

CLAIMING THE CAUCASUS:
RUSSIA'S IMPERIAL ENCOUNTER WITH ARMENIANS, 1801-1894

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

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ABSTRACT

Stephen B. Riegg: Claiming the Caucasus: Russia's Imperial Encounter with Armenians,
1801-1894
(Under the direction of Louise McReynolds)

My dissertation questions the relationship between the Russian empire and the Armenian diaspora that populated Russia's territorial fringes and navigated the tsarist state's metropolitan centers. I argue that Russia harnessed the stateless and dispersed Armenian diaspora to build its empire in the Caucasus and beyond. Russia relied on the stature of the two most influential institutions of that diaspora, the merchantry and the clergy, to project diplomatic power from Constantinople to Copenhagen; to benefit economically from the transimperial trade networks of Armenian merchants in Russia, Persia, and Turkey; and to draw political advantage from the Armenian Church's extensive authority within that nation.

Moving away from traditional dichotomies of power and resistance, this dissertation examines how Russia relied on foreign-subject Armenian peasants and elites to colonize the South Caucasus, thereby rendering Armenians both agents and recipients of European imperialism. Religion represented a defining link in the Russo-Armenian encounter and therefore shapes the narrative of my project. Driven by a shared ecumenical identity as adherents of Orthodox Christianity, Armenians embraced Russian patronage in the early nineteenth century to escape social and political marginalization in the Persian and Ottoman empires. After the tsarist state wrested the headquarters of the Armenian Church from Persia in 1828, it maneuvered to ensure the election of an Armenian ecclesiastical leader most conducive to Russia's geopolitical objective of maintaining influence over Armenians abroad.

Tsarist diplomats amplified the clout of the Armenian Church in European capitals and Russian generals relied on Armenian priests to gather intelligence in Turkey during wartime, but the government shuttered Armenian parish schools and imprisoned clergy when it detected links between the church and a rising nationalist movement. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a multifaceted Armenian nationalist sentiment that sought varied goals penetrated Armenian students, aristocrats, and clerics. Yet my research shows that even during this challenge to tsarist authority, Russian statesmen and Armenian clergy continued to pursue parallel aims.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKAK	Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Kommissieiu (Documents Collected by the Caucasus Archeographical Commission)
GARF	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation)
MID	Ministerstvo inostrannykh del (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
MVD	Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
NAA	National Archive of Armenia (Hayastani azgayin arkhiv)
RGIA	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive)
RGVIA	Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Military History Archive)
TsIAM	Tsentral'nyi istoricheskii arkhiv Moskvu (Central Historical Archive of Moscow)

INTRODUCTION

A large crowd in Yerevan braved the winter chill of 2 December 2013 to watch the unveiling of the city's latest sculptural addition. Dignitaries at the ceremony included Serzh Sargsyan, the president of the Republic of Armenia, and Maksim Sokolov, the Russian Minister of Transportation. Towering behind the men stood the new, fifteen-foot-tall marble monument. It depicts two women, their veiled heads slightly bowed toward each other, bound in an intimate embrace. A large cross, the focal point of the sculpture, not only links the women but also finds shelter in their unity. While new to the Armenian capital, the monument is a larger replica of an older statue in central Moscow, where an inscription declares: "Blessed over centuries is the friendship of the Russian and Armenian peoples."

A relationship that stretches back into the premodern era, contemporary Russo-Armenian ties penetrate time and politics to base their foundation upon centuries of cultural, diplomatic, and economic dialogue. Tsar Nicholas I wrested Armenia from Persia in 1828, fusing it to the Romanov and then the Soviet empires for nearly two centuries. Since the emergence of an independent Armenian state in 1991, the Republic of Armenia has maintained a close political partnership with its former imperial overlord, relying on its diplomatic, economic, and military support. Indeed, in January 2015, Yerevan joined the Moscow-organized Eurasian Economic Union, abandoning the prospect of entering the European Union. Most Western analysts interpreted Armenia's decision to side with President Vladimir Putin's brainchild as a case of realpolitik, in which Armenia yielded to Russian pressure out of fear of losing Moscow's support against its neighboring foe, Azerbaijan. Yet such explanations ignore the deep ties between

Russians and Armenians that continue to inform modern developments in the Caucasus and beyond. As the Russian Foreign Ministry declared on Twitter in April 2015, “Armenia is Russia’s reliable partner and ally. We share centuries-old relations and are bound by historical and spiritual ties.” The political synergy and religious kinship between Russians and Armenians evoked by Moscow in the twenty-first century experienced their defining moments in the nineteenth century.

This dissertation explores the evolution of the Russian political encounter with Armenians in the nineteenth century, a period marked both by the zenith and the nadir of that relationship. I argue that Russia harnessed the stateless and dispersed Armenian diaspora to build its empire in the Caucasus and beyond. Russia relied on the stature of the two most influential institutions of that diaspora, the merchantry and the clergy, to project diplomatic sway from Constantinople to Copenhagen; to benefit economically from the transimperial trade networks of Armenian merchants based in Tiflis, Astrakhan, and Moscow; and to draw political advantage from the Armenian Church’s authority in that nation.

