the Russian commander in K’art’li who emphasized divisions among the royal heirs and the perilous condition of the general population as sufficient reason to reaffirm Russian protection of Eastern Georgia (p. 241).
annexation of K’art’li-Kaxet’i in 1801 and the abolition of the Bagratid royal dynasty based on his belief in the veracity of Musin-Pushkin’s report and in the alleged support of the local population for Russian rule.\textsuperscript{78}

During these years of Russian vacillation and downright transgression of its treaty commitments in Eastern Georgia, the ideology of imperial expansion crystallized into a conquest narrative that consolidated the pact between Christian peoples based on the notion of the threat of extinction. In the Treaty of Georgievsk itself, the preamble lays out the general contour of this pact:

From ancient times, the Russian Empire, having the same religion as the peoples of Georgia, has been the bulwark, refuge, and support of the said peoples and of their Most Serene Sovereigns against the oppression of their neighbours. The protection of the Russian Tsars, accorded to the Georgian Tsars, as well as to their families and their subjects, has produced this dependence which exists at the first onset by the very title of the Russian Tsars. Her Majesty, the Russian Empress, who reigns for the happiness of all, has given proof in a satisfactory manner of Her supreme goodwill towards the Georgian peoples, and of Her magnanimous solicitude for their well-being, by the great efforts displayed by Her for the liberation of these peoples from the yoke of slavery...\textsuperscript{79}

This statement contains all the elements of the imperial relationship including the assertion of Christian kinship, the long-standing hierarchical relationship of vassal to lord based on the notion of selfless protection, and the justification for Russia’s more recent and direct intervention to emancipate the Georgians from “the yoke of slavery.” The statement embodies traditional ideas of kingship with components of Enlightened monarchy expressed by references to “the happiness of all,” and “Her magnanimous solicitude for their well-being.”

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 247-250. In this decision, Lang asserts that Alexander I “showed himself more autocratic than his father,” since Paul had at least remained steadfast in preserving “at least a shadow of the royal dignity” (p. 250).

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Russo-Georgian Treaty concluded in 1783}, p. 5.
These elements coalesced in a bolder form around the direct reference to extinction in the manifesto proclaiming the annexation of K’art’li-Kaxet’i drafted by Platon Zubov and signed by Tsar Alexander I in September, 1801. In brief, Russia was assuming the burden of government, “Not to augment its powers, not for profit, [and] not to extend the borders of already the most expansive empire in the world . . . ; only virtue, honor, and humanity lay upon Us the sacred duty, having heard the prayer of the suffering, [and] in aversion to their sorrows, to establish an administration in Georgia that can confirm justice, the safety of person and property, and give to each the defense of the law.”\textsuperscript{80} In effect, the tsar professed that Russia did not need this small territory; to the contrary, this small country needed Russia to selflessly come to the rescue of its inhabitants in order to save the lives of Georgians and the life of Georgia itself: “The predatory peoples surrounding you are ready to fall on your kingdom and tear its remains to pieces. Not only the people but even the name of the Georgian people, who were previously so renowned for their bravery throughout Asia, would be eradicated from the face of the earth by the unification of all these evils.”\textsuperscript{81} This may not have been the first statement averring the imminent extinction of the Georgians, but it certainly was the most explicit and thus became the cornerstone for the justification of Russia’s annexation, a view shared by many Georgians, Russians, and others up to the present day.\textsuperscript{82} To secure


\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 432. Alexander reiterated these themes in June 1802. \textit{Ibid.}, doc. no. 732 (3 June 1802), p. 568.

\textsuperscript{82} The issue of the imminent extinction of the “Georgian people” in the eighteenth century deserves a separate study, one addressing the genesis, development, and appropriation of the idea by various Georgian and Russian scholars, intellectuals, administrators, and revolutionaries. I have written about the mutual support for this idea given by Russian and Georgian scholars in the mid-nineteenth century in a paper, “The Scholarly Reconstruction of the Georgian Nation under Russian Rule, the First Phase,” presented at the National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Seattle, 21 November 1997. That the thesis still garners support across a wide spectrum of scholarship is seen in the following works: John F. Baddeley, \textit{The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus} (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908): 18; P’. Maxaradze (Makharadze), “Obshchaia kharakteristika Gruzii v XIX stoletii,” \textit{Ocherki po istorii rabochego i krest’ianskogo dvizhenia v Gruzii} (Moscow: Zhurnal’no-gazetnoe
the fidelity of all social classes, the manifesto called for them to take the oath of allegiance to the tsar, a gesture that affirmed the Georgians' part in this narrative.

In effect, the Extinction Thesis concealed Russia's former transgressions and placed the onus of responsibility for the turbulence in the Georgian lands on external enemies, namely the Islamic powers of Persia and Ottoman Turkey. That is, the discourse of this alliance obfuscated Russia's role in exacerbating the tensions that led to the significant depopulation of the Georgian domains. This thesis also buttressed the idea of unity across the Georgian lands, downplaying internecine strife. And it implicitly conjured up ethical norms for defining honorable conduct in this new relationship in the sense of manifestations of loyalty: the demarcation of an ideological boundary between enemy and ally, Muslim and Christian, meant that crossing this boundary to form an alliance with the Ottomans or Persians was dishonorable behavior or treachery, just as efforts to impede the consolidation of Russian imperial administration would be seen as obstructing the spread of enlightenment to these downtrodden lands.

On the other hand, from the Georgian point of view, the terminology framing this new alliance with Russia, particularly the emphasis on Enlightened government, obligated the Russian administration to exemplify good government, to rule with fairness and magnanimity as worthy of Orthodox Christians. Good government also meant demonstrating respect for local traditions, including the preservation of the existing social structure that gave such a prominent and privileged position to the princely and noble families of the Georgian domains. This sensitivity to local traditions and customs

reflected the expressed respect for Georgians as good Orthodox Christians who, at least for the purposes of justifying the Russian presence, could boast a long history of piety. This initial appraisal of Georgian religiosity would change as the Russians became more entrenched south of the Caucasus. Certainly, one of the most appealing aspects of this new condominium was granting equal rights and privileges to the Georgian nobility as enjoyed by their Russian counterparts; this concession manifested the tsar’s generosity and commitment to creating an inclusive imperial social structure. At the same time, it also compensated for the abolition of kingship in Eastern Georgia and the exile of the royal Bagratid family to Russia. Respect for the local social structure and customs helped to preserve a certain degree of local autonomy and latitude in the face of the dissolution of sovereignty in these domains. One other component of the condominium between the inhabitants of K’art’li-Kaxet’i and the Russian administration was the latter’s commitment to enforcing peace in these lands and providing protection both from outside incursions and internal discord. Minimizing internecine strife would prove to be the most sensitive and difficult task facing the new government, since many members of the extended Bagratid family were unhappy with the loss of power.

In order to live up to the terms of this pact between imperial overlord and local Georgian vassals, the government had to substantially increase its knowledge of the terrain, inhabitants, and practices of its subjects. In short, the Russian administration had to generate new imperial knowledge based on the kind of empirical observation already demonstrated by Güldenstädt and his fellow scientist-explorers. And, as already stressed, even though Russia now proclaimed its status as the sole sovereign power in Eastern Georgia, officials were highly dependent on the active participation of their Georgia subjects in providing the data and manpower required to maintain Russia’s precarious foothold south of the Caucasus. The Russians needed data not just to rule the Kingdom of K’art’li-Kaxet’i but to consolidate their power in the region at large, and this more extensive task underscored their dependence on the local population.
In effect, even though Russia could boast a long history of interaction with the Georgian lands, the extension of empire into these lands required the production of new imperial knowledge which had heretofore been inaccessible and less important. The commitment to rule the region as an integral part of the empire occurred at a time when other European colonial powers like Britain and France had embarked on the scientific investigation of their own colonies. As Michael Adas demonstrates in his study, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, by the eighteenth century, the colonial enterprise proceeded in accordance with scientific modes of inquiry which expanded the field of exploration seemingly to all aspects of the cultural and physical realms.\(^3\) Alexander von Humboldt’s and A.J.A. Bonpland’s study of large tracts of South and Central America (1799-1804) exemplified this turn to scientific exploration.\(^4\) Already several centuries had passed since the European imperial powers had “discovered” whole continents and peoples; natural scientists, colonial administrators, ethnographers, and other scholars were quickly replacing explorers, traders, and missionaries as the principal sources of knowledge about these regions.\(^5\) Russia undertook the conquest of Caucasia in midstream, as it were, of the scientific exploration of the world.\(^6\)


\(^4\) Their expedition resulted in the publication of a 23-volume study (1805-1834) featuring an extended physical geography of the regions they visited.

\(^5\) Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, p. 10.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that in his preface to the first systematic Russian description of the Caucasus, completed in 1810, Semen Bronevskii (1763-1830) exhorted his readers to follow the example of Humboldt and Bonpland in undertaking the study of Caucasia:

Perhaps wealthy people will be found among us who have grown weary by the satiety of luxury [and] who envy the glory of the enterprising Mr. Humboldt, who sacrificed especially his own possessions on the six-year trip around America with his companion Mr. Bonpland; and if his magnanimous resolution appears too burdensome for imitation, then it would perhaps still be useful to imitate the disinterestedness of this renowned traveller with less soul and less enlightenment and to encourage enterprising people to travel around the Caucasus, the interior parts of which are nearly as little known as the interior of Africa. Finally the time has come to transplant sciences from the hothouse into the open air and to cultivate them on Russian soil.\textsuperscript{87}

Given Russia’s long-standing familiarity with the Georgian Orthodox domains, Bronevskii’s call to transplant the sciences onto Russian soil and his conjuring of the unknown in his comparison of Caucasia’s internal reaches seems at first glance exaggerated. Because of the relative proximity of Russia to Caucasia and because of a long history of diplomatic relations, Russia was not “discovering” Caucasia as other imperial powers would claim to be doing with the Chinese, Amerindians, or South Pacific islanders, but Bronevskii wanted his readers to believe it was the same.\textsuperscript{88} Alas, despite previous forays into the region, Bronevskii and his peers convey the impression that the Georgian lands and Caucasia at large was indeed a \textit{terra incognita} in need of exploration, that Russia had assumed the mantle of imperial rule in this most unruly of lands, and had taken upon itself the heroic task of lifting the veil from this most ancient, mythological land and laying it bare to the civilized world of Europe.

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\textsuperscript{87} Semen Bronevskii, \textit{Noviishiia geograficheskiiia i istoricheskiiia izvestiiia o Kavkaz' e}, vol. 1 (Moscow: S. Selivanovskii, 1823): xxvi-xxvii.

\textsuperscript{88} Adas, \textit{Machines as the Measure of Men}, p. 12.
I emphasize the importance of knowledge to highlight the nature of this most fragile relationship between sovereign lord and vassal. The core point of this discussion stresses the mutual dependence of lord and vassal in the production of imperial knowledge. The annexation of K'art'li-Kaxeti signalled these domains' change in status from vassal kingdom to imperial province. Thus, the mode of inquiry and the knowledge it produced had to expand tremendously in order for Russia both to establish a viable administration and to demonstrate its prowess as an imperial power. Consequently, this change in mode of governance underscored the participation of Georgians in the imperial enterprise. Russia was dependent not only on Georgian personnel for its military campaigns and for the production and collection of tax revenues, but equally significant, the administration required translators, in the broad sense, to make accessible the range of material and human resources that the government needed to exploit and to maintain its imperial presence and achieve its larger geo-political goals. At the same time, Russia was dependent on Georgian participation in the more grandiose project of empire-building. In conformity with the principles and aspirations of enlightened monarchy, Russian administrators may have perceived themselves as the purveyors of enlightenment, but they needed the Georgians to affirm this project and to participate in the expansion of empire itself. That is, the evolution of Russian rule in the Georgian lands and Caucasus at large lent credence to the notion of empire-building; more than this, the diversity of the Caucasian lands and peoples eventually made this region the crown jewel of the empire itself.

For the moment, however, as Bronevskii intimates so strongly, when confronting Caucasus, Russia could only marvel at its own ignorance of this most diverse and majestic land. The confession of ignorance heralded the magnitude of the challenge to integrate the region into the empire, which meant knowing it. In the first years of its existence, the Russian Caucasian administration faced a glaring lack of basic information about its new domains. In turning to the Georgians as sources of information, the Russians often
encountered either misinformation of one kind or another or resistance to providing that information. Thus, in 1802, intent on gathering basic statistical data on households, villages, and districts, Lieutenant-General Knorring, then Chief Administrator in Caucasia, lamented bitterly to Tsar Alexander I that his efforts had thus far been in vain: “I most humbly beg to report only that here not one of the Georgian officials who have long served the kings has provided me with accurate information about the names [and] numbers of villages or the peoples residing in them, nor whether they belong to the treasury, church, the estates of members of the Georgian royal house, or to landlords, much less information of any truth whatsoever about the number of houses or families.”

Equally significant, the Russians had limited access to existing social networks for gathering intelligence and had to insinuate themselves into them or create their own. They also had difficulties keeping track of their own officials in the field. More than this, as we shall see in the rebellion of 1819-1820, the very production of imperial knowledge would at times pose a threat to the traditional social order and provoke rebellion.

III. The Problem of Western Georgia

Once the Russians demonstrated the intention to establish a permanent presence south of the Caucasus through the annexation of Eastern Georgia, the central question for Georgians of all lands and the Russian themselves was what would they do with Western Georgia. What could they do, after all, in 1801? Todtleben’s campaign might have revealed the military potential of this region, but disease devastated his troops. More significantly for Russian geo-political concerns, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca had


90 See, for example, AKA, vol. II, doc. no. 932 (8 July 1804): 475-476; and Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imereti,” p. 275.
confirmed Ottoman hegemony over the region, even if the Ottomans did not rule the region outright but merely maintained garrisons in several isolated fortresses mostly along the Black Sea coast. Unlike their actions against the Persian-controlled khanates along the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, during the eighteenth century Russia had repeatedly hesitated to act in Western Georgia for fear of upsetting the Ottomans, and now they were obligated by treaty to respect Ottoman suzerainty.  

Several other considerations attended the debate over how to act toward Western Georgia. As we saw in the last chapter, despite Imeret’ian claims of sovereignty over the region, the Gurieli-s of Guria and Dadianis of Samegrelo repeatedly exercised their autonomy against both Solomon I and Solomon II of Imeret’i. Even if the Russians conveniently honored the two Solomons’ claims to hegemony over Guria, in the early decades of the nineteenth century they would have to deal with Guria on separate terms. In short, Western Georgia was much more fragmented politically than K’art’li-Kaxet’i. In addition, the Russians had less information about the lands of Western Georgia as well as less access to information. While the first kameral’noe opisanie (periodic revision or population census) was attempted in parts of Eastern Georgia in 1804-1805, the first did not occur in Imeret’i until 1821, after the 1819-1820 rebellion, and was not attempted in Guria until 1831. Only after the final dissolution of Gurian sovereignty in 1830 did the Russians undertake any formal study of Guria’s social structure and administration. Russians, who had been charged with overseeing the “temporary administration” of the principality after the death of Mamia Gurieli in 1826, were totally dependent on “local

\[91\] For continued Russian sensitivity to Ottoman suzerainty over Western Georgia on the eve of the annexation of Eastern Georgia, see AKAK, doc. no. 34 (14 April 1801): 112-113.

knowledge" of customs and laws and had produced no written documents; all business was conducted orally. As we have seen in previous chapters, Guria was the least studied or visited domain outside of Svaneti in Western Georgia. Finally, in considering their options for how to bring Western Georgia into the Russian orbit, the Russians quickly learned that King Solomon II (1789-1810) distrusted their presence because of their dissolution of kingship in K`art`i-Kaxeti and the annexation of Eastern Georgia. As chronicled in his dissertation, Henry Armani demonstrates how the Russians sought an accommodation with Solomon in the first decade of the nineteenth century, but had to face a king who grew increasingly suspicious of Russian intentions and eventually turned against the Russians in open rebellion in 1810. Thus, Russian action in Eastern Georgia galvanized opposition in Imereti to extending imperial suzerainty in the lands west of the Surami mountains.

Legally falling under Ottoman suzerainty, more politically fragmented than Eastern Georgia, less known and less accessible, and much of it ruled by a recalcitrant king, Western Georgia posed a serious problem for Russian imperial ambitions in the south Caucasus. And yet, the Russians understood that the region was strategically vital to maintaining their precarious foothold in Transcaucasia. They needed at least the nominal allegiance of the sovereign rulers of Western Georgia in order to consolidate their power on the isthmus between the Caspian and Black Seas. The single land route to their base in Tiflis over the Daryal Pass in the central Caucasus was vulnerable to ambushes from mountain tribes and often snow-bound in the winter months. At the very

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93 Pirtskhalashvili, "Imeretiia i Guriia v period 1804-1840 g.," pp. 85, 93, n. 1, and p. 115.

94 This episode constitutes a section of the following chapter. Relying primarily on documents in AKAK, Armani gives the fullest account in English of the deterioration of Imeret`i-Russian relations under Solomon II in his dissertation. H.J. Armani, "The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia, 1800-1815," chapters 3-8. More recently and succinctly, Gvosdev traces this narrative as well in his Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, pp. 108-115, 123-131.
least, the Russians needed to obtain Ottoman consent to the use of some sea ports along the Black Sea coast of Western Georgia to link the empire via the Crimea, recently annexed in 1783, to Eastern Georgia; in turn, access to Eastern Georgia through Samegrelo and Imereti would help to fulfill the long-standing goal of establishing a trade route through Caucasus to Persia and India.95

To conclude this chapter it is illuminating to examine how the problem of Western Georgia was made manifest for the Russians in their dealings with Guria soon after the annexation of K’art’li-Kaxet’i, as they began to attempt to solidify an alliance with Solomon II. Essentially, the Russians stumbled upon a succession crisis in Guria; or, more accurately, they found themselves thrust into the crisis having to play the role of mediator and choose a successor while avoiding violation of their obligations to the Ottomans. In 1804, when they became embroiled in Gurian affairs, the Russians were officially allied with the Ottomans (as of 1799) against France and therefore even more conscious of upholding their treaty obligations to them. At the same time, the Gurians knew that the Russians were looking for a place along the Black Sea coast where they could build a port. Thus, the Russians could not help but get involved in the crisis.

The first problem the Russians encountered was their own ignorance of the Gurieli family, the power structure of their dynastic rule, the principality’s relationship to Imereti, and even a basic knowledge of its geography. Without any administrative or military experience of the area, they were completely dependent on local information. Thus, in his report on the historical boundaries of Guria, one of the contenders for rule,

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95 Writing to Prince Pavel Tsitsianov (C’ic’ishvili) in 1803, Tsar Alexander I stressed the importance of Western Georgia for Russia’s position in Transcaucasia and instructed his Administrator-in-Chief to occupy Samegrelo as well as Imereti: “upon completion of this order, you shall proceed to establish uninterrupted communication between Baku and Georgia, which, upon the occupation of Imeretia and Mingrelia, shall unite...the Caspian Sea with the Black — thus opening to our trade a new route, closed until now....” AKAK, vol. II, doc. no. 720 (26 October 1803): 359; quoted in Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia, 1800-1815,” p. 168 and pp. 220-221.
the young Mamia Gurieli (he was fifteen) assured the Russians that after the reign of Queen T’amar (1184-1213), his principality had never been “in bondage” to Imeret’i. Out of neighborliness and love, the Gurieli-s and kings of Imeret’i had supplied one another with troops and other aid upon request, but Guria has remained absolutely independent of the kingdom. Whatever the historical reality, this claim was particularly important at that moment because Russia was trying to court King Solomon’s allegiance and therefore had just acknowledged his suzerainty over Guria, a point to which I return in the next chapter. Hence, the acquisition of basic information was intimately connected to political alignments and revealed how little the Russians in their role as the alleged imperial overlords knew.

This became more clear when the Russians attempted to sort out the power relationships in the Gurieli family. As the letters from various family members indicated, the conflict boiled down to a struggle between Mamia (1789-1826) and a number of his uncles. Mamia was the son of Svimon (1784-1792) who had reigned by popular consent, or as his widow wrote to Prince Tsitsianov, the chief administrator in Transcaucasia, “the titled princes, nobles, and all the Gurian people installed him as ruler” in the face of a Turkish invasion. As noted in the previous chapter, what made this situation

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96 Thus, they requested that someone give them a description of the historical boundaries of the principality. I mentioned Mamia Gurieli’s description in the previous chapter. AKAK, vol. II, doc. no. 1055 (no date, but most probably 1804): 539-540.

97 His father was old and worn-out at that time in the mid-1780s, she writes. Svimon’s widow, Marina Gurieli (died 1814), was the daughter of Zurab Ceret’eli who was a prominent adviser to both Kings Solomon I and II; he actually raised the second Solomon. She writes that Solomon I had unsuccessfully tried to bring Guria and Samegrelo into his kingdom, but as a sign of alliance, the king granted the then-reigning Gurieli, Giorgi’s request to give Ceret’eli’s daughter to his son, Svimon. Solomon I acceded to this request as a sign of “trust.” Once Svimon came to power, after Solomon I’s death, the Turks ravaged Guria, and Svimon went on to negotiate with the saat ‘abeg Isak Pasha of Axalc’ixe for the restoration of Guria’s autonomy. When returning home, the Acharans, who then considered themselves independent of Axalc’ixe and Guria, seized and wounded Svimon. For his release the Acharan beg (from the Ximiaashvili family) demanded Svimon and Marina’s five-year-old daughter for marriage to his son. While Marina was away from Guria, Svimon complied with the beg’s wish and gave his daughter to him. Marina writes that
particularly complex was the division of the princely estates in Guria between Svimon and his four brothers; three of the five brothers had powerful territorial bases from which to contend for power and with access to a different set of allies.

According to the narrative provided by Svimon’s widow, Marina, the ensuing struggle unfolded as follows. When Svimon died, his younger brother, Vaxtang, assumed the role of reigning prince and forcefully took over Svimon’s patrimonial estates, evidently mistreating Marina and subjecting her and Mamia to hunger and physical harassment. As a result, the next youngest brother, K’aixosro, who had previously lived with Svimon “remembered the paternal love of his older brother” and took Marina and Mamia into his residence. Vaxtang took offense at this action and recruited “Tatars” to chase the three out of the principality. Solomon II of Imereti also evidently paid bribes to the Turks to sow discord in the Gurieli house and win Vaxtang’s allegiance. Helped by God and the strength of Christ, K’aixosro fended off these attacks from his fortress. Furthermore, out of outrage for Vaxtang’s lawless behavior, Marina claims that another brother, Levan, acting “on the wish of all the Gurian people” seized Vaxtang. K’aixosro purchased him with silver from Levan and imprisoned him. King Solomon demanded his release, and K’aixosro complied. Vaxtang again threatened Marina and Mamia, seeking aid from the Acharans, but was captured by Selim Pasha of Erzurum. And then the trouble began for the Russians.

As stated, when they granted Solomon’s kingdom of Imereti formal protection in 1804, they included Guria as a constituent territory of the kingdom. Marina exclaims in her testimony that she and Mamia were elated to consider themselves the “humblest slaves and eternal servants” of His Majesty, Alexander I. Selim Pasha was angry; he released Vaxtang and together they threatened Marina and Mamia’s base in Guria. This was evidently how circumstances stood when she composed her account for Tsitsianov in

she suffered a “grave insult” by this act and sought a divorce from her husband. He died shortly thereafter leaving her with their three-year-old son, Mamia. *Ibid.*, doc. no. 1058 (15 Oct. 1804): 541.
late 1804. She implored him to recognize Mamia as the legitimate ruler and to extend Russian protection; otherwise they would have to flee Guria with K'ainosro. Of course, rendering aid to Mamia could jeopardize the Russians’ relations with the Ottomans.

Vaxtang also stated his case to the Russians. He insisted that previously an unnamed ruler of Russia had shown him good will and that he, Vaxtang, had remained loyal in his heart to Russia. However, “on account of my sins,” he had previously spent time away from Guria and missed the opportunity to serve the Russians. Now, though, he was ruler of Guria, and what was more, his fortresses and estates lay along the coast, which he knew interested the Russians. His younger brothers Levan and Davit’ were with him as well as several other princes. And since “God had favored me with returning to my land, I am ready to serve each of your commands loyally,” and so forth. He lamented that during his absence with the pasha, the Russians had mistakenly considered “them” [Marina and Mamia] to be the Gurieli-s:

...but it does not become your wisdom not to discern what is certain. May God not allow anyone to dare sway you to injustice or make you party to an affair founded on lies; but if I cannot do anything at all, then at least in my heart I am certain that in Imeret’i, Odishi, and Guria, no one is more loyal than I, and no one can provide you with the truth better than I. No one besides me, neither previously nor now possesses Guriel-ness [gurielo] and control over those coastal sites.

Vaxtang concluded his case with an appeal to send a trusted person to confirm his story. “We have not been anyone’s slave, neither before nor at present.” Therefore, he pledged his loyalty to the tsar through Tsitsianov.98 Political shrewdness reigned in the borderland. To seal his case, a contingent of princes and Vaxtang’s brother Davit’ sent a petition to Alexander I beseeching him to show them “his generous grace” by recognizing

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98 Ibid., doc. no. 1059 (1804): 542-543.
Vaxtang as the reigning prince and by extending protection over their domain in order to eradicate "every lawless custom and deed." 99

What to do? Tsitsianov was in a quandary over how to proceed. He was aware that both parties sought protection and expected to rule an autonomous principality, free from Imeret'i. He could not do this since he had already recognized Guria as part of the Western Georgian kingdom. But there also remained the problem of whom to recognize as ruler. In a letter to his chief commander in Western Georgia, Councillor Litvinov, the general recognized Mamia as the legitimate ruler but knew that this could insult Vaxtang and induce him to seek allies beyond Guria's borders. Therefore, he had thwarted Vaxtang's possible strategy and written to the at'abeg of Axalc'ixe, insisting that since Guria was a part of Imeret'i, and since the Russians had formally extended protection over that kingdom, Russia had a right to Vaxtang's choice harbor at Grigolet'i. But in case of the need for troops, he was sending a small contingent to investigate the terrain, especially in neighboring Mingrelia, to see how much forage they could expect for provisioning troops. They lacked basic data. 100

Tsitsianov realized that the whole affair needed quick resolution. The internecine struggle had led to incidents of brigandage and theft across the border in Mingrelia and Axalc'ixe, and it brought the Turkish commander of the fortress at P'ot'i into the fray (for a price). Various Gurieli brothers had hatched assorted plans for dividing up the principality and proposed that the Russians serve as mediators at a kind of peace conference, but King Solomon obstructed these attempts, and the Russian proposals — first, to divide the realm by area, and then to bring Solomon into the process — did not

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100 *Ibid.*, doc. no. 1061 (12 Nov. 1804): 543. As it turned out, when Tsitsianov sent an engineer to investigate the harbor at Grigolet'i, he concluded that it was not a choice location for a port. *Ibid.*, doc. no. 1063 (3 Dec. 1804): 544. The Russians would eventually set their sights on Bat'umi.
find favor.\textsuperscript{101} In the end, Tsitsianov acted on his initial view that Mamia was the legitimate ruler, and the administrator-in-chief instructed his subordinates to make this decision known to all parties in Guria. As we shall see, Mamia would prove to be a faithful, if weak-spirited, ally and would be greatly rewarded for his loyalty; Vaxtang would request a pension since he was unmarried and without child.\textsuperscript{102} In this way, the Russians entered the complex world of Western Georgian politics and groped about for information and allies. Though they would win the loyalty of Mamia and most of his subordinate princely families in the short run, they would encounter huge problems in Guria in later decades. But their immediate concern was much larger than the Gurieli-s: how to bring the dynastic king of Imeret'i to heel.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., doc. no. 1064 (16 May 1805): 544-545.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., doc. no. 1066 (3 June 1805): 545-546; doc. no. 1067 (22 August 1805): 546-547.
CHAPTER FIVE
LOOKING TO THE RISING SUN OF THE NORTH: INCORPORATION, REBELLION, AND AFFIRMATION OF RUSSIAN RULE

...As we are still inexperienced in European civility and knowledge or conduct, but only give expression to the thought that comes into our head, so the great sun of all Russia will turn its face on our thought and enlighten it with its rays, for I have absolutely sacrificed my mind to you...¹

—Excerpt from the written pledge of allegiance to Russia given by Grigol Dadiani (1803).

If the Russians moved into Western Georgia with much more decisiveness and determination than they did into K’art’li-Kaxet’i, at least initially they avoided outright annexation and reached a series of accords that preserved the nominal autonomy of the ruling families of the Western Georgian domains. Indeed, Western Georgia is an exemplary site for witnessing the clash between traditional borderland politics of Caucasia and more modern modes of governance as exercised by the Russian imperial regime in the Georgian lands. More specifically, Western Georgia bears witness to the clash between the ancient tradition of dynasticism and bureaucratic imperialism. What exactly did this clash mean? Most fundamentally, it entailed the dissolution of sovereign power whether in the form of kingship or princely rule as well as the integration of the sovereign’s patrimony into the imperial administrative structure as a constituent territory

¹ Akty sobrannye Kavkazskoiu arkhiteqoficheskoiu komisssieiu [hereafter AKAK], vol. II, doc. no. 908 (21 August 1803): 461-462. Both the original Georgian text and Russian translation appear on these pages. An interesting theme to investigate is the origin and extent of the representation of Russia as “the sun” in the north.
— whether a single district (Guria) or group of districts (Odishi\textsuperscript{2} or Mingrelia and Imereti\textsuperscript{3}). In Toumanoff's terms, the annulment of local sovereignties was absolute so that the polygenetic roots of kingship became monogenetic.\textsuperscript{3} Imperial rule rested in the person of the tsar and his Romanov heirs. The Russian tsar was the sole source of authority and power, and it was imperative that all regard him as the fount of the greatest generosity, justice, and might. The conversion of dynasticism into an imperial worldview required that the loyalty of the local inhabitants be directed to the tsar and not fixate on the dynastic house of old. Hence, what appears as a simple transfer of loyalty was actually a translation into a new imperial idiom, and translation in this sense meant transformation.

The transfer of loyalty embraced the dynastic ideal of sworn allegiance and therefore resonated with local Georgian tradition, but its effect was to transform the class of dynastic families into a special kind of service nobility. That is, in accordance with imperial practice and as proclaimed in the terms of annexation, princes and nobles of the Georgian domains entered the empire with the same rights and privileges as their Russian counterparts; therefore, they did not have to earn their status (though they would have to prove it beginning in the 1830s). Yet, this status was conditional, in the sense that retention of one's title and estates became contingent upon displays of loyalty at the appropriate times — in official ceremonies, military campaigns, opposing rebellions, judicial proceedings, the sharing of local knowledge. Participation in the providing of local knowledge is often overlooked, but given the Russians' dependence on this knowledge, particularly in the early decades of their rule, the aristocratic class of dynastic

\textsuperscript{2} Russian sources from this period of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continually use the term Odishi to refer to Samegrelo (Georgian) or Mingrelia (Russian). Accordingly, I use all three names for the Dadiani's domain depending on the context but interchange Samegrelo and Odishi.

\textsuperscript{3} See my discussion of Toumanoff in Chapter Two.
families and nobles was expected to generate statistics, lineages, titles to land-holdings, legal codes, and so forth on demand. Conversely, acts of disloyalty, like making overtures to the pasha of Axalc’ixe or Erzurum or refusing to take the oath of allegiance, ran the risk of dispossession, exile, or even death.

In the early decades of Russian rule this code of conduct, which was designed to inspire and affirm one’s loyalty to the imperial enterprise, retained considerable latitude. But in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the Russians sought to transform the landscape to increase agricultural and industrial production, they required deeper, more mindful, and permanent displays of loyalty. Whereas in the first half of the century, they were more dependent on local knowledge, once embarked on the modernization of the Georgian lands, they sought to implant an imperial knowledge in the minds of the local inhabitants: imperial knowledge was to become local knowledge. Grigol Dadiani’s opening his mind to the rays of the imperial sun, quoted above, envisions this transformation of character. Ilia Chavchavadze’s powerful story, “Is That a Man?” (Kac’ia-adamiani?, 1859-1863), is prescient in the way it derides the ignorance, idleness, and poverty of the rural nobility, and thus urges its readers to enlighten themselves! But this comes later. From the earliest days of Russian rule in Eastern Georgia, the transfer of

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4 In his essay, “India’s Development Regime,” David Ludden describes one facet of Britain’s colonial regime in terms of the appropriation of peasants’ knowledge and establishing itself as the central authority on agriculture through the “textual construction of agriculture with statistics.” Such an appropriation required the standardization of social categories, weights, measures, and crops that facilitated the quantification of agricultural production. This process occurred in Russia’s Caucasian possessions, but in the more peripheral regions like Guria it gained momentum only after the Crimean War. David Ludden, “India’s Development Regime,” in Colonialism and Culture, Nicholas Dirks, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992): 257-276.

5 Of course, Chavchavadze’s call for enlightenment and action was not simply a call to serve the empire but also carried a nationalist tone as well. A translation of the story appears in Ilia Chavchavadze, Works, Marjory and Oliver Wardrop, trans. (T’bilisi: Ganat’leba Publishers, 1987, reprint): 41-54. Donald Rayfield translates the title as “Is He Human?” and describes the work as “the first intellectually and aesthetically satisfying Georgian novella.” Chavchavadze went on to become a leader of the Georgian national movement and the most esteemed luminary of Georgian social thought and literature. D. Rayfield, The Literature of Georgia: A History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994): 174-175.
loyalty involved the concomitant realignment of all institutions that previously had served dynastic houses to now serve the empire. The Church is most conspicuous among them. Thus, in 1811 Alexander I revoked the autocephalous status of the Georgian Orthodox Church and subordinated the Church to the Holy Synod. In short, the transfer of loyalty required turning one’s face to the rays of the northern sun as a humble participant in the construction of empire.

In laying out this argument about the pivotal role of loyalty in how we understand Russian rule in the Georgian lands, I am arguing that the initial imperial alliance forged between Russia and the dynasts of Western Georgia (with the exception of Solomon II of Imereti) left much latitude for the dynasts to retain control of internal affairs even though they had been stripped of their sovereignty. The translation of local allegiances into an imperial idiom of loyalty did not follow some kind of premeditated design or plan. No such design existed. Rather, the establishment of imperial rule was a haphazard affair. Various elements limited the Russians’ capacity to project power. These elements can be summarized as limitations of resources, including the incompetence of officials and lack of knowledge, often simple ignorance, natural obstacles, indigenous autonomies, and international tensions. Precisely because of these elements, I am arguing that success in Georgia’s incorporation was very much dependent on the capacity of the Russian administration to inspire and maintain loyalty. Loyalty was crucial because of the role assigned to Georgians in conducting the conquest of Caucasia at large (including expelling the Persians and Ottomans) and realigning the entire region to the north. The Russians intimately depended on their fellow Christians to establish the empire in that region. Indeed, it is the joint nature of this enterprise that emphasizes not only the mutual dependence of Georgians and Russians but also explains the lack of design: the process of imposing imperial rule was itself an act of transferral of evolving imperial standards and norms to Caucasia, the most diverse territory of the entire empire. No one could define or predict how this transferral would proceed and appear as a complete idea.
Demonstrations of loyalty affirmed that it was at least occurring. Thus, I refer to the joint
dependence and the loyalty it generated as the condominium or pact of empire-building in
Western Georgia (and Caucasus at large).

I. The Methods of Russian Imperial Rule

Holding loyalty as the focal point of our investigation, I venture into the history of
the Russian incorporation of Western Georgia and Guria, specifically, by looking at the
discourse and various strategies, policies, and practices devised by the administration to
inspire loyalty and acceptable conduct. These components of government, together with
the limitations that constrained administrative latitude, define the methods of rule.
Because the goal was to inspire allegiance to the imperial regime and the process of
merging into empire in Caucasus, and because achieving this objective engendered a pact
of governance, we can discern a system of rule amidst the vacillations, variations, and
above-mentioned elements that gave the process of incorporation its haphazard
appearance. The crucial element of this process was the appearance of order and purpose
as projected by the discourse of incorporation which took the form of ideological zeal.
As I suggested above, this discourse explains not only how the Russians justified to their
co-religionists the conversion of dynasticism into imperial rule, but also why the
Georgians went along with it or resisted it but still felt a part of the imperial enterprise.
The zeal detected in the discourse emanates from the concept of the Georgians’
threatened extinction and the related goal of displacing Persian and Ottoman suzerainties
and redirecting Caucasus from its traditional southern orientation to the “northern sun” of
Russia. Central to this notion was the hierarchical relationship of vassal to lord and
subject to sovereign. The two aspects of this relationship harmonized the traditional
dynastic bond of personhood — articulated by blood price and pledges to spill the last
drop of one’s blood for one’s lord — with the new European-based, imperial union that
was at once less personal and more egalitarian, in the way it was predicated on common enterprise, joint endeavor, and greater social mobility.

Still, lest the indigenous subject populations aspire to too great a sense of egalitarianism, the ideology of incorporation encompassed preconceptions about the indigenous peoples that were expressed in a plethora of descriptions, among other sources, that tabulated productive capacity or industriousness, depth of religious faith, acceptable behavior, and potential for modernization that were the mainstay of enlightened autocracy. Terms like vospriimchivost’ (literally, “receptiveness”) and grazhdanstvennost’ (“civic-mindedness”) evoked all of these character attributes as the enterprise developed. At the outset, these attitudes toward the Georgians took the form of disparaging remarks about their lazy natures, deep ignorance, backwardness, and proclivity to corruption due to their long association with the Ottomans and Persians. We have already seen the roots of this attitude etched in centuries of travel accounts. In essence, we find permeating the written record of the Russian incorporation of Western Georgia a dilemma over whether to regard the Georgians as “Asiatics” or “Europeans,” and hence whether to treat them po-aziatki or po-evropeiski. Different commanders would take different approaches to this dilemma, but generally all would look down on the Georgians as inferior in their position on the ladder to civilization. But, ultimately, the Russians believed they were saving the Georgians, which came to mean they could be transformed into Europeans, because of their Christian faith, a faith that the Russians

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6 I am indebted to Austin Gerseld for drawing my attention to the resonance of grazhdanstvennost’ in the discourse of imperial rule. See his article, “From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire,” in Russia’s Orient, pp. 101-114; and the essay by Dov Yaroshevski, “Empire and Citizenship,” in ibid., pp. 58-79.

7 Thus, in his lengthy report of 1801 about the internal and external relations of the Georgian lands, the Russian liason to Eastern Georgia, Petr Kovalenskii remarked that “The trade of Imeretia and Mingrelia, and even Guria as well, which is now virtually under direct Turkish rule, is most insignificant insofar as the inhabitants are lazy, poor and [living] in the crudest ignorance.” AKAK, vol. I (14 April 1801), p.113.
knew long pre-dated their own. Consequently, these attitudes affected the ways Russian officials treated the Georgians as "allies" in the extension of empire into Caucasia, the ways they devised policies, and the ways they treated rebellion when it occurred.

In more practical terms, the methods of Russian rule consisted of the policies and practices designed to inspire loyalty and compel acceptable conduct, a number of which — though not all — maintained Georgian practices and customs. Chief among them was the oath of allegiance to the tsar. Others included the use of Vaxtang VI's law-code to settle civil suits and minor crimes, and the recruitment of Georgian nobles and serfs to fight in military campaigns. Similarly, the regime undertook a number of new imperial initiatives, like the awarding of medals, pensions, and other honors for loyalty and bravery in battle; granting the rights and privileges of Russian nobles to Georgian nobles; creating new educational and cultural institutions in keeping with enlightened rule; purging corrupt Russian officials from the administration as a sign of goodwill and justice to Georgians; and providing grain after bad harvests as a sign of the tsar's infinite generosity. At the same time, the regime always had recourse to and often used coercive measures to compel proper comportment, allegiance, or submission. These entailed such tactics as the abolition of kingship and the exile of the Bagratid royal family as well as punitive campaigns and tax increases after rebellions. But the premise underlying the articulation of Russian imperial power over the Georgians was that theirs was an alliance; Russian and Georgians were on the same side, fighting a common foe, and engaged in the elevated enterprise of bringing the empire and its civilization to Caucasia. Therefore, a central focus is on how the rebellions that broke out were to be the expression of perceived transgressions of the imperial pact.
II. The Creation of a "Temporary Administration" in Western Georgia

In order to elaborate this argument more fully, I examine several episodes in the incorporation of Western Georgia that illuminate the contours of the methods of imperial rule. We see this system of governance take shape in the first half century of Russia's rule but in a different form from that in Eastern Georgia. The difference consisted in the relative attention paid to each region by the imperial regime. In general, it can be argued that Russia invested less of it in the development of Western Georgia and, accordingly, prolonged its "temporary administration" of the region. The effect of this relative neglect, for reasons already outlined, was to increase the tension between the imperial presence on the ground and the ideological justification for that presence as well as to increase worries about the future of the key local actors, or the dynasts. Russia were unable to harness the resources in Western Georgia to the degree that it could in Eastern Georgia, at least for the first half century of its administration. As a result, the ruling families of Western Georgia exercised a greater degree of relative autonomy than their kin in K'art'li-Kaxet'i, all the while imbibing the grandiose aspirations of a modernizing imperial regime. Thus, the process of converting dynastic into imperial rule was slow. The greatest effect of this delay was the preservation of the exercise of these Georgians' political autonomy. Thus, when dynastic rule was eliminated, some members of the dynastic families in Western Georgia saw this move as a violation of the contract with their imperial overlords. This sense of violation led to rebellions, which constitute a primary focus of the history of incorporation.

The following exposition centers around four episodes in the process of incorporation. These are the abolition of kingship in Imeret'i, the 1819-1820 rebellion in

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8 Though the history of the incorporation of Western Georgia has not received the attention in English that it merits, many in Georgia, Russia, and elsewhere have written about it. In general, historians writing in English, and to a large extent in Russian as well, write the history of "Georgia" in this period from the vantage point of K'art'li-Kaxet'i, relegating events in Western Georgia to the background of their
Imeret’i and Guria, the abolition of princely rule in Guria (1828-1830), and the Gurian rebellion of 1841.

*The Dissolution of Dynastic Rule in Imeret’i*

The history of the Russian incorporation of Western Georgia originates with the confrontation between the Russia administration and King Solomon II of Imeret’i, one of the most ardent advocates of dynasticism and the final representative of kingship in the Georgian lands and Caucasia at large. When the Russians decided to move into Western Georgia, dynastic rule appeared to have sapped the region of its resources and vitality. We have seen how the Russians boldly asserted that they were saving the Georgians in K’art’li-Kaxet’i from extinction by annexing the united kingdom in 1801. They could not make such a bold statement with regard to the polities of Western Georgia because they had not suffered such a terrible invasion as as the recent 1795 Persian invasion of the eastern kingdom. Yet, the Russians would make a similar claim by asserting that they were saving the Georgians in the western domains because they were trapped in a downward spiral of moral decay, economic decline, and population depletion because of the impact of centuries of Ottoman-Islamic suzerainty. For the Russians the form of dynastic rule that they encountered in Western Georgia was symptomatic of this general debilitating influence.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in the final decades of the eighteenth century
the principal domains of Imeret´i, Mingrelia, and Guria were all fractured by dynastic
crises. In all three polities, members of the ruling families as well as of the most
powerful princely families often engaged in conflicts among themselves conducted from
the secure holds of their inherited fortresses. Moreover, the social and economic weight
of dynastic rule was exceedingly burdensome on the serf population. In 1821 in Imeret´i,
it was estimated that the number of noble and clerical families comprised fifteen percent
of the total number of families, which meant that each princely, noble, and clerical family
was supported by the labor of approximately six serf families. In Guria a similar
proportion obtained. As in Eastern Georgia, dynastic rule was personal, with the
sovereign ruler dispensing justice and redressing grievances while migrating between
residences, hunting, or visiting his lords. Relatively few written records were kept,
especially in Guria. Despite efforts of Solomon I to ban the slave-trade, it went on
unabated from several port settlements and through the southern trade and grazing routes
from Guria into Achara and Axalc´ixe. Commercial enterprise lagged behind even what
it had been in the tumultuous seventeenth century. As expected, education remained in the
hands of the clergy.9 Hence, the Russians easily assumed the role of saviors liberating the
region from the grip of Ottoman rule.

If strategic concerns focused the new Caucasian administration’s gaze on the
polities of Western Georgia immediately after the annexation of 1801, the recurrent
dynastic tensions between Mingrelia and Imeret´i provided the pretext for Russian

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9 P`irc`xalaishvili (Pirtskhalaishvili), “Imeretiia i Guria v period 1804-1840g.,” pp. 15-25; Ivanenko,
Grazhdanskoе upravlenie Zakavkaz’em, pp. 66-69, 256-257. As indicated in the discussion of
Güldenstädt, it is estimated that the population of Guria at the turn into the nineteenth century was around
25,000. Though no secular system of education existed in these domains, Pirtskhalaishvili is quick to point
out that the ecclesiastical tradition of education was still very much intact. Imeret´i had eleven
monasteries, while Guria had two. One of the brilliant products of this system of education was K`aixosro
Gurieli, whom we met in the preceding chapter and who returns to our story below. P`irc`xalaishvili, p. 22.
intervention across the Surami mountains. In his study of the subsequent dissolution of kingship in Imeret’i, Henry John Armani chronicles the path from Solomon II’s initial request for Russian protection in 1794 (rejected by Catherine the Great) to the Russian annulment of his right to rule in 1810 and his subsequent exile to Turkey where he died in 1815. Armani’s study concludes that Russian administrators perceived Solomon’s sovereignty as a direct threat to their rule in Eastern Georgia. Therefore, they acted decisively to thwart his attempts to unite the dynastic houses of Western Georgia under his rule.¹⁰ As the predominant sovereign in the region, Solomon’s plight directly affected the fate of all the other polities, most notably Mingrelia and Guria. In addition, Russian efforts to win Solomon and the other dynastic families over to their side involved careful maneuvering with the Ottomans.

In brief, Russia sought to extricate the region from the Ottoman sphere of influence in order to consolidate its position in Eastern Georgia and expand trade. The empire needed access to the Black Sea ports (P’ot’i and Bat’umi most notably) then controled by the Turks. They exploited the dispute between Grigol Dadiani of Mingrelia and King Solomon II of Imeret’i over control of the region of Lech’xumi to extend protection over Mingrelia in 1803.¹¹ The Dadiani construed Russian protection as an expedient alliance to safeguard his autonomy. He threatened to seek a similar arrangement with the Ottoman sultan, if the Russians rejected his request; they did not.

¹⁰ In addition to the fact that Solomon was indignant about the Russian annexation of K’art’li-Kaxet’i and therefore was steadfast in upholding his sovereignty, the Russians saw his stance as a direct threat to their rule in Eastern Georgia because, first, he succeeded at least temporarily in gaining the allegiance of Guria, Ap’xazet’i, and Svaneet’i in a bid to unite Western Georgia; and, second, he granted asylum to two sons of the former King Erekle II, Iulon and P’arnavaz, who were both opposed to Russian rule. He also supported the efforts of another son of Erekle, Alek’sandre, to mobilize Lezgian and Persian forces against the Russians. Armani argues that Solomon did in fact seek Russian protection but only on condition that the Russians preserve kingship in his realm; he abided no alternative to kingship, and in the end, he refused to cower before Russian arms. Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia, 1800-1815,” pp. 173, 177-181, 202, 208-209, and, in general, chapters 5-10.

¹¹ See Armani for this episode, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” pp. 167-203.
As it turned out, Samegrelo/Mingrelia would continue to exist as a protectorate until 23 December 1866 (or 14 January 1867), thus demonstrating in part the different imperial modes of governance between Eastern and Western Georgia. The epigraph at the beginning of the chapter captures the spirit of this temporarily mutually beneficial union and deserves closer scrutiny as an expression of oaths of allegiance to the tsar.

The cited document was actually Grigol Dadiani's pledge of loyalty to Russia, a proposition of terms for extending protection over his realm. He evidently composed the letter and used expressions of servitude that had recurred in earlier letters and pacts made between his predecessors (and the kings of Imereti) and the Russian tsars. In the letter containing the pledge he traces the circuitous route by which Prince Tsitsianov's original letter discussing protection reached him. He claims that King Solomon paid K'ainosro Gurieli, the uncle of the reigning Gurieli, "many bribes" to "commit dishonor" against Tsitsianov's messenger, and he seized Tsitsianov's letter, copied it, and gave the original to Solomon. Receiving the copy of the letter, Grigol dispatched "an especially honest" priest and noble, both "blessed with an abundance of trust," and they carried this proclamation of loyalty to Tsitsianov.

The document states unequivocally that Grigol Dadiani "has placed all of my hope on you, inasmuch as you (th), the absolute wisest ruler, having spared [me], have opened the doors to the most benevolent Sovereign." He then castigates Solomon for his transgressions and delivers his pledge of allegiance to Alexander. He repeatedly declares himself to be the "slave" of the tsar. He depicts the tsar in the most grandiose of terms, essentially representing him as the most virtuous of sovereigns, and, in fact, God's representative on earth. Alexander is "the mightiest," "the most gracious," "the lord of lords." Grigol composes his oath with the greatest "zeal," harboring no "lies" and with the "purest of minds." He underscores the purity of his state of mind by stressing that "neither craftiness nor perfidy" resides in his pledge. As testament to his purity, he swears by the Holy Trinity, by Christ, the Word of God, the Holy Mother, the Holy
Gospels, and the Cross of Christ, among other Christian sacrosanct symbols. There can be no doubt that the foundation of trust between these two individuals and the domains they represent was their common Christian faith.\footnote{AKAK, vol. II, doc. no. 908 (21 August 1803): 459-462. Grigol uses the term moneba in Georgian (rabstvo in Russian) to convey his slave status to the tsar; similarly, he writes crp’eli gonebit’a for “pure mind” (rendered in Russian as chistaia myst’ or chistoe razumenie).}

Grigol Dadiani then swears “to sacrifice himself” to the tsar from this moment, “now and for centuries, I and my sons, and the brothers who are bound to me, in conformance with such faith [i.e. Christianity] and the Christian law.” No other law could exist between them as neither was as yet familiar with the legal code of the other’s land; the act of translation had barely begun. He also swears to uphold “the most faithful and loyal love” for Alexander, to serve him “with pure mind” and “until the last drop of blood,…in word and deed both among myself and those surrounding me, and within the boundaries of my domain and beyond them.” He then swears to have no relations with anyone, “neither from the higher, nor from the lower [classes] who are inclined toward harm or treachery, whether openly or secretly.” He pledges himself zealously to serve the Russian military when called upon, providing guidance and intelligence so that it encounters neither obstacles nor need. Finally, he seals these obligations with the pledge that he stands before God’s tribunal “with the purest of minds” and consequently would submit to divine punishment in the event of transgression.\footnote{Ibid.}

After clarifying his obligations to the tsar, he details with the greatest humility his requests from his lord of lords, i.e. the tsar. These include receiving Alexander’s confirmation of his offspring as the sole legitimate rulers of Mingrelia; the provision of a charter securing possession of his estates; fulfilling his promise of awarding to Grigol Dadiani the Order of St. Alexander Nevskii; giving him a sword which will symbolize
"the honor" and "slavery" with which he submits to his all-mighty Sovereign; providing protection against Solomon; and granting him a portion of the revenues from any minerals extracted or ports constructed in his lands. This last point is significant insofar as it affirms not only the right of the Russians to exploit the economic resources of his realm but also enjoins Grigol Dadiani himself to facilitate this exploitation, to strive for greater production.\(^{14}\) In sum, Dadiani’s pledge expresses the terms of a condominium or pact between lord and vassal. It is a declaration of absolute submission of person, lineage, subjects, and territory to the most virtuous and mighty of sovereigns. The language of the oath effects a clear union of minds, devoid of deceit and references to local tradition that might introduce confusion or equivocation; it compels honorable conduct as judged by the Holy Trinity. At the same time, if this phrasing renders Dadiani’s loyalty absolute, it also preserves his authority in his realm and the existing social structure. Only now his authority is contingent upon his ability to live up to the terms of the agreement by manifesting his loyalty and that of all his subjects to the imperial overlord.\(^{15}\)

But how long could one sustain such a mindful union across immense distance and through a host of couriers and intermediaries? To make his word more binding and grounded in the profane world, and to demonstrate the integrity of his person in the face of all the requests he made of Tsitsianov, Grigol Dadiani offered his son as a hostage.

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\(^{14}\) \textit{Ibid.} Grigol Dadiani justifies these requests for a portion of the revenues by declaring that "ever since my youth I have had the desire to be the slave of the most august Sovereign," and that he makes his request with the "deepest love." Providing him with a portion of the revenues from the development of the Black Sea coast will enable him to live with "honor" by his own means and will also provide work for his subjects.

\(^{15}\) In order to make those terms explicit in the short run, the commander in Western Georgia, General Petr Litvinov, issued a proclamation to the residents of Odishi, enjoining them to abide by Christian law, cease the sale of children in conformity with that law, make peace with King Solomon, and foster love in the realm as a way to end all brigandage. \textit{Ibid.}, doc. no. 931 (16 June 1804): 475. Other examples of oaths of allegiance appear in \textit{ibid.}, doc. no. 1031 (13 July 1805): 526-527 (with the princes of Ap ‘xazet’); and doc. no. 1912 (20 May 1804): 938-939 (with the ruling family and \textit{bega}s of Kabardinia).
The offer placed Tsitsianov in a quandary over how to respond. He called it "an Asiatic custom," and therefore felt compelled to convey to Dadiani that Russia need not accept hostages (amanatov) as a sign of trust; Russia relied on the "force of arms" if need arose to enforce agreements. All the same, in order to foster "the felicity" of his son, Tsitsianov would request permission from Alexander to send the boy to Russia to provide him with "the proper upbringing" at state expense. As he saw it, he condescended to participate in this practice because he was dealing with a ruler whose trust in the tsar would be all the greater if he was indulged in this Asiatic custom. In other words, accepting the "hostage" would demonstrate Russia's respect for the culture of the Dadianis' dynastic rule, while sending the boy to Russia would confer respect on Russia as an enlightening imperial power.\(^\text{16}\) This new union of Mingrelia and Russia benefitted both sides. Russia received a foothold on the Black Sea coast from which it could begin to reinterpret the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in order to displace the Ottomans from their coastal fortresses. Dadiani received Russian protection against Solomon and confirmation of his claims to Lech'xumi. As a treaty of protection, he retained considerable latitude in running his own affairs.

On the other hand, such an agreement would be difficult to impose on the Imeret'ian king. Given the kinds of obligations imposed by such powerful language, Solomon, if he were to accept, could expect little room to maneuver as the sovereign lord of his land. The problem of Lech'xumi encapsulated the conflict: Russia insisted that Solomon submit to imperial protection in order to have his case heard, while Solomon, the preeminent sovereign in Western Georgia, demanded that his claims to Lech'xumi be honored before he submit to Russia. The Russians were keenly aware of the importance of bringing Solomon to heel and obtaining his submission in order to establish an

uninterrupted line of communication from the Black Sea to Tiflis/Tp’ilisi. Solomon was acutely sensitive to the Russians’ violation of the Treaty of Georgievsk when they annexed K’art’li-Kaxet’i in 1801. He demanded an explicit display of imperial goodwill and respect by at least honoring his claim to Lech’xumi. The Russians first tried to placate his concerns by awarding him the Order of St. Alexander Nevskii as a sign of support and protection.17 But Solomon was little swayed. On behalf of all the inhabitants of Imeret’i, a group of princes and ecclesiastical officials composed a letter to Tsitsianov in which they affirmed “with upright conscience” their devotion to the tsar and to their king alike that Lech’xumi belonged to Imeret’i; the Dadiani may hold it by force of arms but inscriptions on churches there and royal charters here clearly prove its long-standing affiliation with Imeret’i.18 Shortly after signing the agreement with the Dadiani, however, the Russians lost patience with dialogue and responded to Solomon’s intransigence by flashing their imperial might against the enfeebled king, threatening violence against him. The king relented momentarily and struck a deal in 1804 with the Russian administration by which it promised to uphold his kingship and submit his claim to Lech’xumi to Alexander I.19

Unlike the arrangement with the Dadiani, the Russians had more reason to doubt the Imeret’ian king’s sincerity as sworn in his oath of allegiance. Reports reached Tsitsianov about his possible betrayal. The chief administrator of Caucasia charged Litvinov to obtain reliable information about the state of affairs in Western Georgia from

17 Ibid., doc. no. 706 (3 August 1803): 352.

18 Ibid., doc. no. 737 (23 Feb. 1804): 368-369.

19 Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” pp. 192-258. With Solomon sworn to submission, the Russians then extracted from both the Dadiani and the Imeret’ian king sworn promises as slaves of the tsar to make peace and impose it on their subjects so that no more brigandage, theft of livestock, thievery, or sale of slaves occurs. AKAK, vol. II, doc. no. 769 (no date, but in May or June, 1804): 383-384.
the Imeret’ian and Mingrelian princes who had declared their heartfelt loyalty to the
empire; this was their duty. 20 The king responded by asserting that Tsitsianov need not
worry. The language of his letter also exemplifies Solomon’s sense of his dynastic
authority. He declares that “my mind exults with soulful joy and veneration of God” as
confirmation of his bond to His Imperial Majesty. And though he receives Tsitsianov’s
letters “with much happiness,” he would have more happiness and joy if he could meet
the general in person. This statement reflects the importance of personal contact, the
intimacy of the king’s authority, and his belief that correspondence alone ultimately
fosters doubts and misunderstanding between two like-minded rulers:

As concerns your paternally benevolent declaration that hidden enemies
surround us, spreading evil rumors in order to unsettle our submission to
our all-gracious Sovereign—we hope on this account that your most
profound, inquisitive mind, which resembling a well-worn diamond, will
not accept the fumes of those persons who are afflicted by the disease of
love for sedition and with which you see and investigate a matter with the
capacity to discern the right from the left, as the Bible says: ‘an unspoken
matter is better than an idle word.’ And when I have the happiness to see
you face-to-face, then my affairs can come to light—better than the evil
rumors. 21

He closed by giving his word that he would be unwavering in his loyalty to Tsitsianov’s
paternal love and to “the glorious and most-gracious Sovereign, my tsar.” 22

The much hoped-for meeting did not occur, and doubts about Solomon’s loyalty
grew. Russia’s reluctance to reconsider the Lech’xumi affair provoked Solomon’s ire,
and shortly after this letter, he considered his oath of allegiance annulled by Russian
behavior. 23 In early 1805, Litvinov reported to Tsitsianov that he knew the thoughts and


21 AKAK, vol. II, doc. no. 793 (10 Oct. 1804): 400. The original Georgian text is not included.

22 Ibid.

moves of Solomon through intercepted correspondence given to him by K’aixosro Gurieli. Solomon sought an alliance with K’aixosro against the Russians: “The morality of the inhabitants inspires so little trust in their words that except for written evidence or clear exposure, it is difficult to trust [them].” Solomon’s insistence on being treated like a dynastic sovereign king of his realm and on exercising his royal prerogatives reflected his hope to compel Russia to meet his demands; but his courting local allies made him a traitor in the eyes of the Russians and condemned all his subjects for their lack of morals and untrustworthiness; they were “Asiatics” clearly.

Thus, the accord between the Imeret’i dynasty and the Russian Empire proved to be untenable. The Russians had promised Lech’xumi to the Dadiani and delayed consideration of Solomon’s claim. Solomon’s continued intransigence on the matter, coupled with his efforts to strike a counter accord with the Ottomans was increasingly interpreted by Russian officials as “treachery.” Then, when war broke out between the Russians and Ottomans in 1806, the former required Solomon’s complete submission which he refused to give. The war forced Solomon to choose sides, and in fact, he played the role of Caucasian sovereign with great deviousness as he tried to strike a precarious balance between the Ottomans and Russians to preserve his kingdom. He solicited aid from the pasha of Axalc’ixe, tried to rally the Persian Shah to his cause, and continued negotiations with the Russian officials. For their part, the Russians embarked on a campaign to end Solomon’s reign and dissolve kingship in Imeret’i, replacing it with a temporary or provisional administration (vremennoe upravlenie). Between 1806-1810, the Russians occupied the principal citadel of K’ut’aisi and several other fortresses,

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24 Ibid., pp. 192-196, 204-206.

25 Ibid., pp. 263-298, 333-340. Russia was at war with Persia as well as the Ottomans. See note below.

prosecuted the war against the Ottomans, and hardened their stance toward Solomon. Suspicions on both sides mounted. In a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Rumiantsev, the new Administrator-in-Chief of Caucasia, Ivan V. Gudovich (1806-1809), belittled Solomon’s kingdom and kingship: “Besides, this small kingdom, which does not correspond to even a principality, seems unworthy of being called a kingdom, and the king, [unworthy to be called] a king, who lives in the manner of a Circassian.”

In response to Gudovich’s accusations of violating his loyalty and obligations to Russia, Solomon declared that the tsar had never responded to his inquiry into the destruction of his palace by Russian soldiers: “In your last letter you write that I should keep silent. Have it your own way; if so much dishonor and sorrow, useless for Russia, can be borne, then I will have nothing more to report to you.” And so the break-down of trust proceeded. The correspondence reveals, however, that despite Russia’s distaste for Solomon’s “treacherous” proceedings, the imperial administration could not risk permanently losing his loyalty since they were at war with Iran and Turkey and he was well-regarded by many of his subjects.

Nonetheless, Gudovich and subsequently his successor, Alexander P. Tormasov (1809-1811), were quickly losing hope of reconciliation and pressed their demand for full compliance with their 1804 agreement including having Solomon turn himself in to the Russian authorities. They justified their stance by referring to “the interests of the

\[\text{\#27 Quoted in Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” p. 290; the remark appears in AKAK, vol. III, doc. no. 270 (4 Dec. 1807): 143. The translation is Armani’s, and he includes the Russian text in his footnote.}\]

\[\text{\#28 Ibid., p. 297; AKAK, vol. III, doc. no. 298 (11 June 1808): 161-162. The translation is Armani’s, and he includes the Russian text in his footnote.}\]

\[\text{\#29 Lang quotes an unattributed description of Solomon printed in Kavkazskii kalendr’ (vol. XIV, 1858), that lauded his physical appearance and ““pleasant, cordial smile.” Last Years, pp. 265-266.}\]
Imeretian nation. In a proclamation to the Imeret’ian clergy, princes, and nobles to be issued in the event that Solomon rejected the Russians’ ultimatum to meet their demands, Tormasov stated clearly that the Russians regarded Solomon’s actions as a direct violation of the 1804 accord when Solomon, indeed, had entered into a solemn pact with Russia. The Russians stressed their oath “before the face of the omnipotent God and on the Holy Gospels...” Solomon was in grave danger for violating this Christian pact, and yet, in the heat of the moment, an adviser (and traitor to Solomon), Zurab Ceret’eli (Tsereteli), urged caution to the Russian administration, reminding Tormasov that only two years before Solomon had administered an oath of allegiance to his princes and nobles binding them to defend the king against Russia to the last drop of blood.

Finally, in April, 1810, Russian troops surrounded Solomon and forced him to surrender and take a new oath of allegiance to the tsar. They also administered oaths to princes and nobles throughout his domains in various churches. At this point, Tormasov was insistent on taking several hostages as a sign of loyalty and goodwill. Shortly after his removal to Tiflis (Tp’ilisi), Solomon escaped to the pashalik of Axalc’ixe and fomented open rebellion among Imeret’ians and recruited Lezghians and a combined Persian-Ottoman force to his cause. Among his possible allies, Solomon solicited the support of his former adviser, Zurab Ceret’eli (Tsereteli), imploring him not


31 Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” p. 343.

32 Ibid., p. 344; AKAK, vol. IV, doc. no. 306 (29 January 1810): 223; and Armani, p. 354; doc. no. 311 (22 February 1810): 231. Ceret’eli had been Solomon’s sâxît ’axuc’esi or “vizier,” but he increasingly sided with the Russians, plying them with information about Solomon’s intentions in the early years of the conflict.

33 AKAK, vol. IV, doc. no. 325 (11 April 1810): 240-244.

34 Ibid., doc. no. 330 (13 April 1810): 246. This particular document summarizes the events of the final months up to and after the king’s arrest.
to “deprive me of your paternal love,” for Solomon reminds him that “I was raised by your hands.” Colonel Simonovich, the Russian commander in Imeret’i, quickly composed a proclamation to the high Imeret’ian clergy, princes, and nobles in K’ut’aishi, and he sent copies to Guria and Mingrelia as well. In it, he declared that Solomon’s actions had aroused the “rightful anger” of the tsar. He reiterated the demand that they remain loyal to the tsar themselves in conformance with the sworn oaths recently administered. After all, Solomon had fled to “the Turks, the natural enemies of the Christians.” Solomon and his named accomplices had “broken the oath giving eternal submission to Russia before God and must appear before all honorable and sensible Christians.” Because of the severity of their deeds, they should expect full justice rendered by God. All those now called on who demonstrate their loyalty to the empire can expect rewards of promotions in their ranks and estates, he stated, but those violating their oaths will be considered traitors and face “grave and eternal captivity” in Siberia.36

As the rebellion spread in the early summer, Tormasov grew more adamant in his call for these most severe punishments. Imeret’i was in fact still not part of the empire, despite Solomon’s oaths of 1804 and early 1810; the threat of defection and the risk of arousing revolt in Guria and Mingrelia required clear demarcation of the boundary between loyalty and treachery. Loyalty to the dynastic rule of Solomon was now unacceptable. Tormasov ordered Simonovich to procure troops from Guria and Mingrelia to help put down the rebellion (referred to as a miatezh and bunt) and to punish some of the main leaders by hanging without a trial as a “useful” example to the population of the tsar’s almighty wrath.37 At the same time, he reported to Rumiantsev

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that some Imeret‘ians were grumbling over the tsar’s hesitation to reward their loyalty; the region was too important strategically to allow this “extremely frivolous [legkomyslennom] people” any further opportunity to indulge their feelings of loyalty to their former king.38 He could be condescending in his descriptions of the Imeret‘ians since they still lay outside of Russian rule, but his keen awareness of the need to be judicious and swift in rewarding loyalty and selective and severe in punishing treachery reflects the vulnerability of the Russian presence.

Solomon’s efforts to rally his people to his rule were to no avail. The Russians controlled several of the main fortresses in Imeret‘i at this point and defeated the various rebel forces through the summer, culminating in the defeat of Solomon himself. Solomon managed to escape to Axalc‘ixe and then to Turkey where he died in Trabzon (Trebizond) in 1815.39 Thus, the Russians quashed the Imeret‘ian revolt of 1810 and incorporated Imeret‘i into the empire not as a protectorate but as an oblast’ (province or region) under the control of a temporary administration. The former kingdom was divided into four okrug-s (districts), and the administration was staffed with Russian officials and Imeret‘ian advisers.40 Still, even though they managed to impose this imperial administrative structure on the former kingdom, they had to retain use of the Vaxtang law code as the foundation of the judicial system.41 The imperial presence was

38 Ibid., doc. no. 485 (19 April 1810): 365-366; doc. no. 499 (1 July 1811): 373.

39 Solomon escaped to Axalc‘ixe with a retinue of four hundred, but when he died in Trabzon in 1815, after Sultan Mahmud II had cut off his subsidy, only twenty-five still remained by his side. Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” pp. 341-399, 505, 509. Pirtskhalashvili provides a more abbreviated version of this narrative as well, “Imeretiia i Guriia v period 1804-1840 g.,” pp. 44-60.

40 For a detailed description of the structure and functions of the new oblast’ administration in Imeret‘i, see AKAK, vol. IV, doc. no. 335 (30 April 1810): 255-263.

41 Ibid., doc. no. 364 (10 June 1810): 284-285.
tenuous and still very dependent on local custom and information on which the Russians had limited access.

By the terms of the Treaty of Bucharest (1812), settling the war with the Ottomans, the Russians agreed to return the coastal fortresses they had seized from the Ottomans (P’ot’i, Suxumi, and Sucuk Kale). Otherwise the treaty was silent about Russian advances in Western Georgia, and accordingly, this silence confirmed their gains at least temporarily.42 Solomon’s kingdom thus became an integral territory of the empire, albeit under a temporary or provisional administration that would continue to exist in one form or another until the administrative reform of 1840. Though the Russians achieved their goal of incorporating Imeret’i by exiling the principal dynast of the realm, this eradication of the dynasty caused immense destruction in the kingdom, ushering in a famine and plague in 1811-1812 that turned many in the local population against the new imperial regime.43 Again, the Caucasian administration had to respond to

42 Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” pp. 439-440; Lang, Last Years, pp. 259-266; LeDonne, Russian Empire and the World, p. 115. A secret clause in the treaty did guarantee the Russians the right to use a harbor along the Black Sea coast — two hours from the Rioni River and four hours from Anakra, where no fortress existed — as a landing-place to unload supplies for Eastern Georgia. In 1804 the Russians had gone to war with the Persians who refused to recognize Russian suzerainty over Eastern Georgia. Both sides prosecuted the war in fits-and-starts, without long campaigns, but the Russians prevailed by 1812. Unlike the Treaty of Bucharest, the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) recognized Russia’s territorial gains, including control of the Khanates of Ganja, Sheki, Karabagh, and Shirvan (with Baku on the coast). Russia also won the right to sail merchant and navy ships on the Caspian Sea. The war was significant for events in Western Georgia in that it diverted troops to the eastern provinces and prolonged Solomon’s independence. LeDonne, Russian Empire and the World, pp. 116-117.

43 One report states that the famine in 1811 was so severe that people were forced to give their half-starved children to whoever could feed them. Akak, vol. IV, doc. no. 487 (25 April 1811): 367. Tragically, the 1810 revolt in Imeret’i against the Russian persecution of Solomon ushered in a famine and plague that reportedly killed 33,000 inhabitants and forced another 7,500 to flee the land, drastically reducing the population. Once again, Imeret’ians were forced to sell their children into bondage. On the eve of the famine, the population was estimated at 40,000 households, or, if we assume five persons per household, roughly 200,000. Akak, vol. IV, doc. no. 330 (13 April 1810), pp. 245-246; doc. no. 487 (25 April 1811), p. 367; Armani, “The Russian Annexation of the Kingdom of Imeretia,” p. 399. Other estimates of Imeret’i’s population on the eve of Russian rule, include 125,700 and 159,600. See Vaxtang Jaoshvili, Sak’art’velos mosaxleoba XVIII-XX sauksuneebshi (demograp’iul-geograp’iuli gamokveli), pp. 69, 71. On the other hand, Brosset claims that the famine and plague combined wiped out half the population of the
the crisis with extremely careful consideration of what they could demand from the population. The new Imereti administration could not collect taxes in 1811, and all agreed that no one could force the issue. Besides, the Russians still knew very little about their new subjects and needed the good will of the local population to obtain a reasonable estimate of their numbers. In order to bring relief and garner the good will of the Imereti, the Russian administration approved a proposal to expend 10,000 silver rubles for the purchase of grain from the Crimea to be distributed in Imereti. 44 Plans for pressing ahead with further administrative reforms had to be abandoned until peace returned. The “temporary administration” was to become permanent for years to come. The government was largely at the mercy of the local population and explained this dependence in grand imperial style, castigating the natives for their “wildness” and lack of respect for order. 45

As we saw at the end of the last chapter, the fate of Guria was inextricably bound up with Solomon’s plight and directly demanded Russian arbitration. After Solomon initially swore allegiance to Russia in 1804, Vaxtang Gurieli formally requested imperial protection as an autonomous principality, presumably to secure his own control over Guria. The Commander-in-Chief, Prince Tsitsianov, curtly replied that Guria had already received that recognition in the treaty with Imereti since the principality was a constituent part of Solomon’s domains, or so the Russians had regarded it in order to win

44 In 1817 Ermolov urged the foreign ministry not to demand repayment of the 10,000 rubles by the Imereti in order to demonstrate “the boundless generosity of His Imperial Majesty” and win the loyalty of the Imereti who were still living under the direst of circumstances and possibly inclined to rebellion. AKAK, vol. VI, doc. no. 733 (24 Feb. 1817): 530.

Solomon's allegiance. Besides, the Gurieli-s were in the midst of a dynastic succession crisis, and the Russians had difficulties deciding whom to back as the rightful heir. They still needed to gather the basic intelligence on the political leanings of those vying for the rulership of the principality. The Russian administration's stance toward Guria changed once it pronounced Solomon a traitor and set about abolishing his rule. Mamia Gurieli proved loyal to the Russians during this critical period, 1804-1810, when Solomon attempted to mount a concerted opposition to the Russians. In addition, Mamia provided troops to the Russians in the successful siege of P’ot’i in 1809 during the war with the Ottomans. Thus, when in 1810 Mamia Gurieli again requested that Tsar Alexander extend imperial protection over his domain, Alexander agreed. In 1811, Mamia Gurieli was invested as the autonomous ruler of Guria, independent of Imereti but under Russian protection. He received the Order of Anna in the first degree, a sword, and banner with his coat of arms, in addition to a charter from Alexander charging the

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46 The Russians had some sense that Guria was essentially autonomous in its relations with Imereti. See the detailed report on affairs in Western Georgia composed in 1804 by Councillor A.M. Litvinov, Akak, vol. II doc. no. 803 (October 1804): 407-411. Indeed, the Russian position toward Guria must be seen in relation to the dispute between Samegrelo and Imereti over Lech’xumi; Russia had no choice but to regard Guria as part of Imereti given their promise of Lech’xumi to Samegrelo. It also made their bid for control of the coast easier to advance against the Ottomans. Ibid., doc. no. 876 (9 Sept. 1805), p. 443; no. 877 (9 Sept. 1805), pp. 443-444; no. 932 (8 July 1804), pp. 475-476; and no. 1830 (30 April 1804), pp. 896-897. See also, P’irc’xalaishvili, "Imeretiia i Guriiia v period 1804-1840 g.,” pp. 41-43.

47 The succession crisis was mainly between the brother (Vaxtang) of the last deceased Gurieli (Svimon) and Svimon’s son, Mamia. The Gurieli-s sought Russian adjudication because they were trying to break free of Imereti and Ottoman overlordship. Interestingly, in making his case to the Russians, Vaxtang Gurieli was well aware of Russian interest in possible ports along Guria’s Black Sea coast. Thus, he stressed, “No one besides me, neither before nor at present has possessed [as much] Gurieli-ness [Georgian: gurielobia /Russian: Guriel ’stva] and power over these coastal places.” Because he claimed the Gurieli-s’ fortresses along the coast as his patrimony, he fell under Ottoman suzerainty; thus, he signed his letter with a stamp in Ottoman Turkish proclaiming his submission to the Ottomans: “Khåki pây ’us mân váqtang kuriel khan 1219,” which was translated into Russian as “Prakh stop ottomanskoi dinastii, Vakhhtag-khan- Guriel’skiti.” Akak, vol. II, doc. no. 1059 (1804): 542-543. The Russians opted to support Mamia as the son of Svimon, and for this Mamia remained loyal to the Russians. Ibid., doc. no. 1065 (3 June 1805): 545; doc. no. 1067 (22 August 1805): 546-547; doc. no. 876 (9 Sept. 1805): 443.
Gurieli to rule his people “with gentleness and justice.” Finally, his descendants were confirmed as his rightful heirs.48

While the pact served the interests of both sides, this was not an instance of unconditional loyalty on the part of the Gurieli to Russia. The commander of troops in Western Georgia reported that the Gurieli family had displayed “extreme hesitation” in signing the treaty of alliance because Mamia did not want to grant Russia the power to try Gurians (including his family members) in criminal suits according to Russian law; nor did he want to turn over tax revenues from merchants to imperial coffers. He was also reluctant to provide “hostages” as a sign of his allegiance.49 Thus, Mamia’s calculation that allegiance to Russia would protect his autonomy against Solomon’s claims to suzerainty marked all too clearly the dynastic family’s adroitness in forging an expedient political alliance to uphold their autonomy. More generally, this event represents a clear instance when a local lord ruling a territory in a borderland zone played an active role in the process of empire-building but with the immediate purpose of preserving his autonomy. In this light, the immediate incorporation of Guria resembles that of Samegrelo/Mingrelia insofar as both the Gurieli and Dadiani viewed the move in traditional terms of preserving autonomy by conceding suzerainty over their domains to the Russians.

48 P’irc’xalaishvili, “Imeretia i Guria v period 1804-1840 g.,” pp. 60-61. Under this new pact with Russia, Guria existed as an “independent domain” (samostoiatel’noe vladelel’stvo) according to “the laws of a special vassal principality” (na pravakh osobogo vassal’nogo kniazhestva). On the importance of Gurian and Mingrelian troops in the campaign against Solomon, see AKAK, vol. IV, doc. no. 435 (23 Sept. 1810), p. 322.

49 AKAK, vol. IV, doc. no. 352 (28 May 1810), p. 275; and doc. no. 359 (8 June 1810), pp. 279-281. Ivanenko states that ultimately, the provision about trying criminals according to Russian law had little meaning in Guria and Mingrelia because the Gurieli-s and Dadianis rarely turned their criminals over to Russian courts unless they wanted them exiled from their domains. Ivanenko, Grazhdanskoje upravlenie Zakavkaz’em, p. 257.
This episode, a response to the abolition of dynastic kingship in Imeret’i, illustrates several points about the nature of Russian imperial rule in the earliest stages of its development in Western Georgia. For one, all sovereigns — including the dynastic families of Imeret’i, Mingrelia, Guria, and Ap’xazet’i, and Alexander himself — understood that they were forging a pact of protection that imposed certain obligations on all sides. Christian law and faith provided the moral enforcement of the pacts and the basis for acceptable conduct in their compliance. For their part, the various Georgian rulers sought to preserve the prerogatives of dynastic rule, but through the example of Solomon II, they came to learn that they had struck a deal with an imperial power that was more deeply committed and better able to enforce its suzerainty than had the Ottomans who had acted through their local pashas at Erzurum and Axalc’ixe. Still, the Russians well appreciated the tenuousness of their presence in Western Georgia as compared even to Eastern Georgia, where their hold was also fragile. The Russians could do no more than impose a “temporary administration” on Imeret’i and extend protection to Mingrelia and Guria. In all three polities, the Russians had to rely much more on existing local personnel and retain more of the traditional governing structure than in Eastern Georgia. In addition, Solomon had demonstrated a strident recalcitrance in his negotiations with the Russians and over more than a decade had made it clear to all that the Russians could not impose their will as they liked but had to live up to their obligations, especially in providing protection, actively rewarding loyalty, and showing generosity in times of need. In effect, Solomon’s principal demand of the Russians as a condition for his loyalty was that they acknowledge him as the preeminent dynastic lord — the “lord of lords” — in Western Georgia. They had refused to do this, and Solomon had lost power and sadly died in exile.

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50 As a student of Toumanoff, Armani presses this point in his study. Thus, at one point, he states: “The representatives of the Empire in Georgia possessed certain blind spots with regard to other aspects
At the same time, the 1810 rebellion underscored the fragility of imperial rule. Solomon’s revolt was not the first major rebellion against Russian rule. Rebellions had broke out in 1804 among the mountaineers astride the Georgian Military Highway (mainly in the region of Mt’iulet’i), in 1807 in the Gori district of K’art’li, in 1809 in the K’sani region of the central Caucasus, and in 1810 in Osset’i and the Kuban. Just after Solomon’s revolt, the largest rebellion of the first years of Russian rule in all the Georgian lands broke out in Kaxet’i in 1812. But in Western Georgia Solomon’s rebellion was the first major revolt that heralded the emergence of a tradition of revolt, while in Eastern Georgia rebellion would play less of a role in the political life of the region in subsequent decades (though rebellions occurred). The 1810 rebellion in Imeret’i illuminated the array of policies at the disposal of the administration for defining, inspiring, and coercing loyalty; that is, the rebellion exposed the limitations in the existing methods of imperial rule. The Russians deployed the harshest of measures to bring the inhabitants to heel, coerced new oaths of allegiance, rewarded those who remained loyal, suspended the payment of taxes, and imported food to alleviate hunger. But all of these measures occurred with relatively few Russians actually in the area. They were designed to distinguish the traitorous from the loyal and, at least momentarily, have the latter affirm their separation from the former. Loyalty meant submitting to the will of the tsar, the greatest of fathers, while treachery meant engaging in the time-honored tradition of seeking alternative allies to uphold sovereignty.

Because the Russian abolition of kingship in Imeret`i was intimately connected with their war against the Ottomans and the Persians, the Russians depicted their campaign against Solomon in a virulent anti-Islamic rhetoric that evoked references to the on-going slave-trade, and strong affirmation of their mutual Christian faith. This rhetoric may have deepened the ideological barrier between Christians and Muslims, but the actual border between them remained as porous as ever.\textsuperscript{52} All sides also acknowledged the hierarchical structure of this new imperial condominium. The Russians buttressed it with their frequent references to the light-mindedness, wildness, and Asiatic customs of their new subjects. In light of this orientalist construction of the native, imperial rule boded ill for Caucasian cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the paternalistic, condescending tone of the Russian discourse introduced a view of rebellion that accepted it as the behavior of still-uncivilized children, not brought up with the values of their Russian overlords but tainted by their long association with Ottoman, Islamic rule.

Equally significant, the rebellion made manifest the fundamental tension undermining the Russian presence. On the one hand, the Russians sought to incorporate the region into the empire as a regular set of provinces or districts. In conformance with their notion of enlightened autocracy, they sought to transform the Georgian lands through reform of administrative and cultural institutions. On the other hand, given the precariousness of their presence and dependence on Georgian support, in Western Georgia they could not push ahead with this kind of imperial project. They rationalized their hesitation to do so by referring to the “Asiatic” nature of the local population. Thus, the Administrator-in-Chief after the 1810 rebellion, the Marquis Filip Paulucci (1811-—

\textsuperscript{52} The continuation of the slave-trade was one indication of how porous the boundary was. Thus, in 1818 a Russian official observed a lively trade in slaves at P`ot`i. Indeed, the wife of a Gurieli, and sister of the well-known Georgian General, Prince Orbeliani, was said to make frequent visits to P`ot`i after which she would often return to Guria with only half her suite. S.L. Avaliani, Krest`ianskii vopros v Zakavkaz`e, vol. 1: Krestnoe pravo i istoria krest`ianskoi reformy v tiflisskoi i kutaisskoi guberniiakh (Odessa: Tip. "Tekhnik," 1912): 9.
1812), wrote to the Minister of Police in St. Petersburg that he could not consider going ahead with governmental reform in Imeret’i “because of the absolute difference in morals, qualities, and the cast of mind of the Imeret’ian people, who are accustomed to swift and decisive justice by their kings and his officials;” this conflicted with the European system of justice, which he argued was more deliberative, systematic, and slow.53 Thus, given their zealous ideological commitment to enlightened rule, how could the Russians ultimately justify the lack of reform and concessions to local custom? Or were they there simply to protect?

In a long memorandum composed after the conclusion of peace with Ottoman Turkey and Persia, Paulucci asks a similar question and responds to it with a clear enunciation of what he thinks Russia’s imperial aspirations should be. He argues that Russia should work to consolidate its position in Transcaucasia—particularly its territorial acquisitions from Persia—because the strategic advantages of controlling the isthmus had revealed themselves. He elaborates his vision of Russian objectives in Caucasia from the vantage point of the imperial rivalry with England, which was well underway at this point. He notes that great commercial advantages would accrue to Russia if it could gain control of Persia but that England already “exercises a tyrannical supremacy in Persia, as in the Indies.” The “Great Game” was on. With regard to the Black Sea coast, it was axiomatic that Russia gain control of this littoral for realizing its larger goals against the Ottomans: “I would not be remiss on this occasion to say that I see the most certain means for annihilating the power of the Ottoman Porte in Europe to be to attack him vigorously in Asia, the abundant source of his riches and his force.” It is certain, he emphasized, that the Balkans were “nearly impregnable on the European side,"

53 Quoted in Ivanenko, Grazhdanskoe upravlenie Zakavkaz’em, p. 92. He also indicates that the Russians sought to use the 1810 rebellion as a way of drawing loyal Imeret’ian nobles into local administration (p. 73).
and that Constantinople had long been able to muster powerful resistance from Asia. Pressing Russia's boundary to the Araxes and Kura would assure tranquility in the lands they already held in Transcaucasia, facilitate the subjugation of the mountain peoples, diminish the influence of the Persians and Ottomans, and provide the empire elbow room in its political and military relations in Europe. The problem was that Russia still had only a tenuous hold in the Caucasus. Russia had already expended great resources in money and men in the region and still had relatively little to show for it: indeed, not even firm communications between Mozdok and Georgia, or Kizliar and Baku. Thus, Paulucci proposed that in its dealings with the mountaineers the government should "prevent oppression, spread enlightenment and even Christianity [répandre les lumieres et même celles du Christianisme], to the extent that this could be done solely through calmness, persuasion, and good example." The Georgians' role in this strategy was unspoken, taken for granted, as it were, insofar as they already were Christians and allies, and therefore, the government needed to gain a foothold on the coast and spawn trade, agriculture, and the "love of industry."⁵⁴ Certainly, the achievement of these goals precluded the possibility of maintaining the status quo there but required more direct intervention. Paulucci was intimating that once the Georgians saw Russia's motivations, they would accede to a larger imperial presence, for the fruits of enlightenment would reveal themselves in better military organization, greater industriousness, and more orderly government. In effect, the marquis was proposing that Russia push the boundary of Europe south to the Araxes and Kura and include the Georgians as allies in the endeavor.

The Rebellion of 1819-1820 in Imereti and Guria

The rebellion that swept through Imeret’i, Guria, and parts of Mingrelia in 1819-
1820 brought to light with more clarity the tensions in the Russian imperial enterprise.
The uprising occurred in response to an ecclesiastical reform that was designed to bring
the administration of the Church in Western Georgia under the control of the Holy Synod.
The Russians had already implemented this reform in Eastern Georgia beginning in 1809
when they augmented the powers of the Dikasteria (or “court of justice”) within the
Georgian Church. An imperial ukaz endowed this body with a new, more centralized and
authoritative administrative structure and with the power to control all Church finances
and appointments to monasteries, churches, and schools. Not only did this reform bring
the body into line with imperial standards of administration, it also charged it to produce
information for the imperial state. In 1811 the Russians retired the Kat’alikos Antonii,
abolished the autocephalous status of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and created a
“Georgian Exarchate” subordinated to the Holy Synod. In an effort to ascertain Church
revenues and land-holdings and to secure their title, the Dikasteria was ordered to survey
Church holdings and record all sources of income and expenditures. Also in 1811 the
Russians removed the lower nobles or aznaurebi, who had been vassals of the Church,
from that institution and placed them under state control.55 The administration forestalled
possible resistance to these measures by appointing a Georgian from a prominent family,
Metropolitan Varlaam (Erist’avi), as the new Exarch, a step that seemed to promise
continued autonomy for the Georgian Church. Officials were also careful to explain the
purpose of the reforms. Finally, as a way to extend these reforms into Western Georgia,
in 1814 they created the “Georgian-Imeret’ian Office of the Ruling Holy Synod” (or
Kontora) which assumed the responsibilities of the Dikasteria. This measure created a

55 In 1808 the Caucasian administration had freed all priests and deacons who had been bound to princes or
nobles in Eastern Georgia. N.K. Gvosdev, “The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church in the
Dikasteria in Western Georgia and an accompanying ukaz subordinated the Church hierarchy there to the Exarch and the Holy Synod.⁵⁶

The attempt to bridge the Surami mountains with this reform languished for a few years until Exarch Varlaam was replaced in 1817 by a Russian prelate, Feofilakt (or Theofilakt), the impetuous Bishop of Riazan'.⁵⁷ In 1819, acting against the advice of Russian commanders, including the Chief Administrator, Aleksei Petrovich Erмолов (1816-1827), the new Exarch insisted on going to K'ut'aisi to carry out the reform in Western Georgia. Erмолов feared that, because of their depraved character, the nobles were naturally inclined to revolt, and therefore they would seize the opportunity to stir up trouble. As he put it:

Excluding Georgia itself, that is Kartalinia and Kakhetia, where the young people of princely and noble descent, visibly look to take advantage of opportunities for education, one can say that in Imeretia, Guria, and Mingrelia nearly all who are nobles, borrowing all the vices and the debauchery of their neighbors, who for a long time have dominated them, are given over to edifying themselves with perfidy, ingratitude, and a proclivity for deceit to such a degree that the class of nobles is more like a band of thieves than this distinguished estate.⁵⁸

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⁵⁶ Gvosdev notes that among its activities, the Kontora reduced the thirteen dioceses in Eastern Georgia to two. “The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church,” pp. 413-415. One history of this reform recounts that in order to impart an imperial air to the opening of the Kontora in Tiflis in May, 1815, it was decided to have the Exarch assume his seat as President of the six-member body on a throne. Because no throne existed then in Tiflis, Paul I had the last Georgian King, Giorgii XII’s throne sent from St. Petersburg. This act generated rumors that the Russians were sanctioning the revival of kingship in Georgia. The Russians acted quickly to dispel such thoughts by sending the throne back to Petersburg, and this action quieted society in Eastern Georgia. Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze, Major-General Potto, ed., vol. III, part 2: Vremia Aleksei Petrovicha Ermolova, 1816-1826 gody, N.N. Beliavskii, ed. (Tiflis: Tip. Shtaba Kavkazskago voennago okruga, 1904): 498-499.

⁵⁷ As Gvosdev stresses, Russians would occupy the highest position in the Georgian Church until 1917 when the Church regained its autocephaly. Gvosdev, “The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church,” pp. 412-413. The Kontora did create a Dikasteria in K'ut'aisi to prepare to initiate the reform.

Here is a precise statement of how the Russians viewed the effect of the Surami mountains on the Georgian peoples. Though all lived in close proximity to Muslim powers, those in the east had at least had the chance and shown the inclination to educate themselves and eat of the fruits of enlightenment. By contrast, those to the west seemed hopelessly tarnished by their association with the Turks, and Russia still had only a small presence there. Ermolov’s character description aside, the general had a point. This was a risky step to take not only because the Russians made no effort to inform the population of their plans and purpose, but also because the subordination of the Church in Western Georgia to the Church in Eastern Georgia violated the traditional autonomy of the westerners’ Church and the dynastic families there.\footnote{It should be remembered that the Church in Western Georgia had been effectively independent of the Church in Eastern Georgia since the fourteenth century when the Metropolitan of Bicvinta (Pityous or Pitsunda) assumed the title of Kat’alikos, thus rivaling the Kat’alikos of Mc’zet’a in K’art’li. This state of affairs lasted until the Russian period. Jean Richard, “Les églises des confins orientaux,” in \textit{Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours}, Jean-Marie Mayeur, Charles Pietri, André Vauchez, and Marc Venard, eds., vol. VI: \textit{Un temps d’épreuves (1274-1449)}, Michel Mollat du Jourdin and André Vauchez, eds. (Paris: Desclée-Fayard, 1993): 234; and Giuseppe Croce, “Les églises orientales,” in vol. IX: \textit{L’âge de raison (1620/30-1750)}, Marc Venard, ed., p. 590. See also Robert H. Hewsen, “An Ecclesiastical Analysis of the Naxarar System,” in \textit{From Byzantium to Iran: In Honour of Nina Garsoian}, R.H. Hewsen, ed. (Atlanta, 1996): Excursus III, p. 144.} Indeed, ecclesiastical and dynastic affairs were intimately connected. Many bishops came from the ruling families, and the organization of bishoprics had been “dynasticized” insofar as they coincided with the territories of the chief dynastic families.\footnote{I borrow the term “dynasticized” from Toumanoff in his description of this process in Armenia. Toumanoff, \textit{SCCH}, pp. 138-139.}

Though he retained the existing twelve Western Georgian bishoprics, upon his arrival in K’ut’ai Feofilakt ordered an accounting of all church landholdings and revenues and the closing of churches that seemed little used. Equally dangerously, the Russian commander charged with executing these tasks refused to explain their purpose to the Imeret’ian nobles whom he recruited to help. In fact, the order to gather data on
church estates was seen as a threat to noble estates precisely because, in many cases, the legal distinction between noble and church lands was vague.\footnote{That is, nobles actually held the titles to many estates whose tax revenues went to a particular parish church. On the other hand, bishops often held hereditary right to estates, jurisdiction over which some of them gave to lower nobles (aznaurebi), who then ran the estates as though they were their own. In order to effect a clear separation of Church and noble lands, in 1811 Alexander I ordered that Church lands be "secured" from inappropriate acquisition and use." Gvosdev, "The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church," pp. 409-410, 415.} Furthermore, Feofilakt ordered that traditional in-kind payments by peasants to the clergy be converted into Russian monetary equivalents. Given the shortage of Russian currency in the area, this was perceived as an onerous burden. Concealing the purpose of the reform, commanding the tabulation of landholdings, closing churches, and dismissing priests, and generally transferring the control bishops had over their affairs to the Dikasteria — all of these actions provoked rebellion in Imeret’i.\footnote{Ivanenko, Grazhdanskoie upravlenie Zakavkaz’em, p. 126.}

Imeret’ians composed petitions to the imperial administration stressing that even under Ottoman suzerainty, "the Hagarites" had not infringed upon their spiritual affairs like this: "their [the Russians’] offense had no bounds."\footnote{Quoted in Uverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze, vol. III, part 2, p. 502.} They also gathered in crowds, initially composed of princes and nobles, who refused to comply with the order to aid the authorities in compiling their lists. Officials managed to make a list of Church-holdings in only two districts of Imeret’i — the K’ut’aisi and Vake districts. Elsewhere in Imeret’i as well as in Mingrelia and Guria, officials sent to gather data encountered stiff resistance and were unable to execute their task.\footnote{AKAK, vol. VI, doc. no. 743 (8 July 1819): 536; M.A. Polievktov, "Arkhivnoe ‘delo’ o vosstanii v Imeretii, Gurii i Mingreli v 1819-1820 godakh," Saistorio moambe, 1:2 (1924): 212.} It was the threat of generating the data that led to rebellion. That is, the process of acquiring information from the locals produced
rebellion, insofar as the acquisition of such information represented a threat to dynastic authority and the social structure that supported it.

In his lengthy report about the reasons for the revolt in Imeret’i, the head of the administration there, Major-General Kurnatovskii, took a benign view toward the situation and refused to react with violence. He stated that the Imeret’ians understood that they were legally wrong but vehemently stood defiant. In Racha, a crowd estimated at 2,000 went from village to village brandishing guns and blowing horns as a call to assemble. One unidentified Imeret’ian from the crowd declared, “We feel our guilt, but, fearing punishment, we are trying to make ourselves stronger to defend ourselves, and that is why we cannot abandon our undertaking prematurely, not until we have confirmed by oath that all residents will follow us.”65 “Forgive us! [But] until you resolve our affair, the road to Georgia will not be open to mail or commerce,” a noble declared. In response to Kurnatovskii’s question about why they were rebelling, Imeret’ians answered that they were not rebelling but only requesting that Feofilakt leave the region and that the efforts to compile census and landholding lists cease. When told that the Exarch had agreed to leave and that their petitions would be given to Ermolov, they still refused to go home and remained firm that all officials leave. His report indicates that the Imeret’ians understood that they were violating the pact they had made with the Russian administration, to be loyal subjects, but they clearly felt that the government had violated its side of the agreement by infringing upon the autonomy of the Church and the nobility to manage their own affairs. This was supposed to be an agreement of protection under a temporary administration; Imeret’i was not a constituent territory of the empire as was Eastern Georgia.

65 AKAK, vol. VI, doc. no. 743 (8 July 1819): 536.
The inhabitants of Imeret’i, indeed most of Western Georgia, were at a standoff with the government, the general reported. “The first shot will be the signal and the flame of rebellion will consume the entire region.” In his view, the inhabitants knew that few troops were in the region, and they expected the government to dispatch additional troops to come at them with force. Kurnatovskii requested reinforcements. Nobles proclaimed that they would bind everyone by oath, forcing those who refused to join by “destroying them and burning their homes.” The “spirit of rebellion” had evidently also seized Guria and Mingrelia, he reported. The Abkhazians were just waiting to be asked to join; he was uncertain whether the rumors were true, but he had also heard that the Imeret’ians had asked the “Georgians” (i.e. Eastern Georgians) to join as well, and that the Mingrelians have solicited help from Abkhazia and Svanet’i, and Guria from Achara. Other rumors claimed that the Russians wanted to alter the Georgians’ faith and call up recruits from among the Western Georgians. They were wondering whether they could not expel the Russians from here.66

Officials responded to this crisis with an array of measures. The Deputy Commander of the Caucasus, General I.A. Vel’iaminov instructed Kurnatovskii to use “only prudent reprimands” to induce the Imeret’ians to return to their homes and fulfill their obligations. Should they resort to violence, then the commander was to treat them “as traitors” and punish them mercilessly “by force of arms” to end the revolt (miatezkh). In the meantime, he was to send letters by “trusted people” to the Dadiani and Gurieli demanding their loyalty and troops. Find out who the trusted subjects were and inform the general. Some reinforcements were available, if needed, but the Russians needed additional troops from Guria and Mingrelia. At the same time, Vel’iaminov reprimanded Kurnatovskii for his slowness in informing his superiors about the disturbances, and for

66 Ibid.
being so insensitive to the mood of the people not to see rebellion brewing. Ermolov later wrote about Kurnatovskii that he was a brave officer but too old for handling the situation in Imeret’i. The root of the problem from the administration’s point of view was, in part, the character of the people. Echoing Ermolov’s assessment of the Imeret’ians, Vel’iaminov attributed their actions to their “unsettled and frivolous minds.” In order to calm “the fermentation,” Vel’iaminov was ordering the Exarch to terminate his affairs in the region and return to Tiflis. Finally, the commander had eighty copies of a proclamation printed which he wanted read to the rebel Imeret’ians.

The proclamation expresses surprise that the Imeret’ians — common folk and nobles as well — were responding to the government’s actions this way.

The Russian government had only benevolent intentions in mind, truly beneficial for the Imeret’ian people themselves, to bring about change and, to improve the spiritual department in Imeret’i, which finds itself in complete disarray, to define for the Church firm revenues and to safeguard them against illegitimate uses and ... [then] to turn to proper goals, like the construction and adornment of the grand churches of the lords, the establishment of religious schools, and the provision of decent income for the clergy itself. The government looks for no kind of advantages in this affair for itself...

It reminded the Imeret’ians, on the one hand, of the severe measures the government had used in crushing rebellion there previously, while on the other, it stressed that “only the inexpressible mercy of our gentle and most philanthropic Imperial Sovereign has saved you from interminable slaughter and revived your prosperity. Can it be that you again want to violate the trust and cower before those sworn to crime? In that case, you should fear that not only the monarch’s but also God’s gentleness will abandon you completely.”


68 Ibid., doc. no. 744 (11 July 1819): 537-538. Character assessments like that of Ermolov and Vel’iaminov abound throughout the reports of the rebellion.

69 Ibid., p. 538.
The Exarch was leaving Imeret’i, terminating his work, and so “there is still time to make amends for the reckless step you have taken.” And lest the Imeret’ians entertain their fancy to rebel any longer, he concluded by saying: “Do not forget that in only a few months Russia was able to pacify thirty million French, who had risen up with the rebellious Napoleon against the legal authority of their sovereign, and restore the King of France and bring about a beneficial return to peace for the peoples throughout Europe. What can weak Imeretia, given over to your unfortunate blindness, expect from the strength and mightiness of Russia?”

These declarations contain all the elements of the imperial condominium. They assert Russia’s selfless motives for coming to the rescue of the beleaguered Georgians; not only had Russia saved them from the Turks, but they were actually saving the Georgians from themselves by identifying and persecuting the trouble-makers who held the population in blindness. Russia had brought enlightened rule to the region, and Feofilakt’s reform embodied this higher purpose. If only the Imeret’ians and their kin in Mingrelia and Guria could understand this.

But the fact remained that Russia was weak in Western Georgia. Vel’iaminov informed Exarch Feofilakt that he had to leave Imeret’i because Russian troops were tied up in Daghestan and elsewhere. At this point it would be difficult to send additional troops. Feofilakt left the region under an escort of 300 troops. Officials were ordered to project a strong facade and not to reveal to the inhabitants “our weak measures for pacification, let alone our fear.”

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70 Ibid.

71 These themes are repeated in other proclamations to the general population, cf. ibid., doc. no. 759 (28 July 1819): 548-550; Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze, vol. III, part 2, pp. 511-512.

72 Ibid., doc. no. 745 (11 July 1819): 538-539.

73 Ibid., doc. no. 747 (13 July 1819): 539; and doc. no. 748 (14 July 1819): 539.

74 Ibid., doc. no. 759 (28 July 1819): 548.
extremely competent general, Ermolov recognized that Russia had a shortage of troops in Imeret’i, but he emphasized that the Imeret’ians had meager means to sustain a revolt; therefore, the troops that were there should occupy key points in the kingdom and hold out. The only possibility for the revolt to pose a serious threat would be if it spread to Guria and Mingrelia, the rulers of which had thus far seemed to be loyal. After all, he wrote, “they will not find the least benefit for themselves” if they sided with the rebels.

Once Feofilakt returned to Tiflis, officials felt cautiously optimistic that the rebellion was coming to a peaceful end. Peasants were returning to their homes, and some nobles had proclaimed their loyalty to the government. On the other hand, other nobles had allegedly sent agents to “Georgia” [i.e., Eastern Georgia] to stir up rebellion there. In Imeret’i meetings were held to choose a new king. Prince Aleksandre, a renegade son of Erekle II who had long sought to oust the Russians from Eastern Georgia, Zurab Ceret’eli (Tsereteli), and Ivan Abashidze, the grandson of King Solomon I, were the principal candidates. Equally worrisome, in the region around Shorap’ani, a band of 100 rebels was forcing peasants to join them and to supply them with food under threat of plundering and burning their homes. Some serfs were refusing to fulfill their obligations to their lords and even using the rebellion as a means of gaining their freedom. The sound of horns could still be heard, rallying the populace to the cause.

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76 Ibid., doc. no. 761 (30 July 1819): 551.

77 Ibid., doc. no. 748 (14 July 1819): 539.

78 Ibid., doc. no. 786 (17 Jan. 1820): 569. Prince Aleksandre had come to the pashalik of Axalciye from Daghestan where he met with a delegation of Imeret’ians to discuss his kingship. Uvverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze, vol. III, part 2, p. 507.

79 Ibid., doc. no. 760 (31 July 1819): 550; doc. no. 773 (27 August 1819): 560.
Worst of all, reports confirmed that nobles and peasants had been sent to Axalc`ixe from Imeret`i and letters from Guria and Mingrelia had been sent to seek help from the pasha there. Kurnatovskii sent a spy, who was Catholic and had long been loyal to Russia, to the pasha to find out for himself what the situation was. The pasha told the spy that the Imeret`ian, the Dadiani, and the Gurieli (Mamia V) had all “persistently” requested through him Ottoman protection as well as weapons and troops. He stated that in keeping with the “Turkish custom,” he himself had not rejected their request but was awaiting word from Istanbul. He added that he had received news that in Georgia itself (i.e., K`art`li-Kaxet`i), the number of those loyal to Russia “was extremely small;” as for the Imeret`ians, well, they were “extremely sly and treacherous.” Kurnatovskii affirmed in the same report that the ruling princes of Mingrelia and Guria, together with the Imeret`ians, had for certain written letters to the sultan and the exiled Prince Aleksandre; the Russian commander was still unsure of the sultan’s response. The informer then went to P`ot`i to try to confirm a rumor that ships carrying some 570 soldiers and cannons were coming from Trabzon. He could not find confirmation. To make matters worse, the routes linking Imeret`i with Axalc`ixe could not be blocked. Reports like these express the frustration felt by Russian officials during these early years of the Russian presence in Western Georgia, a frustration over how they were still on the outside of information networks, how much of the intelligence they received seemed

80 Ibid., doc. no. 775 (22 Sept. 1819): 561-562.

81 Ibid., doc. no. 786 (17 Jan. 1820): 568-570. Working in the archives, the historian, M.A. Polievktov, discovered correspondence between Mamia Gurieli, Levan Dadiani, and the Russian administration in which the Gurieli and Dadiani consistently avoided responding to the Russian request for troops while affirming their allegiance to Russia by denying they had any contact with the Turks. “Arkhirnoe ‘delo’ o vosstanii v Imeretii, Guri i Mingreli v 1819-1820 godakh,” p. 204.

82 Ibid., doc. no. 786 (17 Jan. 1820): 568-570.
unreliable (so much of it was oral-based), how the boundaries between Ottoman and Russian domains were as porous as ever, and how loyalties were similarly fluid.\textsuperscript{83}

In the summer of 1819, the administration decided to arrest the chief culprits, including the Metropolitans Evfimia and Dositheus, both Western Georgians. But arresting the leaders proved to be difficult since they were living in different parts of Imeret’i, and Vel’iaminov wanted the arrests all to occur on the same day. As time dragged on, Ermolov decided to replace the aging Kurnatovskii with Colonel Puzyrevskii who had lived two years in Caucasus, was much younger, and already renowned for his sternness. Vel’iaminov gave him explicit instructions on how to arrest the two Metropolitans. By no means should he kill them, since that would have a provocative influence on the Imeret’ians and lead to blame being placed on Russian soldiers. But if he found that he had to kill them, then he was to dispose of their bodies outside of Western Georgia. Interestingly, Puzyrevskii managed to make the arrests in late winter, 1820, in K’ut’aisi where most of the accused had assembled to bid farewell to Kurnatovskii.\textsuperscript{84} And so, it seemed, that the rebellion would come to an end.

But in the spring of 1820, Ermolov’s worst-case scenario seemed to come true. Guria became the locus of rebellion as Prince Ivan Abashidze, who had managed to escape arrest found refuge with K’aixosro Gurieli, who had years before been involved in the succession crisis. He was considered one of the most learned persons in the region. He had studied at the famous monastery of Gelat’i (near K’ut’aisi), learned Greek and

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, doc. no. 787 (17 Jan. 1820): 571. This report from Vel’iaminov to Kurnatovskii instructs him to reward those who have shown their loyalty but to remain suspicious over certain of the professions of loyalty based on certain people’s past actions. On the other hand, the names of six of the alleged leaders appear in another report and include two Metropolitans (Genateli from Gelat’i and K’ut’at’el’i from K’ut’aisi). An adjoining list of chief accomplices includes the names of an archimandrite and a priest who was a vassal to a noble. Doc. no. 797 (16 Feb. 1820): 578-579.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Utverzhdenie russkogo vladychestva na Kavkaze}, vol. III, part 2, pp. 508-512. In route into exile, Metropolitan Dositheus K’ut’at’el’i fell ill and died between Surami and Gori and was buried unceremoniously in the church in Ananuri.
Latin, maintained an impressive library that included many classical authors, and wielded much influence in political affairs within and beyond his principality. Because of his associations through the years with many individuals whom the Russians considered suspicious, he was considered a “traitor.” Puzyrevskii considered him “a known thief, stubborn, incapable of reforming himself, and consequently not worthy of mercy.” He requested permission to go into Guria with troops and, with a lightening strike, seize K’aisosro and his accomplices at the fortress of Shemok’medi. Ermolov had already written to Mamia Gurieli, reiterating the purpose of the Holy Church Synod’s reform and stressing that the Russian government had only the best of intentions in mind and was fully committed to upholding the treaty of protection. Mamia could continue to exercise his sovereign rights as stated in the treaty. Ermolov assured Mamia that he had no doubt that Mamia and Levan Dadiani, “in accordance with [your] piety and devotion to your faith,” would fulfill the terms of the reforms. In so doing, the general reminded Mamia that in supporting the reforms he would be showing “His Imperial Majesty the most agreeable service, for you know His paternal concern for this matter.” As we have seen,

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85 The historian of the official history of the “confirmation” (utverzhdenie) of Russian rule in Caucasia, written to commemorate a century of imperial rule, writes that K’aïxosro evidently had one character flaw. His vast erudition had not given him the strength to resist “popular customs,” and he was widely known as one who could not refrain from entertaining those who had fallen into misfortune, especially his relatives. Utverzhdenie russkogo vladychestva na Kavkaze, vol. III, part 2, p. 514. On his erudition and library, see Pirc’ xalaishvili (Pirtskhaliaishvili), “Imeretiia i Guria v period 1804-1840 g.,” pp. 23-24.

86 AKAK, vol. VI, doc. no. 810 (1 April 1820): 587. K’aïxosro’s brother, Prince Davit’ was also considered a rebel, as was the widow of the deceased Prince Vaxtang Gurieli. Ibid. doc. no. 800 (18 Feb. 1820): 581. It is worth noting that Shemok’medi was one of the principal religious and dynastic sites in Guria. It had several churches and a monastery in addition to K’aïxosro’s residence which held his vast library. It was also the chief repository of Gurian charters and icons. Bak’radze, Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie, pp. 128-137.

87 Ibid., doc. no. 799 (16 Feb. 1820): 580-581. Several documents underscore the importance of demonstrated service to the Russian government during the heated year of the rebellion. Thus, Ermolov sent a letter of commendation to Prince Giorgi Eristavi for his role in quelling the rebellion in Imereti. He expressed his gratitude to the prince for “your distinguished zeal and your devotion to the Russian government as brought to my attention by Colonel Puzyrevskii....[S]uch laudable fervor brings you honor, all the more so as your Highness’s well-founded foresight about the disastrous consequences of treachery,
at least for the time being, Mamia professed loyalty but hesitated to comply with the request.

Vel’iaminov approved of Puzyrevskii’s plan, with the condition that he first ascertain whether he could secure enough provisions to sustain a small detachment for at least six months in order to prevent any rebels who might flee to Axalc’ixe from returning. He also endorsed the suggestion that the arrests happen quickly for fear that any bungling of the operation could spark revolt in Mingrelia. If Puzyrevskii had any doubts about the viability of the plan, he should desist from undertaking it, since they should show “no weakness” to the Gurians. Finally, he stressed that the colonel should record Mamia’s reactions as Vel’iaminov intended to force the ruling prince to turn over the estates of his rebellious kin to those who had shown their loyalty to the Russians.

“`These measures are needed in order to show both the Gurieli and Mingrelian rulers that the government in no way intends to violate the treaty concluded with them for as long as they remain loyal to the Imperial Sovereign.”’

Puzyrevskii proceeded with his plan. He took a small detachment from a company of chasseurs with a few cannons, and leaving them in Ch’oxatauri, went on to

in an attempt to deter your compatriots from inevitable ruin, to which their lamentable blindness and the crafty agitations of several ill-intentioned people drew them, demonstrates at the same time service also to the Russian government, which, given all the veritable means it has in its hands to quell the rebellion, gives them time to avoid their error, solely out of sympathy for them as fellow Christians, and desires to lead them by gentle means to repentance and submissiveness.” For his part, Ermolov promises that the imperial throne is aware of such praiseworthy deeds of people like Erist’avi, and that such service to High Majesty and to one’s homeland will be rewarded. Doc. no. 813 (14 April 1820): 589; see also doc. no. 817 (24 April 1820): 590-591. Such pronouncements were crucial for implanting an ethic of service in the dynastic nobility, one that retained its sense of love for one’s homeland, but which situated that love within the larger service and devotion to the empire and the person of the tsar. By contrast, writing in response to the rebellion unfolding in Imeret’i, Vel’iaminov stated that he had found “two kinds of ill-intentioned people” in the region: “those who try by all means to provoke us into spilling blood in order to embitter the people against us, and those [who] provoke the frivolous mob only to take advantage of the disturbances in order to remove what is useful for the government and extract what is advantageous for themselves.....Therefore, time and patience up to a point are the best means by which to weaken the group of those wishing ill for the Russian government.” Doc. no. 814 (14 April 1820): 589.

88 Ibid., doc. no. 810 (1 April 1820): 588; doc. no. 812 (12 April 1820): 589.
the fortress accompanied by only a handful of Cossacks, two junior officers, and a translator. Just before Shemok’medi, he left behind all but one of the officers, the translator, and one Cossack, and the four went on to the fortress. At that point, the captain who had been left behind nearby heard gunshots. As Mamia Gurieli reported to Ermolov a few days later, someone had shot and killed Puzyrevskii and the Cossack. The officer and translator were being held prisoner.  

Ermolov quickly issued a proclamation condemning “the inhuman act” of K’aixosro Gurieli. Such a deed could only rekindle rebellion among ill-intentioned people in Imereti’i itself. He declared that he had already received reports that rebels had attacked government troops and officials. Therefore, he issued a clear warning to the inhabitants of Imereti’i: “I urge the Imereti’ian people to be aware of the consequences of revolt. It threatens disaster for [your] unfortunate country. A people that resorts to revolt begins to violate the oath, sworn before the face of God, to submission and loyalty to its Sovereign. God, the avenger of those who break oaths, will not tolerate the undertaking of lawless acts!” K’aixosro Gurieli was the quintessential traitor, declared another proclamation, for he had betrayed his duty to submit to his dynastic lord and violated his obligation as a subject of the tsar. It warned all Imereti’ians, Gurians, and Mingrelians that if they rendered any aid to him or his accomplices (who were in hiding), or in any way participated in the rebellion, they would be considered traitors themselves and lose their property. Ermolov instructed Prince Zurab Ceret’eli to inform Vel’iiamino as to

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89 *Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze*, vol. III, part 2, pp. 514-515.

90 *AKAK*, vol. VI, doc. no. 818 (24 April 1820): 591.

who were firm and who were vacillating subjects of the tsar. “I must know through him whom to reward and whom to punish!”

Evidently, Puzyrevskii’s murder was “a signal” for revolt, and reports once again reached Ermolov of acts of violence against government posts especially in Imeret’i and Guria. Bands of rebels found easy concealment in the thick forests of the region and operated with impunity. Fearing the vengeance of Ermolov and Mamia, K’aixosro fled to Kobulet’i across the border (in “Turkish Guria”). The military expedition to attack K’aixosro’s fortress at Shemok’medi and retrieve Puzyrevskii’s body ran into difficulties in the dense forest around the settlement. Rebels who had been rallied by the sound of horns to defend the dynastic residence continually fired on the several hundred troops sent to the fortress. The commander decided to retreat to Ozurget’i and in the process lost nine men and had twenty-four wounded. Another contingent of rebels attacked the military post at Ch’oxatauri, burning it to the ground and forcing the soldiers to flee into the woods where they encountered heavy fire. More than half of the eighty garrison soldiers were killed. After several days of hiding in the woods, survivors made it to the nearest post in Marani. These events triggered revolt in neighboring Mingrelia, where the

92 Ibid., doc. no. 820 (24 April 1820): 591.

93 As it turned out, K’aixosro was innocent and fled out of fear for his life. At a subsequent court hearing, a sixteen-year-old Gurian, Iotam Bolkvadze, confessed to the crime. K’aixosro was at a neighboring village, and when he heard that a Russian contingent was coming to Shemok’medi, he dispatched the lad and two comrades to assess the situation. Puzyrevskii was returning from the fortress, where he had not found anyone, and encountered the young men. He asked the whereabouts of “the son-of-a-bitch” K’aixosro and raised his lash in a threatening manner. Bolkvadze took this gesture and remark as an insult, so out of loyalty to his lord he shot Puzyrevskii dead with a pistol. One of his mates killed the Cossack with a dagger. Because of K’aixosro’s violent temperament and because he had been Mamia’s rival during the dynastic crisis fifteen years before, Russian administrators accused the prince of the crime. By 1822, however, he was declared innocent and given amnesty, but he remained in Kobulet’i and, despite tensions between him and his timid nephew, he maintained a correspondence with Mamia until the latter’s death in 1826. His children went on to serve the empire. Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze, vol. III, part 2, pp. 517, 538.
brother of the Dadiani, Giorgi, assumed leadership of the rebels. Giorgi’s attempt to
displace his brother failed, but he attacked a convoy headed for the new Russian port of
Redut-Kale. A subsequent attack on another convoy resulted in a five-hour shoot-out, but
reinforcements saved the convoy (but not before twenty-six more were dead or wounded),
and Giorgi fled to Abkhazia. But the rebellion continued to spread especially in Imeret’i
and Guria. By spring and early summer, 1820, it took the form of attacks on military
posts, cutting communication routes, and engaging in sporadic plundering. Rebel bands
with as many as five hundred persons roamed the countryside.95

Ermolov’s anger grew. In a report to the head of the General Staff, he cursed the
entire noble estate of Western Georgia: “In a word, the predisposition for disobedience
against the government, for debauchery, and even brigandage that inheres in the princes
and nobles, who, with the exception of very few, do not constitute a class that is animated
by noble feelings any more than the rest of the entire population of Imeretia, Mingrelia,
and Guria.”96 In Ermolov’s view, one was a noble by virtue of one’s motivations and
merits, and the nobility of Western Georgia was pitifully devoid of such traits. The
Russians had a long way to go to transform these tarnished people and inspire in them
loyalty to empire and tsar.

The mercy, gentleness, and patience of the all-benevolent sovereign had reached
its limit. Ermolov ordered retributive expeditions into the countryside. He commanded
Vel’iaminov to create military tribunals for those who were under suspicion of
involvement; but ordered him first to put down the rebellion and then worry about the

94 Giorgi Dadiani was raised in St. Petersburg and became a page and then an officer in the

95 Ibid., pp. 518-525.

96 AKAK, vol. VI, doc. no. 825 (28 May 1820): 593.
trials. He singled out Racha as a major region to bear the brunt of his power. In turn, Vel’iaminov commanded the local princes to assemble militias to help in the round-up of rebels. He also changed tactics, preferring to break his forces into small groups to make pursuit quicker and more effective. Puzyrevskii’s replacement as head of the Imeret’ian administration, Colonel Gorchakov, marched on Racha and swiftly and methodically executed Ermolov’s orders. He burned the estates of prominent rebels, destroyed their towers, gathered weapons, including the ubiquitous kinjali-s (daggers), and had them melted into nails and other building supplies, and did the same with the famous trumpet-horns that had rallied the rebels for the past year.

Vel’iaminov took 3,200 troops into Guria in mid-July determined to destroy Shemok’medi in particular. Mamia Gurieli, who had been loyal throughout but was known for his timidity, went into hiding for fear he would fall victim to the general’s wrath. The rebels had gathered numerous forces including Kobulet’ians and Acharans to defend the fortress. But Vel’iaminov out-witted them by taking an unexpected route. While one unit bombed the front gate with cannons, another gained entrance to the fortress through a secret door. The other Russians then stormed the fortress only to find that most of its defenders had escaped into the forest. Out of vengeance for the murder of Puzyrevskii, the troops destroyed the complex. In the face of this show of imperial

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97 Ibid., doc. no. 826 (30 May 1820): 594.


99 Interestingly, one of the princes from the Abashidze clan, Murab Abashidze, attempted to kill Gorchakov with his dagger but was stopped by the commander’s Armenian translator. The Armenian received a sword and life-time pension from Ermolov. Prince Murab survived the wound he received, was shown clemency by Gorchakov, and subsequently became a devout servitor to the commander. Ibid., pp. 527-528.

100 The Russians lost sixteen men and suffered fifty-two wounded. Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaza, vol. III, part 2, pp. 530-531. In his visit to the complex thirteen years later, Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux noted that the wall around the site was still in ruins from the Russian attack but that the church survived and held the tombs of many of the deceased Gurieli-s. Voyage autour du Caucase, vol. III (Paris:
might, many Gurians hid in the forests in terror. Vel’iaminov then ordered a small
detachment to destroy the estate of Davit’ Gurieli at Grigolet’i at the mouth of the Supsa
River on the Black Sea coast from which the prince had evidently conducted a lucrative
contraband trade with the Turks. Rebels had already burned the residence and taken
refuge with Davit’ in the Turkish fortress of P’ot’i. Nonetheless, Prince Machutadze,
whose family had traditionally been in charge of the treasury for the Gurieli-s, kept the
revolt alive by stirring up the serfs and nobles on his large estate at Nigoit’i (near
Lanch’xuti). His efforts were doomed, however, as he encountered resistance from
Prince Giorgi Nakashidze, who had remained loyal to the Russians, and shortly
thereafter, a contingent of Russian troops destroyed his estate; Mach’utadze managed to
escape. In the end, the chief princely and noble families were forced to take oaths of
allegiance to the tsar, a practice employed throughout the rebellious regions of Western
Georgia. The five-day campaign in Guria proved to be one of the most difficult because
of the formidable natural obstacles and stiff resistance offered by the Gurians and their
allies.101

Before coming out of hiding, Mamia protested the seizure of the estates of his
uncle Davit’ and other princely families. He considered all Gurieli estates to be his
patrimony and recognized as such by the terms of the Russian treaty of protection.
Ermolov refused his request because what the rebellious princes had done, he claimed,
had tarnished the honor of Mamia. He also wanted to set an example to the other Gurian
princely and noble families. Mamia made peace with Vel’iaminov and received praise
from the Russians for his steadfast loyalty, even if it was timidly displayed. Indeed,
Ermolov attributed the success of the Russians in containing the rebellion in Guria to

A. Piihan de la Forest, 1839): 106-109. Unfortunately K’aixosro’s library was destroyed. P’irc’xalaishvili,
“Imeretiia i Guriia v period 1804-1840 g.,” p. 23.

Mamia’s loyalty. Nonetheless, the rebellion proved too much for Mamia, and soon after he grew melancholy and died in 1826, a loyal servitor ruling a fractured domain.\textsuperscript{102}

What is the significance of the 1819-1820 rebellion for the establishment of Russian rule in Western Georgia? In essence, the rebellion was a broad-based refusal to comply with the imperial decree to provide information that would subordinate the ecclesiastical administration to the Kontora based in Eastern Georgia, and, by extension, the Holy Synod, based in St. Petersburg. The actual rebellion consisted of isolated acts and seemed to spread haphazardly, in large part because of the administration’s tentative response (under Kurnatovskii) and Russia’s generally weak military presence until the spring of 1820. Ermolov was often away from Tiflis in Daghestan trying to subjugate the mountaineers there. The rebellion in Western Georgia revealed how over-extended the Russian military could be. It also took the form it did because of the dynastic structure that shaped the resistance. In Guria, the rebellion took root among princely families, including members of the Gurieli family, who saw the decree as an infringement on their autonomy. Ever since entering the empire as a protectorate in 1810-1811, members of the Gurieli family had enjoyed wide latitude in running their own affairs which included carrying on a lively trade in contraband with their kin in Kobulet’i, Achara, Axalc’ixe, and beyond. Dissension among the Gurians, Mingrelians, and Imeret’ians existed, both within families and between social estates. Some serfs tried to seize the opportunity to gain their freedom; and some nobles tried to seize serfs and their lands from neighboring estates. Taken as a whole, however, the rebellion sought to uphold the relative autonomy exercised by the Western Georgian Church and dynastic families under the treaties concluded in the first decade of the 19th century.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., pp. 533-534, 537.
But the rebellion played a major role in entrenching Russian rule in the region and illuminating the limitations in the evolving policies of the imperial regime. Given the relatively small presence of the Russian administration in Western Georgia, the rebellion proved effective in clarifying the boundary distinguishing loyalty from treachery and hence in aligning dynastic loyalties with imperial allegiance. The language of both sides in the correspondence, proclamations, and dialogues between various princes, nobles, and peasants and the administration reflects a consciousness of the pact that had been forged a decade before. As the rebellion developed and became more violent, Ermolov and his subordinates were clearer in defining that boundary. They also crystallized that boundary through an assortment of punishments (arrests, exiles, and the confiscations of estates) and rewards (commendations, pensions, and estates).\(^\text{103}\) And the rebellion — particularly for those nobles rewarded — was another step in the transformation of the dynastic nobility into an imperial service nobility. Moreover, this change is seen through the way the administration demanded demonstrations of loyalty by providing intelligence (as informers, for example), troops, food, and controlling one’s serfs by keeping them out of the revolt. Again, the language of service pervades the written record.

Equally significant, the rebellion provided the justification for additional reforms. That is, the rebellion demonstrated all too clearly to the Caucasian administration that the government had been lax in its efforts to integrate Western Georgia into the empire, by having it a set of protectorates. Imeret’i was of primary importance because it was no longer a kingdom but an oblast’ under an imperial administration. The 1810 revolt and subsequent famine had delayed the enactment of any further reforms and therefore given a more permanent cast to the “temporary administration” in Imeret’i. The attempt to initiate reform in 1819 provoked rebellion. Indeed, the administration’s neglect of the

\(^{103}\) See Ermolov’s guidelines for distributing the confiscated estates. *AKAK*, vol. VI, doc. no. 833 (19 Sept. 1820): 598-599.
region had sanctioned an ominous pattern of delayed reform that worried Ermolov after the 1819-1820 rebellion. He immediately ordered the execution of Feofilakt’s set of ecclesiastical reforms, the effect of which was to presage an attempt to centralize the region’s administration at the end of the 1830s.\textsuperscript{104} At the same time, he used this mandate to carry out further reform to show clemency and imperial mercy. Thus, he instructed Gorchakov as the head of the Imeret’iian administration to delay enacting the proposed increase in taxes, as he considered this too burdensome for a region that had suffered as much as Imeret’i. He understood this gesture precisely in terms of demonstrating good will, inspiring respect for the government, and hence dissipating any temptation to resist.\textsuperscript{105} In these terms, this hesitation reveals the underlying fear of rebellion that weighed on officials’ minds as they tackled the problem of how to integrate the region into the empire and to still appear to respect its dynastic traditions and structures.

Still, the general consensus was that the rebellion had deepened the Russian presence, and therefore the empire needed to reconfigure the Imeret’iian administration as much as possible and establish more of a defined border with the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{106} Related to this concern was awareness of the need to create a more secure and efficient commercial corridor from the Black Sea through the Georgian lands and eastern khanates to the Caspian Sea. This larger imperial goal spurred a desire to acquire more information. Part of this effort involved acquiring the surveys conducted by recent foreign travelers like Jacques François Gamba, the French consul in Tiflis, who traveled down the Black Sea coast in 1823-1824 assessing the viability of port-sites and the extent of mineral and

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., doc. no. 827 (28 April 1821): 601.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., doc. no. 839 (31 March 1822): 602-603; doc. no. 840 (11 April 1822): 603; and doc. no. 849 (16 July 1823): 608-609.

timber reserves. His study of the commercial prospects for the region fell right into line with those of Gülkenstädt and his early successors. Gamba saw this effort, in part, to be lifting the veil on the legendary Caucasus: “over the past forty years, the exploration of the ancient world [i.e. Colchis] by numerous travelers, by entire armies; finally the discovery of monuments, ruins, and unknown medallions has permitted the verification and the acquisition of a great number of facts considered fabulous for a long time.”

More practically, the territory of former Colchis was extremely fertile with “all the crops cultivated in Europe, and all those of Asia, [and] is covered by forests as Germany was at the time of Tacitus.” While such fertility had produced the most beautiful women in the world, he lamented that this beauty had tragically promoted the slave-trade. Indeed, the local population had retained their forests to conceal themselves in from their Ottoman overlords through the centuries. Now the time had come to pacify the mountaineers and create a veritable trade route between Europe and Asia over the isthmus. The age of Ottoman domination and spoilage of the people and their rich resources had passed, and now Russia could embark on the more glorious development of this ancient world. Local rebellions had helped to spark interest in this endeavor and compelled a stronger Russian presence accompanied by increasing indigenous allegiance.

And yet, because of the alleged debilitating influence of the Ottomans on the Western Georgians, the Russians resorted even more vociferously to the paternalistic, condescending rhetoric of enlighteners. The Imeret’ians, Gurians, and Mingrelians were children, frivolous in spirit, treacherous if coerced, still wild in their lifestyle. They had still not been tamed by Russian rule. This indigenous attitude lay behind their propensity


108 Ibid., p. 115.

109 Ibid., p. 117.
for rebellion. It expressed their character flaws and highlighted the same tension that the administration had faced in 1810, but even more boldly since this last rebellion had been longer and larger. In order to prevent future rebellions the administration needed to gain more control over Georgian internal affairs, though in attempting to gain more control they risked stirring up rebellion.

Thus, the importance of the pact, the terms of allegiance, and all the rituals employed to actualize the rhetoric. The administration justified its interventionist measures in terms of the pact of protection which it had forged with the dynastic families. Christian faith undergirded the pact and bound the parties. But, as we have seen, Christianity accompanied Enlightenment as the twin pillars of the Russian imperial enterprise throughout Caucasia but most prominently in Western Georgia where the administration was stretched thin and waging a battle to gain control of the littoral. In terms of the Enlightenment discourse the Georgians were less Christian and less European ("civilized") than the Russians, a condition that sanctioned protection and intervention. And the Russians viewed rebellion as a manifestation of the local inhabitants' character insofar as they were still seen as children acting out of blindness against their all-merciful Sovereign.

The 1819-1820 rebellion was the first rebellion in Guria against the imperial regime. The Gurians exploited the tension in Imeret'i and their peripheral position in the region to mount a concerted resistance against tsarist forces. They reached beyond their borders to form alliances against the Russians. It was a revolt fractured along dynastic lines. To N.N. Beliavskii, the military official charged in 1901 with compiling the official history of this period for the centennial anniversary of Russian rule, the Gurian revolt ended a prolonged period of tension and ushered in a glorious period of friendship: "So ended the misunderstanding that had arisen between two peoples of the same faith;
its actors departed the stage, and the waves of history washed away all traces of human misapprehension.\textsuperscript{110}

\textit{The Dissolution of Dynastic Rule in Guria}

Perhaps when viewed from 1901 and the centenary commemoration of Russian rule in Caucasia, one could see that rebellion marking the end of the pronounced discord between the Western Georgians and the Russians. Subsequent events like the 1841 rebellion in Guria, the revolts on the eve of the Emancipation of the serfs in the 1860s, and the later revolt of 1882 in Guria might appear as minor eruptions washed clean by successive waves of reform and the mutual achievements of Georgians and Russians building empire in that rugged land. Most certainly the 1902-1906 peasant movement in Guria and the 1905-1907 Revolution in general would have altered that perspective. One's interpretation of the waves might change. Instead of reforms, the waves might appear as the rebellions that occurred every twenty years.

And yet, this characterization too is overly simplistic. The dynamic of imperial rule involved manifestations of loyalty that affirmed at least some Gurians' participation in the imperial enterprise. One prominent example of such a display of loyalty occurred in the 1828-1829 Russo-Ottoman War. This war involved the same two-pronged strategy deployed by the Russians against the Ottomans in the Russo-Ottoman wars of 1768-1774 and 1806-1812. In the Caucasian theater, Guria assumed a pivotal position in pressing Russian military objectives. Suddenly, the tiny principality on the periphery of the empire became a crucial battlezone between the Russians and the Ottomans, thrusting the issue of loyalty to the forefront of tsarist concerns. To lose Guria to the Ottomans would give them a foothold in Western Georgia from which they could threaten Russia's still-

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze}, vol. III, part 2, p. 536.
fragile hold on those domains, especially since the Ottomans continued to control key fortresses along the coast like Bat’umi and P’ot’i. Overall, the Russians sought to secure their hold along the coast by obtaining territory at least to P’ot’i, while also gaining control of as much of the Pashalik of Axalc‘ixe as they could.\textsuperscript{111}

The war was to demonstrate how easily dynastic rule could fracture the principality; loyalties became split, just like the territory itself, between Ottoman Turkey and Russia. But the question for the inhabitants of Guria on all sides remained how could they uphold some semblance of autonomy now that they were harnessed directly to one or the other of the two major powers for dominance in the region. From 1804, under nominal imperial sovereignty, Guria had managed to float between these contending powers, to retain its status as a principality run by the Gurieli family and to carry on trade — whether licit or illicit — with their kin to the south more or less as they wished. With Russian support (and earlier help from his uncle K‘aixosro) Mamia V Gurieli had succeeded in resolving dynastic tensions and settled for maintaining a loose sovereignty over his principality with his uncles entrenched in their fortresses running their own affairs as they saw fit. When that timid ruling prince died in 1826, however, the dynastic tensions again flared.

Mamia’s heir, Prince Davit’, was only eight, and because his mother, the Princess Sofia was suspect in the eyes of the Russians, Ermolov sanctioned the creation of a

\textsuperscript{111} The Pashalik of Axalc‘ixe was far more important than Guria in the calculations of Russian military strategists because of its perennial significance as a marchland through which the Ottomans or Russians could launch attacks against the other. Guria became important in this war because it was on the coast and it was divided between the Ottomans and Russians, with those living in “Turkish Guria” — the Kobulet‘ians, Acharans, and Laz — loyal to the Turks. As we have seen, those living in “Russian Guria” had not clearly or all together shown their loyalty to the Russians. Thus, Guria was inherently unstable and needed to be secured to guard against a possible Ottoman attack on Western Georgia. See Vasili Aleksandrovich Potto, \textit{Kavkazskaya voina}, vol. 4: \textit{Turetskaya voina, 1828-1829 gg.}, reprint (Stavropol’: “Kavkazskii krai,” 1994; the five-volume work was originally published in SPB and Tiflis, 1885-1891): 196. Hereafter, \textit{Kavkazskaya voina}, vol. 4. See also, W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, \textit{Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921} (New York: Cambridge UP, 1953): 23.
special Divan or Council to be composed of six of the most respected princes of the realm who were loyal to Russia. The Princess Sofia was to preside over the council but with restricted powers. Sofia manifested much of the same recalcitrance as Solomon II in her insistence to rule independently as regent in the spirit of a Caucasian dynast. When she protested to Ermolov, the Administrator-in-Chief responded that even the Tsar of Russia did not consider it humiliating to preside among his subjects in the Senate. But her powers were clearly different from Tsar Nicholas I’s. The Divan was to be a formal governing council that would appoint officials instead of Sofia herself and make decisions by majority vote and record them in writing. Ermolov was little interested in the differences and urged her to convene the council immediately. She did, biding her time for a propitious moment to assert her dynastic authority to rule alone.\textsuperscript{112} At least initially, Sofia was backed by all the princely families of Guria in her quest to retain sole authority as chief sovereign. Negotiations dragged on over how temporary this council would be until the outbreak of war with the Ottomans in 1828.\textsuperscript{113}

In the meantime, in 1827 Sofia used the occasion of the Russian war against Persia to express her hostility to the Russians by seizing control of Lake Paleostomi from the Dadiani of Mingrelia. This move allowed her to establish closer ties with the Turkish garrison in P’ot’ı, lying just north of the lake.\textsuperscript{114} In addition, the princess solicited

\textsuperscript{112} Utverzhdenie russkago vladychestva na Kavkaze, vol. III, part 2, p. 537.


\textsuperscript{114} Kavkazskaja voina, vol. 4, p. 207. At the time Guria and Mingrelia both claimed sovereignty over the lake. Bako’radze states that Guria had once controlled the lake and P’ot’ı as well. Bako’radze, \textit{Arkheologicheskoe putechestvie}, p. 96. All the same, part of the resolution of the Gurian question as it developed in these years of war with the Ottomans involved settling the issue of sovereignty over the lake.
support from two of Erekle II’s sons, Alek’sandre and Vaxtang who had remained vehemently opposed to the Russians and who were then living in Kobulet’i. She also established contact with certain prominent Gurian princes who had fled there during the 1819-1820 rebellion. These princes had sent agents into Guria to remind the Gurians of what had happened to Solomon II’s Kingdom of Imereti under similar circumstances. As a result, Gurian princes and nobles became even more divided in their loyalties, with a smaller though more prominent contingent that included Sofia and her chief adviser, Prince Machutadze, siding with the Ottomans. Machutadze went to Trabzon, Bat’umi, and Kobulet’i seeking Ottoman support for Princess Sofia’s cause. By the outset of the war, Sofia’s alliance with Ottoman Turkey was confirmed by a firman she received from Mahmud II that extended Ottoman protection over Guria. He sent the heir to princely rule, the young Davit’, a saber and gifts to Sofia and her suite of princes. Finally, in a more powerful show of support, Mahmud ordered an army of 10,000 soldiers to march to Guria. By the outbreak of war in 1828, Sofia was a confirmed traitor to the Russians, and her recalcitrance posed a grave problem to the Russians. Major-General Karl Friedrich Hesse, a newcomer to the Caucasus and at that time the head of the Imereti national administration and of Russian forces in Western Georgia, had only six battalions to hold the entire eastern littoral of the Black Sea coast against Ottoman

In 1831, the Administrator-in-Chief, Prince Paskevich gave control to Mingrelia. Orest Evetskii, Statisticheskoe opisanie zakavkazskago kraia (SPB: Tip. shtaba otdel’nego korpusa vnutrennego strazhi, 1835): 13.

115 The chief Gurian family of Kobulet’i was the T’avdgiridze family that sided with the Ottomans during the war. Several decades after this war, Bak’radze noted in his travels through the region that one branch of the family resided in Kobulet’i and another in Guria itself. Such extended families would have enhanced the porousness of the border between “Turkish” and “Russian” Guria. Bak’radze, “Kavkaz v drevnikh pamiatnikakh khristianstva,” Zapiski obshchestva liubelei kavkazskoi arkeologii, vol. 1 (1875): 99.

incursions. Ottoman strategists planned to prosecute the war against Russia in the Caucasus by arousing the Muslim population in the eastern territories in a campaign against Gümrü (Aleksandropol) and by pushing into Western Georgia and winning the allegiance of the Christian population there. As the war was to develop, however, the Russians thwarted Ottoman plans and made striking military successes by capturing Kars and Bayezid (June, 1828), Axalk`alak`i (July), P`ot`i (July), Axalc`ixe (August), and Erzurum (June, 1829). In effect, under the brilliant command of General Paskevich, Russian forces proved the veracity of Paulucci’s assertion that the best road to Constantinople (Istanbul) lay not through the Balkans but through Erzurum, Sivas, Trebizond—in short, from the east.\textsuperscript{117} In fact, the most difficult military encounters the Russians faced in the east came in the battles fought against the irregular Ottoman forces comprised of converted Laz and Acharan troops. Some of these encounters occurred in or near Guría, underscoring the importance of the principality’s location and loyalty.\textsuperscript{118}

To dissuade Princess Sofia from veering from the course her husband had taken with Russia, Hesse wrote to her from K`ut`aisi, threatening her with dire consequences

\textsuperscript{117} See Allen and Muratoff on this point, \textit{Caucasian Battlefields}, pp. 31-32. It should be pointed out that the fact that Paskevich concentrated his efforts on capturing forts in the Pashaliks of Axalc`ixe, Bayezid, and Erzurum underscores this region’s strategic importance as a marchland or “proruption” zone, to use LeDonne’s term. On the other hand, as I showed in Chapter Two, Guría was relatively isolated by the mountains that sheltered it from this marchland and was therefore less important. Nonetheless, in the War of 1828-1829, Guría came to the forefront precisely because of the division of loyalties in the dynastic family that made the small territory susceptible to Ottoman incursions, which, given the recent turbulence in 1819-1820, might have sparked revolt against Russian rule. The central point is that the Russians had still not won the loyalties of the Christian population in an unconditional way, or so they feared. As the eminent military historian, Vasilii Alexandrovich Potto, puts it, the Turks were counting on “the traditional and deep disposition of the [Gurians] to slavishly trust in the infallibility of their sovereign families.” \textit{Kavkazskaia voina}, vol. 4, p. 264.

\textsuperscript{118} On the ferocity and allegiance of the Laz, Acharans, and Kobulet`ians to the Ottomans, see Allen and Muratoff, \textit{Caucasian Battlefields}, pp. 40-44. In particular, Allen singles out the performance of the Ximiashvili (Khimiashvili) clan, that controlled the Acharan highlands down to Ölti-çay, as superior to that of Ottoman regular forces. Allen, “March-lands of Georgia,” p. 151; see also Bak`radze, \textit{Arkeologicheskoe puteshestvie}, pp. 7-8.
for the Gurieli family and principality if she went over to the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{119} The Russians began operations in Western Georgia first by taking the fortress of Anapa in May, 1828, and then capturing P'ot'i in June. This latter campaign was important because of the role played by militia forces supplied by Levan Dadiani of Mingrelia. The Dadiani’s support for Russia sent a message to the Ottomans that they could not rely on the Christian population of Western Georgia, at least not on all of it.\textsuperscript{120}

With the outbreak of war, several prominent dynastic families, including some members of the Gurieli family, the Nakashidzes, and Erist'avis, rallied to the Russian cause and converged on Ch'oxatauri with their serfs to assemble a Gurian militia. Paskevich refused to tolerate Sofia’s treason and appealed to Nicholas I to remove her from power and create a new council headed by a Russian officer. Nicholas agreed, but Russian successes at P'ot'i, Kars, and Axalc'ixe early in the war moved Sofia to seek a reconciliation with the Russians by offering to make amends for her previous actions by subduing Kobulet'i and Bat'umi with her own forces. Paskevich doubted her sincerity but gave her two weeks to do this, after which he would order Hesse to move on Guria. Sofia hesitated, as Paskevich expected, and the two weeks passed; and at the end of September, 1829, Hesse entered Guria and set up quarters in Ozurget'i. Sofia’s advisers dissuaded her from going there to make peace with the Russians, arguing that they would only remove her from power. Therefore, she fled to Turkish territory with Davit’ and her eldest daughter, Ekaterina, leaving her two youngest daughters, Sofia and Teresa, to their fates. Once she abandoned her principality, the Russians stripped her of her right to rule and convened a special council headed by Colonel Kuliabki, which purported to rule in the name of Davit’. Under this new “temporary administration,” Guria retained a

\textsuperscript{119} Kavkazskaja voina, vol. 4, pp. 11-12, 208-210.

\textsuperscript{120} Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), K istorii gruzii, pp. 170-171. Levan Dadiani supplied 1,500 troops for the siege of P'ot'i. Kavkazskaja voina, vol. 4, pp. 210-211.
semblance of princely rule, with Davit' still confirmed in the right to return and claim his title as Gurieli. The Russian Colonel Kuliabki now chaired the new council which was composed of four mdivan-begs, or advisers from loyal princely families.\textsuperscript{121}

With the Russians winning major battles in the marchlands of Axalc'ixe, Bayezid, and Erzurum, the Turks counted increasingly on their irregular forces in the Pontic Alps, and Achara in particular, to threaten Russian supply lines and create serious diversionary fronts. Thus, both the Ottomans and Russians were in competition to win the loyalties of the Gurians. Sofia's partisans wrote proclamations calling on the Gurians to stand up in defense of their dynastic ruler. The Russians reminded the Gurians of their centuries-long domination by the Ottomans and called them to arms by forming a Gurian militia. Wherein lay the honorable course — to support the dynastic house or one's co-religionists? Which oath was stronger? Agathias's account of the debate between Aeetes and Phartazes from late antiquity resounds through this conflict.\textsuperscript{122}

In Guria, most princes and nobles sided with the Russians in the heat of the moment and hastily assembled a militia of 1,300 troops that they placed at the disposal of Hesse. The Ottomans became preoccupied with regaining possession of Axalc'ixe. Therefore, in early spring, 1829, Paskevich gave the Gurians wide latitude to engage in plundering across the border in Achara to distract the Ottomans. Hesse attempted to ascend the mountains of Achara but had to turn back as the snows were too deep. At the same time, the Ottoman commander of the Bat'umi garrison decided to move on Guria

\textsuperscript{121} Pirc'xalaishvili (Pirtsikhalaisvili) reproduces the directive defining the form and function of the new temporary administration as document no. 6 in his, "Imeretiia i Guriia v period 1804-1840 g.," pp. 111-112; Kavkazskaia voina, vol. 4, pp. 213-214; Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), K istorii Gruzii, p. 172. As it turned out, the daughters, Sofia and Teresa, were initially placed under the care of the mouravi or district-head of Nagomari and eventually sent to study at the Smol'nyi Institute in St. Petersburg.

\textsuperscript{122} In his account of the events in Guria during this war, Potto waxes poetically with his recitation of the campaigns of Mithridates and, later, the Byzantines in the Lazic wars with the Persians. Kavkazskaia voina, vol. 4, pp. 474-476.
with his own troops and an additional 5,000 Laz forces. He entered the Kintrishi river valley in Kobuleti and stopped at the Ottoman advance post of Limani just a few miles from the Russian outpost at St. Nikolas (Georgian: Nikolaoz-cminda). Between the two posts lay the narrowest strip of coast between the Rioni River to the north and Bat`um to the south. The mountains virtually came down to the sea at Limani. The Ottomans were still expecting additional troops to come by boat from Trabzon in order to make an attack on Guria. Therefore, Hesse decided on a preemptive strike against the Ottoman-Laz forces before they could move into Guria. He faced an 8,000-man defensive force with 1,200 Russian troops and the 1,500-man Gurian militia. On March 5, 1829, his army attacked the Ottoman troops at Limani. The Russians charged the Ottoman forces head-on, while the Gurians made their way through the dense forest and attacked from behind. The battle lasted four hours, and the joint Russian-Gurian army prevailed but not without losing 210 men, including fourteen Gurian princes. The battle held little significance in terms of the overall war in the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia. And the Russian-Gurian forces ended up retreating to Guria, while Hesse returned to K`ut`aisi rather than risk losing more men trying to move down the coast to Bat`um. Nonetheless, to the Russians and Gurians, the battle was immensely significant as a demonstration of Gurian military prowess, undaunted bravery, and loyalty to the empire.123

Despite the military insignificance of the victory at Limani, Russian successes elsewhere occurred with such speed and over such large distances that Russian forces

123 Ibid., pp. 265-269. As Potto asserts with end-of-the-century bravado: “But on the other hand, the moral significance of this victory was huge. It showed the utter futility of the Turkish aspirations to harm Russia by means of revolt in Guria and the Christian lands adjoining it and [it] quieted the recalcitrant elements who were still lurking in the principality itself…. The victory at Limani was the dawn of a new civic-mindedness [grazhdansstvennost] and peaceful civilization for this country which was still full of ancient traditions of a semi-militarized existence that the Turks strove for so long to exploit to their own ends” (p. 269). Here is a clear statement of the “savior” thesis by which the Russians had indeed selflessly come to the aid of the Gurians and won their support in the effort to save them from the debilitating influence of the Ottomans.
found themselves over-extended and vulnerable to attack from behind. In May, 1829, the Ottomans with their Laz and Acharan allies again set their sights on Western Georgia. In spite of their defeat at Limani, they had brought in reinforcements to Bat’umi and fortified their position in Kobulet’i. By May, the Ottoman-Laz forces numbered close to 40,000, thereby underscoring how insignificant the battle at Limani had been.\textsuperscript{124} With such a strong force, the Ottomans calculated that they could strike Russia in Western Georgia where it was weakest. Indeed, in Guria Hesse had only a few hundred Gurians still assembled in the militia, and thirteen companies of his own troops (an additional twelve companies were distributed up the coast in Abkhazia). Equally worrisome, Princess Sofia, who was living in Kobulet’i had her agents distributing proclamations to the Gurians calling on them to defy the Russians and defend their rightful sovereign. The Ottomans moved north from Bat’umi and Kintrishi toward Guria. By late May it seemed Guria would certainly fall to the Turks, when suddenly Turkish forces evaporated from the region. Paskevich’s victory at Ezurum had compelled the Ottoman \textit{seraskier} to pull troops away from Achara-Guria to counter Paskevich’s march.

With the withdrawal of the Ottoman troops, Hesse attempted unsuccessfully to win the Acharans and Kobulet’ians over to the Russian side. In addition, Paskevich gave one last opportunity to Princess Sofia to reconcile herself with Russian rule. He sent her several letters promising her complete forgiveness, amnesty for her adherents, and Davit’s right to the Gurieli title, if she immediately returned to Guria. If she refused his offer, Paskevich informed her that Davit’ would be considered a “traitor” and stripped of his right to rule. Evidently Paskevich’s letters never reached the princess; the Ottoman authorities intercepted them, and Paskevich’s offer of reconciliation was effectively refused. This refusal sealed the fate of the principality. The “temporary administration”

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 467-468.
became permanent as Guria became an imperial possession and Davit’ lost his right to the right to rule as the Gurieli prince.125

Paskevich then ordered Hesse to march on Bat’umi. Hesse divided his forces into two groups and moved into Achara both by the mountains and along the coast. Initially both forces were successful in routing the Ottomans. The Gurians had initially assembled a militia of 500 men to accompany the Russian troops, and together these forces joined up with the other contingents, which included the Mingrelian militia, and stormed the fortress at Kintrishi. Princess Sofia barely managed to escape from the fortress with her son and daughter. Her failure to win her compatriots’ support for her return to Guria crushed her spirit. In her rapid retreat to Trabzon, her health failed and she died in September, 1829. The seizure of Kintrishi combined with the previous victory at Limani won the Gurian and Mingrelian militias praise and rewards from Tsar Nicholas. Prince Levan Dadiani received the Order of St. Alexander Nevskii and his son and heir, Davit’, was awarded the order of St. Vladimir of the fourth degree. Nicholas awarded both militias banners. Both banners consisted of red silk decorated by a gold fringe and large tassles. On one side an image of St. George stood in the middle and on the other, the imperial double-eagle. An inscription was sown in a circle as a border, which on the Gurian banner read: “To the Militia of Our trustworthy Gurian people for loyalty and bravery. The capture of the Turkish camp near the swamp of Limani, 5 March 1829.”126

The capture of Kintrishi would be the last triumph of the newly forged imperial forces with their strong Gurian and Mingrelian contingents. Hesse dallied too long in Kintrinshi before moving south, giving the Ottomans additional time to reinforce their

125 Ibid, pp. 467-471.

126 The Mingrelian banner was more effusive in its praise, since the militia still had a loyal sovereign and the Mingrelians supplied more troops for their militia: “To the Militia of Our most trustworthy Mingrelian people for loyalty and bravery in the campaigns of 1828 and 1829 against the Turks.” Ibid., pp. 472-473.
position at C’ixis-dziri (the site of one of the earliest Greek colonies in antiquity and later of Petra under Tsar Justinian). When Hesse attempted an assault on the Ottoman camp there, his forces suffered the greatest loss of life of any Russian campaign during the war in the eastern theater: 650 dead including ten officers. The Ottomans then sought to press their advantage by attacking Guria, but Paskevich’s drive toward Trabzon/Trebizond had already brought an end to the war, thus saving the former principality once again.

The Treaty of Adrianople determined the terms of the peace. Russia finally won control of much of the littoral of the Black Sea, from Anapa in the north through P’ot’i down to the small outpost at St. Nikolas (Nikolaoz cminda) on the north bank of the Çolok River on the coast of Guria. The settlement was due west of Ozurget’i, the chief town of the principality, and this demarcation confirmed the century-long bifurcation of Guria, making more concrete the distinction between “Turkish Guria” and “Russian Guria.” Nonetheless, the exact boundary would remain ambiguous for several more decades. The problem was that the language of the treaty was sufficiently vague in defining Guria’s southern boundary, saying in one place, “the actual border of Guria,” and in another, “to the Port of St. Nicholas;” thus, the delimitation of a line from the coast inland to Imeret’i remained unclear. Though they retroceded the territories in eastern Anatolia and Armenia (the pashaliks of Erzurum, Bayezid, and Kars), the Russians held onto ten sanjaks or districts of the Pashalik of Axalci, including the town itself. More


128 Kavkazskaia voina, vol. 4, pp. 473-477. By then, the Gurian militia had grown to 3,000. Allen and Muratoff, Caucasian Battlefields, p. 42.

129 Caucasian Boundaries, p. 75.

130 Ibid., p. 22-23.
importantly, the treaty formally recognized Russian control of most of the Georgian lands, including K’art’li-Kaxet’i, Imeret’i, Samegrelo (Mingrelia), Guria, and parts of Samc’xe, in addition to the non-Georgian Khanates of Erevan and Nakhichevan.\textsuperscript{131}

In 1830 Nicholas I confirmed the new configuration of Guria’s temporary administration, subordinating it to the Imeret’ian administration. This governing structure would last without change until 1840. In effect, the new condominium abided by the same regulations stipulated back in 1810, confirming the princely and noble families in their rights to control their own affairs and to dispense justice “in accordance with custom” except for cases of murder.\textsuperscript{132} All Gurian nobles (and their subjects) took an oath of allegiance to the tsar.\textsuperscript{133} As an expression of imperial generosity, Prince Davit’ in 1832 was allowed to return to his homeland as a private citizen, and all nobles and princes who had sided with their sovereign were amnestied. They returned by boat in September, 1832, to St. Nikolas. The new Administrator-in-Chief, Baron Grigoriiv Vladimirovich Rozen (1831-1837) also pardoned Prince Machutadze who explained his actions simply in terms of his unbounded loyalty to his sovereign princess. Rozen commended him all the same for his “moral qualities” which had done “full honor” to Prince Davit’ Gurieli as Machutadze’s ward and pupil. Nicholas demonstrated his infinite mercy and generosity by awarding Davit’, his sisters, and Machutadze lifetime pensions. Davit’ went onto St. Petersburg where he entered the Pages’ Corps, completing his education in 1838. He became an officer in the Tsesarevich regiment and died

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 21-25; \textit{Kavkazskaja voina}, vol. 4, pp. 502-522.

\textsuperscript{132} Pirc’xalaishvili provides a copy of the terms of incorporation that defined the structure of the temporary administration in 1828. “Imeretiia i Gurija v period 1804-1840 g.,” appendix no. 3, p. 111.

\textsuperscript{133} See Pirc’xalaishvili (Pirtsxalaishvili), “Imeretiia i Gurija v period 1804-1840 g.,” p. 93 and doc. no. 7 attached to appendix no. 3, pp. 113-116.
honorably the next year in service to His Imperial Majesty fighting Shamyl's mountaineers at the siege of Axulgo.\textsuperscript{134}

In its barest outlines, the 1828-1829 Russo-Ottoman War and its aftermath affirmed the Gurians' loyalty to the Russian imperial regime. Initially, the war divided the loyalties of the principality's princely and noble families, but the performance of the militia demonstrated the allegiance of the inhabitants in an unprecedentedly bold way. In effect, this conflict provided the means for harnessing some dynastic loyalties to the immediate goal of ousting the Ottomans from the region and, by extension, to the Russian imperial enterprise insofar as the outcome of the war was the dissolution of the principality's political autonomy and absorption into the empire. Indeed, the oath of allegiance following the war confirmed this act. The war also more effectively demarcated the political and ideological boundary between the Russian and Ottoman empires and between Christian-European Enlightenment and Islamic-Ottoman civilization. It was a glorious moment for the Russians in the construction of the empire in Guria. The Gurians displayed their martial prowess and bravery in defense of the empire, and the tsar expressed his infinite generosity and clemency to reward loyalty and forgive treachery. All seemed to accede to the dissolution of princely power and the administrative subordination of Guria to Imeret'i. It was a blessed union of principality and empire because it left intact the dynastic social structure and respected the rights of the aristocratic class to run their own affairs for the most part. Finally, by sending the Gurieli offspring to St. Petersburg for their education, the tsar underscored Russia's role

\textsuperscript{134} Kavkazskaia voina, vol. 4, pp. 478-479. For a colorful account of the siege of Axulgo, see Lesley e, The Sabres of Paradise (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1984; originally published in 1960): 135-138. This siege was particularly important in the Russian campaign against Shamyl because the Russians obtained Shamyl's son, Jemal al-Din, as a hostage. Like Prince Davit’, Jemal al-Din would go to St. Petersburg for his education and upbringing as a special ward of Nicholas himself who envisioned making the boy the viceroy of the Caucasus once his father was captured.
as the bearer of enlightenment that was acting selflessly to uphold its commitment to fellow Christians to save them from Ottoman influence.

Indeed, victory over the Ottomans and the concomitant absorption of new domains in Western Georgia into the empire inspired confidence in Russian officials to push for greater reform in the region. The relative neglect of the region that had led to a prolonged period of “temporary administration” had delayed the enactment of reform. This delay first became obvious with the ecclesiastical reform movement of Feofilakt which reached Western Georgia a full decade after its enactment in Eastern Georgia. Similarly, whereas the administration abolished the serf status of the lower clergy in Eastern Georgia already in 1808, final plans for its implementation in Imereti and Guria took shape only in the early 1830s.\textsuperscript{135} Examples of delayed reform abounded. Nobles in Tiflis formed a noble assembly in 1819 and in K‘ut‘aisi only in 1830.\textsuperscript{136} Cultural reforms reached Western Georgia at an even slower pace.\textsuperscript{137}

Thus, having won international recognition of its sovereignty over Western Georgia and, equally importantly, having inspired the loyalty of many of the local inhabitants towards the empire, tsarist officials in Tiflis pushed to consolidate their hold over the region. Indeed, in the 1830s the Caucasian administration embarked on a broader fundamental effort at reform that involved all the Georgian domains under Russian control. This undertaking marked a second phase in the entrenchment of Russian rule, moving beyond the assertion of political hegemony into reforms designed to standardize political and social structures and exploit more systematically the economic

\textsuperscript{135} P‘irc‘xalaishvili (Pirtskhalashvili), “Imeretiia i Guriia v period 1804-1840 g.,” p. 95; N.K. Gvosdev, “The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church,” p. 416.


\textsuperscript{137} While a school for nobles opened in Tiflis in 1804, the first district school for them opened in K‘ut‘aisi in 1830. Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), K‘istorii gruzii, p. 260.
resources of the region.\textsuperscript{138} As imperial Finance Minister, Egor Kankrin had already proclaimed in 1827, "not without reason, the Transcaucasian provinces can be called a colony of Russia which should bring the state very significant profits from the products of the southern climes."\textsuperscript{139} But again, these initiatives were undertaken first in Eastern Georgia and then later extended to Western Georgia. One of the principal reforms involved equalizing the rights and privileges of Georgian nobles with those of Russian nobles, a provision guaranteed as far back as the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk. An imperial ukaz of 1827 initiated this reform, setting in motion a complicated and controversial process by which Georgian nobles had to produce written proof of their noble status. This process would not be completed in Western Georgia until the 1850s.\textsuperscript{140} Here was yet another drive to acquire information in an attempt to harmonize Georgian social relations with those in Russia proper, and the effort revealed how little Russia had succeeded in transforming Georgian institutions into their Russian equivalents. Once again, the campaign to define noble status in conformance with imperial criteria revealed how much

\textsuperscript{138} This second stage of the imperial incorporation of the Georgian lands into the empire also came in the wake of the failed "1832 Conspicacy" by prominent princely and noble families in Eastern Georgia. See Stephen F. Jones, "Russian Imperial Administration and the Georgian Nobility: The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832," \textit{SEER} 65:1 (Jan. 1987): 53-77. On the change in tsarist strategies, see also Ivanenko, \textit{Grazhdanskoie upravlenie Zakavkaz‘em}, p. 283.


\textsuperscript{140} Ivanenko, \textit{Grazhdanskoie upravlenie Zakavkaz‘em}, pp. 106-109; Pirc’xalaishvili (Pirtskhalashvili), "Imeretii i Guriia v period 1804-1840g.," p. 93, n. 1. Part of this reform entailed the elimination of the category of aznauri nobles, or vassal gentry, thereby equalizing the status of avadebi and aznaurebi — princes and nobles. This step occurred in Eastern Georgia in 1837, while in Western Georgia it occurred under Viceroy Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov (1845-1854) in 1847; another example of delayed reform coming to that region. Suny, "Russian Rule and Caucasian Society," p. 56.
the victorious Russian administration was dependent on local information that was not always forthcoming nor accurate.\footnote{141}

Still, the underlying goal of \textit{translating} Georgian social ranks, rights, and privileges into Russian equivalents was to \textit{transform} them. In Western Georgia, and especially in Guria, this transformation occurred at a slower pace. In effect, both rebellion (1810 and 1819-1820) and demonstrations of loyalty (1828-1829 Russo-Ottoman War) had led to the creation of the temporary administrations in Imeret’i and Guria and preserved the Dadiani’s domain as a protectorate (as well as that of the dynasts in Ap’xazet’i and Svanet’i). These modes of governance essentially left in place the dynastic social structure as a reward for loyalty, a point to which I return below.

Given the lack of attention to these domains and the hesitation to introduce reforms already in effect in Eastern Georgia, one of the most pressing tasks in the west was the production of more comprehensive imperial knowledge of Russia’s new possessions.\footnote{142} As stated, the first census (\textit{kameral’noe opisanie}) occurred in Guria only in 1831. This survey produced the first firm demographic data about the principality, indicating that Guria had approximately 36,700 inhabitants. The state of knowledge about Guria came out in the first Transcaucasian-wide survey of imperial possessions published in 1835. Paskevich had ordered the compilation of this survey during his tenure as chief administrator back in the 1820s. The result was the publication of a

\footnote{141} For an expression of Russian ignorance and frustration over how to understand Georgian charters produced for this change, see \textit{AKAK}, vol. VIII, doc. no. 4 (10 December 1831): 18; and doc. no. 61 (1837): 86. Equally revealing, the report by Senators Kutaisov and Mechnikov asserts in 1831: “Despite the fact that some provinces had been joined to Russia for nearly thirty years, the administration in the Transcaucasian region still bears the stamp of the unaccountable, arbitrary and undefined administration of the former rulers of this krai [region].” doc. no. 1 (1831): 1-13, quotation p. 10.

\footnote{142} P’irc’xalaishvili notes that in 1830 Paskevich instructed General Hesse to gather information “as secretly as possible” about traditional rights, privileges and ranks of princes and nobles in Imeret’i and Guria. He wanted a clearer delineation of these in order to strengthen them. “Imeretiia i Guriia v period 1804-1840 g.,” p. 93.
Statistical Description of the Transcaucasian Region in which Guria comprises a small section of only three pages and some passing references. One finds references to “Turkish Guria” and an attempt to define the boundaries of “Russian Guria,” though the result is nearly as vague as Vaxushti’s demarcation. Interestingly, in the brief historical overview of the Georgian lands, the author interprets Eastern Georgia’s turn to Russia as a desperate move to stave off “the inevitable destruction of the homeland, which had been ruined by internecine strife and threatened by greedy neighbors who were only waiting for the appropriate time for the complete extermination [istrebleniiu] of this … Kingdom.”

Evetskii thus confirmed the Extinction Thesis as the foundation for Russia’s incorporation of Eastern Georgia. An unidentified Russian composed a fuller description of Guria around this time that Brosset translated into French. Like Evetskii’s depiction, this one is rudimentary at best, exuding an air of scientific accuracy and erudition intended to conceal the historical inaccuracies and sketchy portrayal of the Gurians.

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144 Ibid., p. 121.

145 “Description géographique du Ghouriya, extraite d’un original russe,” M.-F. Brosset, trans., Nouveau journal asiatique vol. 10, série 2 (Dec., 1832): 532-539. The author states that the princes of Guria first took the title, “Ghouriéli” in the age of King Solomon I in the eighteenth century (p. 532). Interestingly, he claims that the most unhealthy spot in all of the southern Caucasus is the fort at St. Nicholas (p. 535). He also declares that Gurian women “in actuality attain an ideal, and surpass all that one can say in prose and in verse on the women of Géorgie, Imeréthi, and Mingrélië;” with their Greek forms, they have achieved “the incarnation of incomparable perfection….” Immediately thereafter, he states that Guria is more fertile than the other regions of Western Georgia which leads the reader to assume that the beauty of the women and fertility of the land are linked (pp. 537-538). I have written on this topic in a paper entitled, “Conjuring ‘the Most Beautiful Women in the World’ in Nineteenth-Century Descriptions of Georgian Women,” delivered at the AAASS Convention, Boca Raton, 1998. Finally, this author also refers to southern Guria as “Turkish Guria,” thereby reinforcing the trend to separate the two halves of Guria into separate cultural and civilizational zones (p. 539). Another account from 1833-1834, which displays great historical sensitivity (based on the knowledge of the day) and general erudition in its perceptions is the account by Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux, Voyage autour du Caucase, op. cit., volume
The production of knowledge by imperial officials in the form of these surveys of Transcaucasian possessions affirmed Russia’s sovereignty in the region and asserted the Russians’ cultural superiority over its peoples.\textsuperscript{146} Even more thorough than Evetskii’s survey was the description published in 1836 and associated with the labors of Vasiliy Semenovich Legkobyтов (1806-1860). Finance Minister Kankrin had ordered the compilation of this survey to facilitate the realization of his ambition to make Transcaucasia a veritable colony that would compare if not exceed England’s venture in India. The survey contains more detailed descriptions than Evetskii’s but unfortunately does not cover Guria.\textsuperscript{147} A reviewer of this compendium in 1838 praised it as a “European book in the fullest sense,” thus implicitly acknowledging Russia’s success in heeding the call of Semen Bronevskii (quoted in the last chapter) “to transplant sciences from the hothouse into the open air and to cultivate them on Russian soil.”\textsuperscript{148} This specimen of imperial information represented a great stride away from the poetic creation of the Caucasus — what Susan Layton refers to as “an Imaginative Caucasian

\textsuperscript{146} Thus, Evetskii concluded his section on boundaries: “And, so, the Transcaucasian region, having neither physical nor adequate artificial defenses on its borders, and being surrounded by powerful neighbors, like the Turks, Persians, and Mountain peoples, only the might of Russian arms can [bear] the responsibility for its peace and prosperity.” \textit{Statistischeskoe opisanie zakavkazskogo kraia}, pp. 2-3; and his comments on Russian education, pp. 93-94.


Geography"149 — into the realm of hard scientific facts. The reviewer lauds the diversity of Caucasia, claiming that the region’s “amazing fecundity of all possible comforts” exceeds those of any English colony. Russia has ruled the Caucasus for the past thirty years, and yet “only now begins to understand fully the immeasurable importance of this possession,” thanks to publications like the one under review.150 Works like those of Legkobyтов and Evetskii were quickly transforming the Caucasus into the crown-jewel of the empire and implanting in their readers’ minds the notion that Russia was the purveyor of enlightenment to Georgians and mountaineers alike.

Thus, Russia’s military triumphs in the 1820s deepened the regime’s commitment to Caucasia and spurred on the cause of more fully integrating the region into the empire. In Western Georgia, besides the recording of information through surveys and the translation of some charters, the immense effort to transform the region into a productive colony bore few economic results, especially in Guria, through much of the first half of the century.151 Rather, the undertaking focused on one central undertaking in the 1830s, and that was the attempt to formulate a coherent plan for the administrative integration of Western Georgia into the government of Eastern Georgia. This effort comprised part of


150 “Kritika,” Biblioteka dlja chteniiia, pp. 2-3. The review runs for more than thirty pages and contains lengthy passages from Legkobyтов’s compilation to substantiate the reviewer’s enthusiasm over the way this survey illuminated the riches of the region; it was indeed one more step in the imperial mission to lift the veil on the legendary land.

151 Recall Gamba’s remark, quoted above, about how undeveloped the lands of Western Georgia were during his visit in the early 1820s. In the 1830s imperial financial policies were partially responsible for perpetuating this state of underdevelopment, when the administration heeded Kankrin’s call to regard Caucasia as a colony by rescinding the low tariff enacted in 1821. The protective tariff that replaced it in 1831 hurt the indigenous merchant class in an effort to promote the sale in Caucasia of Russian products. Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), K istorii Gruzii, pp. 189-191. The protective tariff also spurred British efforts to develop an overland trade corridor from Trabzon/Trebizond to Tabriz. Charles Issawi, “The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade 1830-1900: Rise and Decline of a Route,” UMES 1 (1970): 18-27. On the failure to realize various economic-development projects in the 1830s in both Eastern and Western Georgia, see Xachapuridze, pp. 196-199, 203-204.
the more general drive to reform the entire Caucasian administration now that the Russians were there to stay and had won international acceptance of their presence.\footnote{Well, almost won international recognition. Because of the rise of Muridism under Shamyl and the beginning of the protracted campaign to defeat Shamyl’s mountaineers in the 1830s, some English officials were loath to concede Russia hegemony over the Caucasus. See, for example, the travel account by Edmund Spencer, \textit{Travels in the Western Caucasus}, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1838). As Spencer asserts, “Russia, however, ought to remember that although she may calculate upon the support of a few despotic rulers, the intelligent mind of Europe is opposed to her and she is regarded as the common enemy of liberty and knowledge” (p. iii-iv). It should be added that Spencer is another who describes Western Georgia in terms of the paradox between the fertile land and poor, ignorant inhabitants awaiting enlightened rule to elevate the spirits of its inhabitants for participation in the enterprise of economic production and prosperity (p. 7). The question was which imperial power should have the right to engage in such a project.}

Based on the report of Senators Kutaisov and Mechnikov, a “Special Committee for the Organization of the Transcaucasian Region” \textit{(Osobyi komitet ob ustroistve Zakavkazskago kraia)} convened in 1833 to consider how to execute this task.\footnote{For a description of the structure of the Transcaucasian administration right after the 1828-1829 Russo-Ottoman War, see Semen Esadze, \textit{Istoricheskaia zapiska ob upravlenii kavkazom}, vol. I (Tiflis: Tip. "Guttenberg," 1907): 65-66.} It is beyond the scope of the present study to elaborate on the various proposals that surfaced in this committee through the 1830s.\footnote{Studies that cover this important theme include, Ivanenko, \textit{Grazhdanskoj upravlenie Zakavkaz 'em}; Semen Esadze, \textit{Istoricheskaia zapiska ob upravlenii kavkazom}, vol. I, chapters III-IV; and Anthony L. Hamilton Rhinelander, “Russia’s Imperial Policy: The Administration of the Caucasus in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” \textit{Canadian Slavonic Papers} 17:2-3 (Summer & Fall, 1975): 218-235.} Nonetheless, for our purposes, the most important point is that the ensuing debate over the form of the new administration centered around the degree to which that structure and its procedures should respect local custom or press ahead with efforts to ignore or subdue local custom and institutions by imposing a standardized administrative structure commensurate with what existed in the interior provinces of Russia. Tsar Nicholas I sought to resolve the debate by sanctioning the creation of a commission that would go to the Caucasus, study the situation, and make
a proposal for an extensive restructuring of its government.\textsuperscript{155} An imperial ukaz created the commission in April, 1837, and appointed Senator Baron P.V. Hahn chair with four additional members from various ministeries. The members arrived in Tiflis in June 1837 and set about their work. To emphasize the importance of this endeavor and mark the imperial triumph in Transcaucasia, Nicholas I visited the region in person in the fall, 1837.\textsuperscript{156}

\textbf{The Gurian Rebellion of 1841}

By all accounts, the Hahn Commission’s final reform package that took effect on April 10, 1840, was largely responsible for sparking a rebellion in Guria in 1841 that lasted less than four months but underscored yet again how vulnerable the Russian presence was in Western Georgia and Western Caucasia in general. The pillar of Hahn’s reform consisted of a new administrative structure for the entire region. Accordingly, Imereti and Guria (but not Mingrelia, Abkhazia, and Svanetia) became subsumed in the Gruzino-Imeretinskaia province, comprised of eleven districts (R, pl: uezdy) and forty-four sub-districts (uchastki). The organization of administrators on the provincial and district levels mirrored the structure in the “internal provinces” of the empire, and the reform imposed the Russian imperial legal code on these new administrative units. At the lowest level stood the sub-district assessor (uchastkovyi zasedatel’) who combined administrative, police, and judicial functions in his office. Another component of this act

\textsuperscript{155} For a summary of the debate over the Caucasian administration in the 1830s, see Ivanenko, \textit{Grazhdanskoе upravlenie Zakavkaz’em}, pp. 288-290.

\textsuperscript{156} For an account of Nicholas’s visit, the first since Peter the Great’s military campaign 115 years before, see A.P. Berzhe, “Imperator Nikolai na Kavkaz’e,” \textit{Russkaia starina}, XLIII (1884): 377-398. For a first-hand account by a British officer who was in Tbilisi for Nicholas’s visit to that city in October, 1837, see Captain Richard Wilbraham, \textit{Travels in the Trans-Caucasian Provinces of Russia} (London: John Murray, 1839): 222-268. At the time, imperial forces had enjoyed some success against Shamyl, and Nicholas was hoping to receive Shamyl’s submission in person. This expectation would prove to be an expression of imperial hubris at its best. L. Blanch, \textit{Sabres of Paradise}, p. 135.
of bureaucratic restructuring involved the use of Russian in court proceedings and the posting of Russians in as many administrative positions as possible. Hahn understood his reform this way: the new bureaucratic configuration “has as its foundation only a happy future; it is already a complete edifice under the roof of which the mighty mental and moral forces of the people, wealth, and enlightenment must develop….” If nothing else, Hahn’s scheme clearly resolved the protracted struggle between whether or not to tailor reform to the “needs” and customs of the widely diverse inhabitants or to impose a uniform structure to which customs had to succumb to change or elimination. Nonetheless, despite its lofty architecture, the edifice dramatically increased the weight of the Russian presence on the peoples of Caucasia, especially where that presence had previously been minimal as in Guria.

This unilateral transformation of the Caucasian administration was acutely felt in Guria because the Russians had incorporated the principality by retaining most of the existing social and administrative structure. To elaborate this point it is worth recalling that the aristocratic class of princes, nobles, and clergy remained in large numbers in the new district (Guriiskii uezd in the revised system). Accurate data is lacking for this period, but if, as suggested above, rough estimates for 1820 indicate that some fifteen percent of the principality’s population belonged to the nobility or clergy, by 1860, this figure had dipped only to eleven percent or so. Similarly, most of the laboring folk in Guria were owned by landlords (roughly 60%), while state peasants comprised around


158 Quoted in Ivanenko, Grazhdanskoie upravlenie Zakavkaz’em, p. 297.

159 Among the problems created by the implementation of this reform was the increase in bureaucratic personnel from 2400 in 1839 to 4800 in 1841; in turn, this increase demanded more tax revenues to fund the salaries of these new officials on the order of one-and-a-half million rubles. These figures only suggest the larger difficulties associated with finding qualified Russian personnel to run the new offices. Ibid., pp. 299-301; Esadze, Istoricheskaia zapiska ob upravlenii kavkazom, vol. I, pp. 80-81.
seventeen percent of the population. The Russians had allowed Gurian princes still to use
the Vaxtang VI law-code to resolve disputes and enforce rights, and in Guria, this
concession prolonged landlords' control of their serfs. Serfs fulfilled their obligations
chiefly by in-kind payments and labor dues. They used Turkish currency to make
monetary payments when needed. Furthermore, not only did the structure of patronage
and local loyalties remain intact, linking serf to noble or prince, but trade mostly occurred
with kin in Achara and Kobulet’i and with the Ottomans farther south in Erzurum.
Indeed, the trade in slaves across the border continued. 160 Dat’a Gurieli, a nephew of
Mamia V., epitomized this social order: he owned more than five thousand serfs and held
eighty nobles as vassals on estates that stretched ten miles inland from the Black Sea
coast. 161 Guria remained very much a borderland principality despite its new guise as an
imperial district.

In an effort to implement Hahn's reform program in 1841, imperial officials
levied a new soul tax to be paid in Russian currency. The new tax represented an
estimated monetary value of all previous in-kind and service obligations paid to landlords
or the state. For state serfs, this translated into monetary payments of one silver ruble and
for privately-held serfs 50 kopeks per person. In addition to this soul tax, serfs were
expected to pay an additional 35 and 9 kopeks respectively as their land dues (zemskie
povinnosti). In part, this increase was levied to pay the salaries of the new officials. If

Xachapuridze indicates that up until 1841 only about 4,800 serfs had to make monetary payments out of an
estimated serf population of 30,000 (p. 33). Evetskii describes Guria’s commercial orientation to its
southern neighbors. Statisticheskoe opisanie zakavkazskogo kraia, pp. 58, 77-78; also AKAK, vol. IX, doc.
no. 519 (1843): 609; doc. no. 558 (15 Feb. 1844): 660-661. On the extensive contraband trade with
Kobulet’i and beyond, see “Dokladaia zapiska o sostoiании 4-go otdeleniia beregovoi linii iz Mingrelii i
Gurii,” (22 April 1842), in Kachapuridze, pp. 88-91. On the poor condition of the priesthood in Guria, still
bound like serfs to their noble lords, and the absence of government schools, see doc. no. 141 (27 Oct.

161 Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu, p. 29.
previously the Russian head of Guria’s temporary administration drew an annual salary of 600 rubles, the cost of the new administrative apparatus rose to 13,195 rubles per year. This burden was especially onerous because the primary tax fell on each member of a household and not just on the household as was the traditional unit of taxation. Nobles and serfs took offense at this imposition but for different reasons. Nobles felt it violated their right to tax serfs according to custom, and serfs objected to the increase in the tax and its payment with Russian money, which was virtually non-existent in their land. Furthermore, both groups had only to look across the border at the autonomy exercised by their kin in Achara and Kobuleti to feel the offense of this state-sponsored intrusion into their lives.\textsuperscript{162}

Thus, it is not surprising that, one day in late May, 1841, a few villagers from the village of Lanch’xut’i refused to pay their land tax and that villagers from nearby Aket’i also refused. As a result, the new sub-district assessor, Prince Baratashvili (Baratov), forcibly exacted compensation.\textsuperscript{163} The new administrators were determined to enforce the new tax. This determination seems to have precipitated an attack in Aket’i on the tax-collector (G: \textit{xelosani}). Several individuals seized at gun-point eleven silver rubles he had collected. Baratashvili responded by gathering several Shalikashvili princes, nobles (\textit{aznaurebi}), and the village elder (\textit{nač’vali}) and went to Aket’i looking for the insurgents. At the approach of this group, the culprits fled their homes, and Baratashvili seized some copper cauldrons and two cows in retribution. During this time, a group of some fifty serfs, armed with their daggers (\textit{kinjalebi}) and guns, threatened to kill the assessor and his group. They quickly returned to the residence of Baratashvili, threatening to burn his

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 33-35.

\textsuperscript{163} It is important to point out that records indicate that the rebels composed letters expressing their grievances and demands, but none has survived. The only extant records for the rebellion are official documents generated by the imperial bureaucracy. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 47.
house and kill everyone inside if he did not turn over the tax collector who had sought refuge within. They broke windows with stones. Then, they grabbed what had been taken from them, and, without committing further violence, they fled.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 49-50 and the document, “Prigovor suda nad uchastnikami vozstaniia,” p. 95; V. Chudinov, “Vozstanie guriitsev v 1841 godu,” Kavkazskii sbornik, vol. XIV (1890): 221-222. Xachapuridze, in discussing Chudinov’s extensive account of the rebellion, notes that the author used the rich archival materials of the Transcaucasian General Staff which were unavailable to him when he compiled his own history (p. 87). Nonetheless, Xachapuridze used archival materials in Georgia and reproduced copies of several of the most important documents as appendices to his book (pp. 88-111).}

Four days later, a crowd of three hundred armed serfs from Lanch’
\'xut’i and Aket’i converged on Baratashvili’s home, evidently to order him to report their demands to the district chief. They called for the repeal of the monetary tax, forgiveness for those who had resisted, and a replacement of the tax-collector. The district chief, Iatsenko, later went to Aket’i and stated that he refused to consider the villagers’ demands and that refusal to pay their monetary dues constituted an act of insubordination that could carry grave consequences. He also requested that a company of infantry be sent to Aket’i. A few days later, a regiment of more than one hundred infantry marched through several villages, and this show of strength induced the villagers of Aket’i to pay their taxes. A handful of agitators took refuge in the woods and evidently stirred up resistance in the village of Vani. Iatsenko set up a military camp nearby, and soon the villagers relented, paid, and the disturbances of Guria seemed to have ended.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 50-51; Chudinov, pp. 222-223. According to Chudinov, villagers in Lanch’
\'xut’i once again showed signs of resistance, but Iatsenko evidently believed that the presence of imperial troops had served its purpose and that he would not find the perpetrators; therefore, he returned to Ozurget’i with the troops, stating that order had been restored.}

On the face of it, this kind of resistance would seem not to pose a serious threat to the imperial regime. After all, inhabitants in other parts of Guria paid their taxes and responded to the call for recruits for the Gurian militia to participate in a campaign planned against the Ubykhi (a Circassian tribe) in the western Caucasus. Was this, then,
an isolated act or the the first expression of general discontent? Despite the fact that a quick show of military force seemed to have quelled the disturbances, it was still too early to know if it was over, and imperial officials were worried because this act occurred in Guria. In a report about the disturbances, Lieutenant-General Braiko, the new military governor of the province, stated that the insurgents seemed to be unclear about what they wanted, but he remained suspicious of the underlying motives and connections of the rebels. He conjectured that perhaps they simply did not want to pay the new tax or felt burdened by the recent labor obligations imposed by the state. Maybe they were disgruntled at dues owed to the clergy for their support or at the recent arrest of several innocent individuals by the district administration. Braiko did not know, but all these conjectures may have been concealing a “long-hidden intention, inclining to a different goal.” Basing himself on a report from the district chief, Latsenko, Braiko states that the Gurian rebels (“miatezhniki”) had twice received gun-powder from Turkey, “and most probably from their relatives [i.e., in Ottoman Guria]. The influence and participation in this uprising by Hasan-Beg Tavadgeridze is evident.”

Braiko’s reference to aid from Turkey underscored Guria’s border position in Western Georgia and pointed to Russia’s vulnerability in the region. In his report he refers to incursions into Guria made as recently as May by Hasan-Beg whom the Turkish government had made Beg of Kobulet’i only in May. Evidently Hasan-Beg seized some lands across the border and declared to the Gurian owners that they no longer belonged to Russia but were subjects of the Ottoman sultan. The military commander in

\[\text{166 AKAK, vol. IX, doc. no. 188 (9 June 1841): 161-162.}\]

\[\text{167 Hasan-Beg’s appointment concluded a struggle for power in Kobulet’i that brought intervention by the Pasha of Erzurum and the Beg of Achara. Hasan-Beg had essentially won the right to rule Kobulet’i by force of arms, seizing power from his brother, Suleiman. He was known to be actively engaged in brigandage, seizing livestock from Gurians across the border, and promoting the sale of slaves. Chudinov, “Vozstanie guritsev v 1841 godu,” pp. 214-215.}\]
Imeret’i responded by posting more guards along the border which was taken to be the Çolok River (which lies south of the Natanebi River; the fort at St. Nikolas sits on its north bank).\textsuperscript{168} Gurian serfs were conscripted as part of a Russian border contingent, and they considered this obligation an onerous burden.\textsuperscript{169} Furthermore, Hasan-Beg did not confine his activities in Guria to merely seizing land and livestock, but he also supplied arms and ammunition to Gurians. Since his family came from Guria, he had many relatives there and sought to cultivate ties with his kin by going there himself and by entertaining groups of Gurians who came to see him.\textsuperscript{170} Russian officials wondered about the sources of this aid. It was known, for instance, that in 1839 the English vice-consul in Bat’umi, Friedrich Garrachino, had supplied some Circassian mountaineers with gunpowder and that as recently as the spring, 1841, he had entertained a delegation of Circassian chiefs.\textsuperscript{171} As we have seen, the British had not fully accepted Russian suzerainty over the Caucasus, and some individuals were trying to impede, if not prevent, the conquest of the mountaineers in the western mountains.\textsuperscript{172} Perhaps the British had a hand in Hasan’s activities.

Moreover, the Russians were preparing a major campaign against the Circassians and were counting on the active participation of militias from Imeret’i, Mingrelia, and

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., pp. 215-216; AKAK, vol. IX, doc. no. 188 (9 June 1841): 161.


\textsuperscript{170} AKAK, doc. no. 197 (14 August 1841): 168.

\textsuperscript{171} Chudinov, "Vozstanie guriitsev v 1841 godu," pp. 216-217.

\textsuperscript{172} "A Memorandum respecting Georgia, 1855," composed by a British foreign service officer in Erzurum, states clearly the position that Britain should have as a foreign-policy objective the removal of Russia from Caucasia. See Caucasian Boundaries, doc. 2.1, pp. 87-92. In many ways, the Crimean War represented the culmination of British efforts, following the Treaty of Hunkâr Iskelesi in 1833 between the Russians and the Ottomans, to oust Russia from the Caucasus, or, at least to minimize Russia’s presence on the Black Sea. In the late 1830s, the British embarked on a campaign to aid the mountaineers in the western and eastern Caucasus. Allen and Muratoff, Caucasian Battlefield, pp. 45-49.
Guria. As mentioned, it appeared as though the Gurians had endorsed this initiative by joining the local militia; but if the revolt spread, this could easily change. A rebellion in Guria could also spread to Mingrelia and Imereti where revolt against Russian rule had occurred not long ago. Indeed, by June, 1841, reports began reaching the high command of rebellion in several villages in Imereti, in a district bordering Guria. To add to these worries, rumors circulated about how Elizavet'a Gurieli, the widow of K'aixosro, had designs on reviving princely rule in Guria under Ottoman suzerainty. Though the disturbances initially looked like serf disgruntlement, it was not clear what role the princely families and nobles would play if the uprising grew. Finally, because of the impending campaign in the western Caucasus, the continuing pursuit of Shamyl in the eastern mountains, and the wide distribution of Russian troops throughout the region, commanders were well aware that their military presence in Western Georgia was small. Few troops meant that the Russians would possibly have to rely on local militias to suppress a rebellion in Guria. They had inspired the loyalty of these militias fighting the Ottomans a decade before; but would they be able to command the same loyalty when they fought their kin? In sum, the outburst of discontent with the new administrative reform in Guria exposed the vulnerability of Russia's position in Western Georgia. It underscored the mixed loyalties of the region's inhabitants, particularly in the border district of Guria.

173 These years following Nicholas I's visit to the region marked a crucial period in the campaign against Shamyl and the mountaineers in general. In the years 1840-1842, Russian losses in these campaigns amounted to more than 5,000. They had trouble in the western Caucasus as well because of Shamyl's successes in the eastern Caucasus. Allen and Muratoff, Caucasian Battlefields, pp. 51-52.

174 AKAK, doc. no. 188, pp. 161-162.


176 ibid., pp. 218, 220.
This sense of vulnerability helps explain the Russian response to the subsequent disturbances that grew into what could be called open revolt during the summer of 1841. Specifically, reluctance to use force, efforts to ascertain the actual reasons for the discontent, and the willingness to forgive most participants reflect the Russian administration’s sensivity to the pact that they had forged with their co-religionists. They needed to keep the Gurians and Western Georgians as allies. Indeed, to embark on an outright conquest of Guria as they were doing against Shamyl’s mountaineers carried too high a risk and violated the understanding between Georgians and Russians that had evolved over the past sixty years.

In consideration of all of these factors, the head of the Transcaucasian General Staff, Major-General Kotshebu reported to A.I. Chernyshev, Minister of War and Chairman of the Caucasian Committee, that he was moving various troops into the region as a precaution, but that he had guarded optimism that the revolt had ended.177 Still, in early June a crowd gathered near Shemok’medi (where Elizavet’a Gurieli lived), and moved onto Ask’ani and Lixauri, commandeering wine and food along the way and forcing dissenters, including nobles and princes, to take an oath of allegiance to their cause and threatening to burn down their homes if they refused.178 Horns once again blared across the valleys calling Gurians to revolt. It seems that the crowd had first intended to amass on the border with Kobulet’i, where they had already received aid from Hasan-Beg, but instead, they marched on Ozurget’i, avoiding clashes with Russian troops, and burned the customs-quarantine office and placed barriers on the roads to St.

177 AKAK, vol. IX, doc. no. 189 (9 June 1841): 162-163. Thus, Iatsenko had written to him on June 5 that “those residents who were gathered together by the rebel party have begun to go home, and one can expect that today everyone will be back home.”

Nikolas and Ch`oxatauri. The district chief, Iatsenko, responded by requesting that 250
troops be sent to Guria. The commander of military forces in Western Georgia, Colonel
Brusilov, mustered several hundred troops from the port of Redut-Kale and K`ut`aisi.
Their first objective was to strengthen the small garrisons at various military posts in
Guria, most importantly in the district seat of Ozurget`i. Local princes and nobles were
pressed into service as a show of loyalty. Thus, Prince Machutadze gathered together a
small militia of his nobles and serfs to calm a crowd near Ozurget`i. Prince Giorgi
Nakashidze, “who for a long time has been known for his devotion to the government,”
repelled a rebel assault on his estate by firing on the crowd and killing two rebels. The
most pressing logistical problem confronting military commanders was the lack of
provisions. No one knew how long these disturbances might last, and the increase in
troop-strength began to deplete food supplies.

Despite continued displays of defiance in both the K`ut`aisi and Guria districts,
the movement of troops into the region seemed to calm the bands. On June 13,
Kotsebu reported that the Gurians had once again “expressed [their] submission
[pokornost ],” a term that I would argue he used consciously with relation to serfs rather
than to nobles and princes, since he added that they had paid their taxes and dues. Serfs
submitted to imperial rule, while nobles affirmed it through oaths of loyalty. Submission
simply meant paying one’s taxes and providing recruits when called upon. By the middle
of June, Kotsebu could report that “in Guria all the disturbances that had arisen at the

179 Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu, p. 52.
1841): 163.
181 Ibid., pp. 224-233.
182 AKAK, vol. IX, doc. no. 190 (13 June 1841): 163; see also doc. no. 193 (4 July 1841): 164-165, on the
impact of troop movements.
beginning of the month have ended,” in part, Kotsebu stated, because the administration had decided to accept Turkish money as well as Russian currency. Thus, at least temporarily, as peasants spent more time with their agricultural labors, it seemed as though the disturbances had not turned into an outright rebellion.

In the calm of the moment, administrators sought to find out the cause of this discontent, and to ascertain the veracity of the serfs’ grievances. In effect, the government realized that it had implemented a reform in a region of Transcaucasia about which it knew little, and therefore, it needed to find out whether in fact the monetary tax was a burden. Officials had given wide latitude to the princes and nobles to run their affairs and had generally ignored the condition of their serfs. Did this new tax constitute an intolerable burden? Officials concluded at this point that the tax did not seem to be a great burden, but they still supported the measure to accept Turkish currency.

By the end of July, however, the calm disappeared as new and more broad-based acts of resistance occurred that engulfed all of Guria. Officials grew anxious over more blatant proclamations of united resistance. In early August a crowd of serfs from Lixauri proclaimed that they were bound by oath not to submit and that they would not consider paying taxes until their compatriots in the neighboring settlement of Gurianmt’a did the same. Then, on August 9, in an attempt to reopen the road between Ozurget’i and St. Nikolas, Colonel Brusilov, the commander in charge of the security of Ozurget’i,


185 *AKAK*, vol. IX, doc. no. 195 (18 July 1841): 165. The same question would arise again, however, as administrators realized how little they knew about the situation in Guria. cf. doc. no. 197 (14 August 1841): 167. In mid-August Lieutenant-General Braiko expressed frustration over the administration’s inability to determine whether the serfs were truly oppressed by the new tax. The fact was that some peasants did pay it and some did not, and the administration had no statistical information to make a judgment.

marched along the road toward the sea. He led two hundred soldiers with two cannons, and for the first several miles all was calm. But, as the road passed through a thick forest, they encountered a large group of rebels hiding in the forest. The rebels opened fire on the troops. Brusilov still had ten miles to go through swampy terrain, and he feared heavy casualties if he proceeded. He decided to retreat to Ozurget’i, and by the time his troops made their way back to town, they had lost six while another sixteen were wounded.\footnote{Ibid.}

Brusilov’s retreat galvanized support for the insurgency, which by now had turned into open revolt. The sound of horns resounded through the forests, and more and more villagers refused to pay their taxes. Reports reached Tiflis that Gurian rebels were swearing allegiance and co-operation among one another by oath; that “parties” of Gurians went often to Kobulet’i to receive arms and ammunition from Hasan-Beg; and that the rebels were coercing support from others with threats of violence. Increasingly, their targets were the small military posts scattered about the district. In mid-August, a band of five hundred rebels had chased off the contingent of Cossacks manning the post at St. Nicolas and taken control of it. They next took control of the Lixauri post and then seized Prince Nakashidze’s large estate at Gurianmt’a. More troubling, they began to seal off all communication with the district capital. In fact, by mid-August, the rebels more or less had control of all of Guria except for Ozurget’i, and they also had begun to threaten the port-towns of P’ot’i and Redut-Kale. In Ozurget’i, Brusilov had to contend with shrinking supplies and mounting illness. He reported that two hundred out of five hundred soldiers were incapacitated by fever. As provisions dwindled and the rebels closed in, some Gurian princes and nobles who had taken refuge there grumbled. Prince Davit’ Gugunava defected to the rebels, taking twenty men with him. Brusilov ordered
Prince Machutadze, as the head of the Gurian militia in the town, to administer to his men an oath of allegiance to the tsar. With help from Hasan-Beg, more than 3,000 Gurians attempted to take Ozurget’i by storm but were repulsed. To make matters worse, reports came from Circassia that the Gurian movement had inspired the Circassians to resist Russian incursions. The high command had to turn down requests for additional troops, and now Braiko had issued an order to form militias among Mingrelians and Imeret’ians from the districts of Rach’a and Shorap’ani because they were far enough away from Guria for the Russians to be able to hope for their loyalty. In late August the 1,000-man Mingrelian militia tried to march down the Gurian coast to relieve St. Nikolas and open up communications with Ozurget’i, but they were repulsed by the Gurians and forced to return to Mingrelia. After that defeat, the Dadiani wrote to Kotsebu that despite the loss his Mingrelians had demonstrated their “loyalty to their Sovereign and homeland; not sparing themselves, they had used all [their] strength against the Gurians, considering neither [their] compatriots nor their relatives, striving only to fulfill their faithful duty.” Attacking one’s compatriots was clearly a display of loyalty to the empire and therefore should be seen as honorable conduct in the eyes of the Russian government.

Administrators puzzled over how to respond, weighing options with the calculus of imperial rule. Lieutenant-General Braiko lamented to Chernyshev that “in general, Gurian residents are still not fully convinced that our government has all the means to


189 Ibid., doc. no. 201, p. 173.

190 Ibid., doc. no. 199 (7 Sept. 1841): 172.

191 Ibid., doc. no. 197 (14 August 1841): 168-169; and doc. no. 198 (20 August 1841): 169-171; Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu, pp. 56-59.

force them to fulfill its orders in an unquestioning manner, and...the manifestation again of disobedience again in the named villages, when residents of other villages already long ago calmed down, is simply the result of obstinancy, against which, up to this point, we have used measures of leniency...." Braiko added that, since he was still unable to determine whether the taxes really were burdensome, he saw no other course than to use military force to quell the revolt.\(^{193}\) But he was not sure. He was deeply disturbed by the events unfolding in the border district, and he still entertained the idea that the Gurians could be placated by a show of imperial understanding and generosity. He asserted that if the chief commander in the region believed that an act of leniency (meroiu snishkhozhdeniia), like the suspension of monetary payments until the authorities could accurately assess their impact, could restore a lasting peace, then he would support it. On the other hand, he cautioned that the regime should refrain from such a gesture if officials thought the Gurians would merely see it as a sign of weakness and exploit it to advance further demands. In any case, he remained committed to rounding up the main "instigators" (zachinshchiki) and inflicting upon them the harshest of punishments.\(^{194}\) This memorandum reveals how officials, knowing the limitations of their power, sought to strike an effective balance between the deployment of troops and conciliatory measures that could placate the rebels, restore order, and win long-term submission to the regime. For his part, Nicholas I thought that surely the incompetency of Russian officials accounted for some of the causes of this uprising, but he still ordered that all measures be taken to crush it.\(^{195}\)

\(^{193}\) Ibid., doc. no. 197, p. 167.

\(^{194}\) Ibid., p. 168.

\(^{195}\) Xachapuridze, Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu, p. 63.
Through the remainder of August, the commander of forces in the area, Prince Argutinskii-Dolgorukii, assembled an army that eventually numbered close to 4,000 soldiers, including 1,500 Imeret’ian militiamen and 250 Gurians, mostly princes and aznaurebi nobles.\textsuperscript{196} When he had secured these men and supplies by the beginning of September, Argutinskii-Dolgorukii undertook what the administration regarded as the liberation of Guria. In just a few days, he lifted the siege on Ozurget’i killing some sixty rebels and losing only three of his own soldiers. Once Ozurget’i fell, the resistance movement collapsed. Some villages, like Gurianmt’a held out until mid-September, but the majority of rebels left their bases and returned home. Most quickly proclaimed their submission; asserting that “they had been drawn into the uprising by deceit and coercion.” Villagers came to Ozurget’i where they openly admitted their guilt and swore an oath of allegiance to the tsar.\textsuperscript{197} Elsewhere Argutinskii-Dolgorukii order parish priests to administer similar oaths in their churches.\textsuperscript{198} By October, order had been restored.\textsuperscript{199}

In assessing the causes of the revolt, officials concluded that in addition to the reform itself, the movement had spread quickly, in part because of the susceptibility of the participants to the rumors they heard. Thus, instigators evidently emboldened their comrades by claims that the new reform heralded further exactions including a levy of recruits for the army. Similarly, the instigators had swayed their compatriots by promises


\textsuperscript{197} \textit{AKAK}, vol. IX, doc. no. 202 (19 Sept. 1841): 174-175.

\textsuperscript{198} Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), \textit{Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu}, p. 70. Between September 17-29, 2,812 families in Guria had sworn an oath of allegiance to the tsar, and officials were hoping that all Gurian families would have performed this “holy duty” by October 1. \textit{AKAK}, vol. IX, doc. no. 205 (7 Oct. 1841): 177.

that the sultan would send aid. Hasan-Beg played a crucial role here, as he both pledged his support to the Russians while supplying the rebels with munitions. Indeed, Guria’s proximity to the border strengthened the rebels’ resolve as the Gurians revived memories of their former alliances with southern neighbors. They also operated under the assumption that they could recruit their fellow Georgians, the Mingrelians and Imeret’ians, to the north.200 Still, rumor explains only part of the magnitude of this revolt. Xachapuridze contends that it was a well-organized movement undertaken by a “secret” society that called itself “priiali,” meaning “those who are disobedient.”201 Without further evidence, it is difficult to determine how important this group was. What seems certain is that a degree of common action, enforced by oaths of allegiance, took place across estate and village boundaries. At the same time, references to threats of violence against dissenters indicate that the movement was rife with divisions.202

In the final analysis, however, the revolt highlights several points about the nature of imperial rule in Guria. First, the administration attempted to act in a judicious manner in meting out punishments to the rebels. The principle underlying the distribution of punishments, according to the pronouncements of the chief administrator in the Caucasus, E.A. Golovin, was that only the alleged leaders should be punished and their sentences should be harsh in order to set an example to their fellow Gurians.203 In November, officials demanded that local residents turn over the leaders or face the loss of property.


201 Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu, pp. 44-45; a government report mentions this name for a shaika or band or gang. Ibid., p. 98.

202 See discussion of the tension between nobles in “Prigovor suda nad uchastnikami vosstaniia,” appendix in Xachapuridze, p. 100.

203 See, for example, AKAK, vol. IX, doc. no. 204 (26 Sept. 1841): 176.
For the most part, the population remained inactive, despite the threat.\textsuperscript{204} By the end of the month, only fifty people had been rounded up. A military tribunal was established quickly and concluded its proceedings in a little more than a month. It passed sentences on 48 individuals whom Argutinskii-Dolgorukii named as the primary "instigators" and leaders of the movement. Ten of these individuals eluded arrest by fleeing across the border. In contrast to the revolt of 1819-1820, several of the leaders and the majority of the active participants in 1841 were serfs, and, in the end, all received imperial clemency.\textsuperscript{205}

In general, acting on the command of Nicholas I, the regime exhibited great mercy in its treatment of the rebels. All of the accused received an imperial pardon except Prince Ambako Shalikavshili, an ensign in the Russian army who deserted the garrison at Ozurget'i to join the rebels; Shalikavshili could not be forgiven.\textsuperscript{206} Nicholas explained his clemency this way:

\ldots the Sovereign Tsar, although [He] deigns to recognize that each act of disobedience against the authorities, which is accompanied by clear resistance to military force, [based] on whatever principle and on whatever necessity, cannot under any circumstance be tolerated; and that, for this reason, the accused, although they would be subject to the harshest punishment according to the law, \ldots by the ineffable mercy of His Highness, shown out of leniency towards the conditions of a poor people, still unenlightened, and taking into consideration that the Gurians were drawn to crime not out of ill-intentioned motives, but more out of a

\textsuperscript{204} Xachapuridze (Khachapuridze), \textit{Guriiskoe vosstanie v 1841 godu}, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{205} Xachapuridze states that of the fifty individuals indicted as leaders of the movement, thirty-eight were peasants. Three princes were named as well as seven lesser nobles (four of whom were acquitted). Two adult children of priests were accused, and one was acquitted. Eighteen out of the fifty were between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Of those who fled to Turkey, one was a prince, two were lesser nobles, and six were peasants. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 41-43, 75-77.

\textsuperscript{206} On the other hand, Davit' Gogunava, who had apparently gone over to the rebels, was acquitted on the grounds that he had been ill, and when he left Ozurget'i in search of help, he was forced to join the movement. Later, he participated in the campaign to end the revolt and then went on to fight the Circassians. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 104.
misunderstanding of the true intentions of the government and by the mistaken execution by the local administration of their responsibilities, the All-Gracious forgives all individuals...except the ensign, Prince Ambakuma Shaliko-Shvili...207

Nicholas concluded his display of imperial clemency "in complete assurance that such great kindness for individuals, who had shown themselves to be criminals in this affair, would not only fill their hearts with living gratitude and veneration for monarchical mercy, but inspire as well the fervent hearts of all of their fellow citizens to uphold the inviolable sanctity given by them in oath to serve with loyalty and truth the throne and the homeland."208 Nicholas manifested this clemency not only in his grand pardon of nearly all the accused, he also reduced the money to be levied against the Gurians to compensate nobles who had suffered property damage. This damage was calculated at 17,743 rubles, 37 kopeks, and initially each household was assessed a four-ruble charge to pay the sum. Nicholas decided not to exact this sum but to pay a large portion of it out of imperial coffers.209

More than this, he also commanded his subordinates in Trancaucasia to make sure that all Gurian nobles who displayed loyalty to the throne during the turbulence be rewarded for their actions. Hence, nearly all the Gurian nobles who had sided with the Russians received a promotion in rank, official commendation and medals of distinction or monetary awards. The most prominent princes received monetary awards amounting to a total sum of 6,830 rubles.210

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207 The text of the imperial pardon is reproduced in ibid., pp. 105-106.

208 Ibid.

209 In November, 1844, Nicholas approved the release of 7,795 r, 26 k. to compensate nobles for their losses. Ibid., p. 72.

210 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
This display of mercy expressed the official imperial view of this distant possession. The tone of Nicholas’s words reflected a magnanimous, selfless cast of mind that instructed the accused to understand their lowly position as ignorant, poor, still half-wild subjects who had failed to understand the intent of the reform. At the same time, it acknowledged the misunderstandings that the reform had caused and the ineptitude of the local officials charged with implementing it. His act of clemency was designed to be for the recipients as inspiration that would move all in Guria to regard Nicholas of Russia as their rightful and benelovent sovereign. On the other hand, this act of clemency concealed the concern shared by Nicholas and many who had fought the rebels about Guria’s location on the border. The rebellion revealed the porousness of the boundary with the Ottomans and heightened the need to demarcate a distinct boundary and to police it. The rebellion also made manifest the mixed loyalties of Gurians. Initially, several princes and nobles had hesitated to side with the Russians and entertained the notion of leading the peasants in revolt against the empire because it seemed a propitious moment. Only when it was clear that the serfs expressed anger against the exactions of state and nobles alike did many princes and nobles of Guria recognize that their interests lay more with the empire. Though many returned to the fold, several lower nobles continued to support the peasants. Lastly, Nicholas’s statement expressed some ambiguity about rebellion itself. Insofar as Nicholas acknowledged the Gurians’ “misunderstanding” of the purpose of Russian reforms, and insofar as they remained uneducated, and neglected in their borderland, subject to the abuse of inept officials, Nicholas acknowledged a certain legitimacy in the grievances and refusal to pay the taxes, though he could not condone their defying military force. We have also seen how officials in Transcaucasia readily admitted their ignorance about the impact of the reform, and so the “misunderstanding” went both ways. The state’s misunderstanding was potentially more threatening insofar as it was founded upon a genuine ignorance of Guria; that is, the state had insufficient knowledge about the land and its inhabitants. Moreover, this ignorance
was the product of the imperial hubris with which officials so readily regarded the
Gurians. How quickly officials took recourse in the stereotypes about the character of the
Gurians to explain the inadequacies of their reactions. By such attitudes, officials
escaped recognizing their own inadequacies. This attitude would become much more
flagrant in the second half of the century and be a major cause of the more popular-based
revolutionary movement of 1902-1906.

In this light, the rebellion served the interests of the regime in illuminating the
social abuses in this borderland territory that assumed importance at least militarily (and,
later, economically). It highlighted the inadequacies of the Russian officials and policies,
like the lack of a properly-defined border, the poor system of roads and communications,
the lack of knowledge about local social relations and economic production. Similarly,
the rebellion further justified and won a degree of local support for the state’s
intervention, insofar as it rewarded those who were loyal, spared those who were guilty,
and admitted that some problems existed with official personnel and administrative
practices: the state had at least a temporary mandate to implement more reforms for the
good of the backward, neglected Gurians. Indeed, the Gurian revolt would be cited as
one reason for overhauling Hahn’s system and replacing it with a more sensitive system
and sanctioning a return to “regionalism,” to use the term of Anthony Rhinelander.
This mandate extended to the militia as well. The state could rely more heavily on the
participation of Gurians as members of the Gurian militia to help them wage their
campaign against the mountaineers.

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211 In the wake of the rebellion, several fortifications were improved as were several roads; likewise, an
effort was made to bring in more competent officials. AKAK, vol. IX, doc. no. 205 (7 Oct. 1841): 176-177.

212 See his discussion of “Regionalism Regained” which blossomed under Vorontsov. Rhinelander,
“Russia’s Imperial Policy,” pp. 230-235. The Gurian rebellion was not the only rebellion sparked by
Hahn’s reforms but it was by far the largest. Ivanenko, Grazhdanskoe upravlenie Zakavkaz’em, p. 298.
One last theme stands out from this rebellion, and that is the change in the social composition of the rebels. To be sure, the two rebellions resembled one another in many ways. The form of both rebellions looked similar in the use of horns to rally people, in the use of oaths, including forced oaths by the rebels, the recourse to violence, ties with those outside of Guria, and a uniformity in the expression of aims. To an extent, the two rebellions also shared the goal of ousting the Russian administration, though it is not clear that a goal of both rebellions was to shed the protection of the Russian army. I would argue that the Gurians had grown used to the notion of imperial protection, certainly by 1841, but not imperial intervention. This last point leads to the fundamental difference between the two rebellions. If serfs participated in the rebellion of 1819-1820, they did so as the servants of their lords; that rebellion was a rebellion of dynasts and nobles aimed at preserving the traditional proprietary rights of lords over vassals and serfs. The 1841 rebellion heralded the emergence of a peasant-serf-lower noble movement directed against the dynastic lords, precisely because the state had upheld their rights and privileges and sporadically but powerfully attempted to introduce particular unpopular reforms that chiefly affected the lower classes. Reform almost always came to Guria late, and often in a diluted form, meaning that it lacked the administrative personnel and endorsement to enforce it (extending even to efforts to acquire information for the state). The 1840 tax and administrative reform demonstrated clearly the interventionist power of the state and, at the same time, revealed the extent to which the regime had left the dynastic families in control of local affairs. They had the right to exact traditional dues and obligations from their serfs, and when the state claimed a share in 1840, in Russian currency no less, many serfs, with some sympathy from the gentry noble class, revolted out of a sense of violation of their autonomy as cultivators of the
soil. Indeed, the more popular causes of this rebellion became the subject of lore and literature among Georgians later in the century. The change in the social composition and leadership of the 1841 revolt reflected a changed reaction to the Russian imperial administration. The reform program marked a much deeper Russian commitment to regularizing administrative practices there, marking state boundaries, and commanding more revenues from the local population to fund these efforts. The 1841 revolt still, however, reflected former traditions of rebellion insofar as it took on familiar forms like the 1819-1820 revolt, and it again resulted in the tsar’s forgiveness of the Gurians’ resistance. This imperial response, however, raised the possibility that the Gurians might turn to negotiating imperial policies there through similar acts of resistance.

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213 Using archival documents from the library of one of the Gurieli princes, the Gurian writer and a founder of Georgian social democracy, Egne Ninoshvili (born as Egne Ingoroqva, 1859-1892), wrote a historical novel about the 1841 Rebellion, Vozstanie v Gurii (Rebellion in Guria) in the late 1880s. The novel won the author much acclaim as a writer of realist fiction and helped to preserve the memory of 1841 for future rebels in 1902-1906 and 1924. In 1897, a school-teacher from the Nigoiti school near the village of Lanch’xut’i, recorded that inhabitants of the rural commune (sel’skoe obshchestvo) retained a vivid memory and rich lore about 1841, claiming, with some justification, that their village was the center of the rebellion. Indeed, the author records how the inhabitants stressed that their village should be called not “Lanch’xut’i” but “Nachxubi” or “those who are quarrelsome.” S. Dzhorbenadze (Jorbenadze), “Lanchkhutskoe sel’skoe obshchestvo,” SMOMPK, vol. 22 (1897): 221-247, especially pp. 221, 224-226.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

The first Viceroy of the Caucasus, Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov, seemed to appreciate the irony of Baron Hahn’s administrative structure for the Georgian lands when he responded to the concerns of the Imere’tian dynastic families by uncoupling Western Georgia from Eastern Georgia and relegating the lands of Western Georgia to their own, Kutaisi province (Kutaiskaia guberniia).

1 By the new administrative plan of 1846, Guria became Ozurget’i district (Ozurgetskii uezd). The new, more conciliatory approach taken by Vorontsov won the praises of many among the Georgian elite, but the actual order created by his reform left Western Georgia with considerable instability. Most prominently, Mingrelia, Svanetia and Abkhazia remained protectorates until 1856/57, 1857-1859, and 1864 respectively. In Guria, questions continued to arise over the exact boundary separating it from the Ottoman Empire. The boundary would not be etched clearly on a map until after the Crimean War, settled by the Treaty of Paris in 1856.

Indeed, in subsequent discussions in 1857 about boundaries in general in Caucasia, the Gurian-Ottoman boundary became a point of dispute that involved substantial deliberation, with references to previous treaties and border commissions that failed to define the boundary of “Russian” Guria. Thus, for example, a commission deliberated on the border without success in 1834. Following the 1841 Rebellion, an Ottoman-Russian commission again investigated this boundary and terminated their work

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1 Esadze, Istoricheskaia zapiska ob upravlenii kavkazom, vol. 1, pp. 85-86.

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without a solution. In response to frequent incursions across the unmarked boundary, another commission met to demarcate the boundary in 1847 in Trabzon/Trebizond. Witnesses from Kobulet’i and Guria provided testimony, but this commission too ended its labors without a firm delineation. In brief, over the years the confusion was whether the boundary was the Natanebi River in the north, the Çurük River in the south, or the Çolok River between them. The Treaty of Paris left the boundary vague, and subsequent deliberations settled on the Çolok River.² This would remain the boundary of the Russian and Ottoman Empires until 1878, when the Treaty of Berlin moved it south into eastern Anatolia, the effect of which was to unify lands that had once been regarded as greater Guria.

Up to the Crimean War, the uncertainty over Guria’s southern boundary reflected the intimate relations that Gurians continued to maintain with their southern neighbors, despite some effort by the Russians to monitor more closely that elusive line. Following the 1841 Rebellion, officials continued to speculate about Gurian loyalties. In 1846 Vorontsov wrote to Nicholas I that “Guria cannot yet be considered a completely subdued and tranquil region.”³ Later, during his account of the Gurian regiment during the Crimean War, Petr K. Uslar, a general in Western Georgia during the war and, later, one of the pioneers of Caucasian linguistic studies, remarked at length about the tenuous loyalty of the Gurians to the Russian imperial enterprise:

More than any other of the Transcaucasian Christians, the Gurians are in contact with Turkey and under the influence of Turkish politics. Adjoining the border peoples of Turkey — the Kobuletsy, Adzhartsy, and Laz — they speak the same language as they and consider themselves as kin; very many Gurian natives are found among the Turkish dignitaries. Contraband and the trade in captives — the favorite occupation of a part of

²Caucasian Boundaries, doc. nos. 2.2 (p. 97), 2.3.2 (pp. 107-119), 2.3.3 (pp. 125-145), 2.3.4 (pp. 149-153, 157-163, 201-206).

the Gurian people — support these cross-border ties. It is easy to understand that among the Gurians the Turks can find many people disposed to betrayal [of Russia]; such people are in all classes of society.⁴

This assessment of the “Gurian natives” underscored the precariousness with which the Russians regarded their subjects on the border as tensions mounted with the Ottomans in the early 1850s.

Thus, when war broke out with the Ottomans in 1853, the question arose yet again about whether the Gurians in Russian Guria would demonstrate their loyalty to Russia. After their defeat by the Russians in 1828-1829, the Ottomans had fortified many fortresses in eastern Anatolia, including the fort at Bat’umi. By 1854, Ottoman forces between Bat’umi and Guria numbered some 40,000, and they faced a contingent of only 3,000 Gurian militia and 1,500 Russian troops. In the spring campaigning season, they pushed into Guria and occupied Ozurget’i. But in June, a combined Gurian-Russian force pushed the Ottomans out of Guria south of the Çolok River. The Gurians once again distinguished themselves in an assault on the Ottoman lines, resulting in heavy losses for the Ottomans and the momentary recovery of Guria. Uslar attributes the Gurians’ success to the intensive propaganda campaign waged by General Bagration-Mukhranskii (Bagrationi-Muxrani). A scion of the Bagratid Muxranian line of Georgian kings, the general, according to Uslar, “attempted to give to the ongoing war in Guria the character of a personalized and popular hostility to the Turks.” As recounted by Uslar, the Gurians imbibed the anti-Ottoman, anti-Islamic propaganda and undertook a series of attacks across the border that won them great respect from the Russian staff for their bellicoscity and loyalty.⁵


⁵ Ibid., p. 252. As Allen and Muratoff recount, in late 1855 during Ömer Pasha’s Mingrelian campaign, the Russians and Gurians actually lost control of Guria for several months, but the Gurians remained loyal to the Russian Empire. Caucasian Battlefields, pp. 61-101.
An early casualty in this campaign against the Ottomans was Prince Giorgi Gurieli who was killed in October, 1853, defending the fort at St. Nicholas. As recorded in the newspaper, Kavkaz, Giorgi fell before the Ottomans, with words that celebrated his principality’s union with Russia:

‘...Thanks to God, following the example of my predecessors, I have been so happy that I could be useful to our native region [krai]. Always remember and tell our princes that under God’s protection our Guria has forever been an impregnable fortress against the Turks, and they have never entered our land unpunished. Now, when our fellow Christians, Russian troops, who are known throughout the world for [their] bravery, do battle beside us and spill [their] blood in our land, we must try to be worthy of their respect and not spare [our] lives so that we will never have to [again] tolerate the Turks, our eternal enemy, as rulers in our land.”

Once removed to his residence, the prince died, imploring his fellow Gurians to: “Think of Guria, vindicate your loyalty to the All-Merciful Sovereign Tsar, and show that you are the same Gurians whose land has forever been a graveyard for the Turks. Think of [your] honorable duty to Christianity;” he implored them to remember that God would forever protect their land. Thus, the Crimean War stands out as a test of Gurians’ loyalty to their imperial overlords. After half a century of Russian rule, the Gurians had demonstrated their acceptance of Russian protection and sovereignty, and had actively participated in constructing a political and ideological boundary between empires.

Indeed, professions of loyalty to Russia extended beyond Guria’s borders to other Georgian lands. The Crimean War galvanized local community leaders to affirm in the Russian-language press the historical rightness, even inevitability, of the condominium with their Russian overlords. In a long article on Georgian history written at the time of the war, Dmitri Qip’iani (1814-1887), a gentry noble and state servitor from Tiflis

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7 Ibid.
province, espoused the merits of the union of the Georgians with their co-religionists in what can be construed as a variant of the Extinction Thesis. He concluded his survey of Georgian history and historical sources by asserting: “It seems that this is sufficient for arousing through historical inquiries sympathy for the fate of a people that for twenty-plus centuries has stood its ground firmly amidst world revolutions occurring all around it and that, finally, voluntarily bowed its head, exhausted by centuries of misfortunes, under the protection of its spiritual kin, Russia.”

Interestingly, Qip’iani used the occasion of the war against the Ottomans both to express his support of the condominium with the Russian regime and to press upon his readers the longevity of Georgian history. “Given the present audacious struggle of Islam against the Cross, the details of glory of a Christian people, against which in the course of fifteen centuries all except Georgia were shattered by the crippling forces of the Chingiz-Khans, the Tamerlanes, Shah Abbases, and other conquerors, [these details] would be extremely interesting and instructive.”

Qip’iani’s remarks expressed the conditions of a mutually beneficial pact between Russia tsars and the intellectual hieroi to the ancient kingdom of Georgia. In essence, Georgians had accepted the Russian dissolution of the oldest kingship in the world, by Qip’iani’s

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8 Dmitri Qip’iani (Kipiani), “Neskol’ko myslei o materialakh dlia istorii gruzii,” Kavkaz, no. 39 (22 May 1854): 156. The article appeared in Kavkaz as a six-part piece extending through the spring, 1854. Kavkaz, no. 30 (21 April 1854): 119-120; no. 31 (24 April 1854): 123-124; no. 33 (1 May 1854): 134-135; no. 35 (8 May 1854): 139-140; no. 37 (15 May 1854): 147-148; and no. 39 (22 May 1854): 155-156. At the time he composed this piece Qip’iani was the superintendent of the Tiflis School for Nobles. At the age of eighteen, he participated in the 1832 Conspiracy against the Russian administration, but subsequently, he acquiesced to Russian rule and came to assume prominent positions in the Caucasian administration. In 1859 he joined Viceroy Bariatinskii’s Council, and from 1864 to 1870, he was Marshal of the Tiflis Nobility. Later, in 1885-1886, he served as Marshal of the Kutaisi Nobility. Despite his loyalty to the Russian regime, when the Exarch of Georgia, Pavel, anathematized Georgia in response to the murder of the Rector of the Tiflis Seminary, Qip’iani wrote a critical letter reproaching the Exarch for his measure. As a result, Qip’iani was arrested and exiled to Stavropol’, where he was murdered under mysterious circumstances. On his role in the emancipation of the Georgian serfs, see Ronald G. Suny, “‘The Peasants Have Always Fed Us’: The Georgian Nobility and the Peasant Emancipation, 1856-1871,” RR 38:1 (Jan. 1979): 27-51.

9 Ibid., no. 30 (21 April 1854): 120.
estimation, and in return, the tsars had accepted the Georgian reconstruction of the historical narrative, undertaken recently by Georgian scholars and others, chronicling the alleged twenty-two centuries of kingship in the Georgian lands.¹⁰

Thus, the Crimean War marked a turning point in the history of Russian-Georgian relations insofar as it represented both the culmination of dynasticism under Russian rule and the emergence of a nationalist discourse that championed a more popular view of Georgian identity. The obituary that apparently records the voice of Prince Giorgi Gurieli expressed the transferral of dynastic loyalty to the tsar and cast the prince (and his family) as the authoritative voice of his people in Guria. As argued in the previous chapter, the Gurian rebellion of 1841 had already revealed the vulnerability of the dynastic social structure. In return for supporting the chief dynastic families’ rights to run their estates as they saw fit, the government demanded their loyalty in that moment of social unrest. Whatever aspirations some might have had in using serf discontent to reassert greater control over the principality — as K’aixosro’s widow, Elizaveta Gurieli evidently desired —, the tsarist administration demanded that they affirm their loyalty to the regime by quashing the revolt. Most complied, and many took refuge in Ozurget’i under the protection of Russian troops. Gurian nobles and tsarist troops crushed the rebellion and

¹⁰ I have investigated the joint composition of this narrative by Georgians in the nineteenth century in an unpublished paper, “The Scholarly Reconstruction of the Georgian Nation under Russian Rule, The First Phase,” presented at the AAASS annual conference, Seattle, November, 1997. Marie-Félicité Brosset had given expression to similar sentiments in the late 1830s, when he wrote: “If ever conquest was peaceful, just, honorable, and advantageous for the master and for the subjects, it is this long period of deliverance, from 1587 to 1783, which placed the scepter of Georgia in the hands of the Russian emperors.” M.-F. Brosset, “Monographie géorgienne de Moscou,” Bulletin scientifique IV:18-19 (1838): 296. Similarly, Platon Ioseliani, the son of a priest who became a scholar of Georgian history and editor of Zakavkazskii vestnik during the tenure of Vorontsov as Viceroy, 1845-1854, staunchly upheld the sanctity of the condominium between Georgians and Russians as co-religionists standing firm against Islam and bringing Enlightenment to a ravaged land. According to Ioseliani, only under Russian rule would Georgians finally be able to find their voice as a nation founded on firm moral principles. Thus, he beautifully articulated the fusion of the nationalist and imperialist visions that melded so powerfully in the wake of the Crimean War. “Istoricheskiy vzgliad na sostoyanie drevnei Gruzii,” Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia 37: pt. 2 (1843): 124-144.
restored order, but the revolt had manifested the economic burden borne by the lesser nobles and serfs for the sake of preserving dynastic privilege and authority in the borderland principality. Thus, Vorontsov’s and Uslar’s concern about the allegiance of the Gurians. Still, the Crimean War demonstrated how successful the tsarist regime had been in the first half of the nineteenth century in forging a pact of protection devoted to ousting the Islamic powers from the region.

At the same time, the campaign against the Muslim Ottomans saw Georgians from all dynastic lands join militias to fight alongside Russians in a campaign of reconquest directed against the Muslim infidels. Newspapers carried regular updates from the battle-zones in what was called “Asiatic Turkey” or, more specifically, “the Kobuleti Sanjak of Asiatic Turkey.”

Authors embellished many of their accounts with ethnographic detail. In an article about a celebration in honor of the volunteers of the mounted Georgian militia [druzhina], for which many of the imperial regiments and local militias had gathered in Tiflis, the author described the uniforms and speech of the local Christian peoples, commenting: “All this together comprised a wonderful military picture in which, as in a living ethnographic museum, one could study the types, customs and dialects of the stern and battle-hardened Christian tribes of Transcaucasia, that up to this time have comprised the most interesting enigma for the rest of Russia and for all of

Europe.” 12 At least during the 1850s, the category of identity most commonly described was that of religion. For Georgian writers in the Russian-language press, the Christian identity of the Georgian peoples resonated with other attributes of their national identity: namely, history and language. In fact, these sketches represent the first attempts to depict the Georgian lands and peoples as an assemblage of collective ethnographic portraits that represented an early image of a Georgian national people. In light of these portraits, the war underscored the imperial regime’s dependence on the local Christian population for prosecuting the war in this most vulnerable region.

Though the imperial army distinguished itself in the Caucasian theater, Russia suffered a devastating loss in the war as a whole, and this loss revealed the still-tenuous position of the Russian regime south of the Caucasus mountains. As a sign of this predicament, the new Tsar, Alexander II, requested that the Caucasian Viceroy, Prince Bariatinskii, seek some kind of compromise with Shamyl in order to make peace and allow for the deep cuts in military expenditures and personnel that had resulted from the defeat in the war. Instead, Bariatinskii proposed an ambitious plan to subdue Shamyl and his mountaineers that resulted in Shamyl’s capture and Russia’s decisive subordination of Caucasia to its rule.13 The dissolution of the protectorate status of Mingrelia, Svanetia,

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and Abkhazia occurred in tandem with this consolidation of imperial rule in the region as a whole.

Thus, in the wake of the Crimean War, Russia finally stood poised to enact more fundamental reforms in Caucasia that were designed to dismantle the dynastic social structure on which the administration had depended to push the Ottomans out of Western Georgia. The emancipation of the serfs in Georgia was the most powerful step taken in this direction. In conjunction with this fundamental reform, the regime would undertake several others — like the construction of railroads and educational institutions, as well as the implementation of conscription — that transformed the countryside of Guria into a largely corn-based economy and integrated the former principality more fully into the imperial economy and administration. Gurians would feel the effects of these changes especially after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, when the tsarist government won large territorial gains against the Ottomans, effectively pushing the boundary between the two empires south into northeastern Anatolia. After that war, Guria lost its borderland status, and its inhabitants assumed a pivotal position as agricultural producers for the imperial economy. This transformation of Guria after the Crimean War undermined the authority of the dynastic families and eventually, by the beginning of the twentieth century, led to the creation of a new revolutionary alliance forged between gentry nobles who had become Social Democrats and peasants who were still struggling to purchase their freedom. A century after the extension of Russian rule into Western Georgia, the Gurian participants in this new alliance rebelled in an unprecedented revolutionary movement that would momentarily, in 1905, reject the terms of the condominium and erect an independent socialist peasant republic.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

In order to expedite the process of finding a bibliographic entry, the following entries are arranged alphabetically as a single list of entries without regard to date or type of source or publication. In the case where a Georgian scholar's name occurs in different variants, where necessary I have included entries for the variants but listed that individual's works under the name transliterated from the Georgian. Thus, Ivane Javaishvili is rendered in Russian as Dzhavakhishvili or Dzhavakhov. His works consulted for this study are found under Javaishvili, but I have included the Russian renderings of his name to refer the reader to the appropriate entry.

Abbreviations:

AKAK Akty sobrannye kavkazskoiu arkheograficheskoiu komissiei
BK Bedi Kartlisa: Revue de kartvelologie
CSSH Comparative Studies in Society and History
EI1 Encyclopedia of Islam, first edition (1934)
IZ Istoricheskie zapiski
Izd-vo Izdatel'stvo
REArm Revue des études arméniennes
RR Russian Review
SEER Slavic and East European Review
SMOMPK Sbornik materialov dlia opisaniiia mestnestei i plemen Kavkaza
SPB St. Petersburg
SR Slavic Review
Tip. Tipografia
Tip. I.A.N. Tipografia Imperatorskoii Akademii Nauk
T'UG T'bilisis universitetis gamomc'emloba (Izdatel'stvo Tbilisskogo Universiteta)
UP University Press
VI Voprosy istorii
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Tsagareli — see C’agareli

Tsetskhladze—see C’ec’xladze