Religion plays a key role in this narrative because of its centrality to the Russo-Armenian encounter. Driven by a shared ecumenical identity as adherents of Orthodox Christianity, Armenians embraced Russian patronage in the early nineteenth century to escape social and political marginalization in the Persian and Ottoman empires. Tsarist officials resettled Armenian peasants from northern Persia and eastern Anatolia into newly conquered territories in the South Caucasus, provided financial incentives to Armenian vendors in Constantinople to relocate to Crimea, and institutionalized exclusive tax breaks for the Armenian communities of Astrakhan and other southern Russian cities. After Petersburg conquered the headquarters of the Armenian

Church from Persia in 1828, it maneuvered to ensure the election of an Armenian prelate most open to Russia's geopolitical objective of maintaining influence over Armenians abroad.

Armenians make a compelling instrument for investigating Russian strategies of imperialism for three reasons. First, owing to their diaspora's distribution along not only social and economic lines, but also across regional and imperial borders, Armenians could be found in numerous milieus. The exploration of Russo-Armenian ties takes us to the neighboring Persian and Ottoman empires, universities and printing presses from Yerevan and Tiflis to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and from Caucasian battlefields to Russian provincial capitals. Second, Armenia initially embraced tsarist patronage, unlike other territories in the Caucasus. Third, Armenians experienced a wide spectrum of group identities that tsarist officials ascribed to them: at first recognized as distant Persian vassals lauded for their economic prowess, they graduated into loyal Russian allies who were crucial for the administration of the South Caucasus, only to find themselves a half century later labeled suspect nationalists.

A key goal of this dissertation is to contribute to the ongoing reconceptualization of dominant narratives of empire in general, and the Russian empire in particular. Moving away from traditional dichotomies of power and resistance, this work examines how the Russian government relied on foreign-subject Armenian peasants and elites to colonize parts of the South Caucasus, thus rendering Armenians concurrently the agents and the recipients of European imperialism. Some of the key protagonists here are ethnic Armenian officers in the tsarist service, who served in the Romanov bureaucracy and commanded Russian troops, often against their own compatriots. Before and after the Russian annexation of Georgia and Eastern Armenia, Armenians served as tsarist spies, settlers, and soldiers. Armenians joined Georgians and other Christian and Muslim natives of the Caucasus in collaborating with St. Petersburg's imperial

project in the South Caucasus, which achieved tangible results in pulling the region closer to Russia and closer to modernity.

Yet the Armenian encounter with modernity in the nineteenth century, much as it played out in other parts of Europe in that age of nationalism, yielded a complex interplay of national and imperial identities. This dissertation engages the interdisciplinary work of such theorists of empire as Ann Laura Stoler, who has emphasized that “blurred genres of rule are not empires in distress but imperial polities in active realignment and reformation.”¹ Tsarist agents lauded Armenian traders’ contributions to the economic development of the imperial periphery but distrusted their affiliations with British and French merchants in Asia Minor. The government supported an Armenian family’s establishment of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow but prohibited the formation of smaller Armenian academies and benevolent organizations elsewhere. Tsarist diplomats amplified the clout of the Armenian Church in European capitals and Russian generals relied on Armenian priests to gather intelligence in the Ottoman empire during wartime, but the government shuttered Armenian parish schools and imprisoned clergy when it detected links between the church and a rising nationalist movement. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a multifaceted Armenian nationalist sentiment that sought varied goals infiltrated students, aristocrats, and clerics. Yet even during this challenge to tsarist authority, Russian statesmen and Armenian clergy continued to pursue parallel aims.

Extending to the Russian empire the theoretical framework of what Stoler and Frederick Cooper have termed the “tensions of empire”—the contrast between what imperialism *sought* and what it *did*—I examine how the Armenian Church continued to collaborate with tsarist

¹Ann Laura Stoler, “On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006): 138.

authorities during the nadir of Russo-Armenian relations in the late nineteenth century.² The two sides joined forces to resist the encroachment of foreign Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the Caucasus and cooperated in other ways because Armenian ecclesiastical leaders recognized the need for Russia's protection from neighboring Muslim states. One of the contentions here is that while Armenians guarded their culture from Russification, the paramount need for physical security overshadowed such concerns. This circumstance explains the absence of a concerted secessionist current within the diverse Armenian nationalist movement of the 1880s and 1890s.

Thus this dissertation looks to explanations of empire, by Stoler, Cooper, Burbank, and others, that account for the complexity of relationships and identities that characterized imperial structures. Dominic Lieven's exposition matches the contours of this story, but it is not enough to explain the Russo-Armenian encounter. Lieven's streamlined definition of empire, and the Russian state of the nineteenth century in particular, describes it as "a very great power that has left its mark on the international relations of an era . . . a polity that rules over wide territories and many peoples . . . not a polity ruled with the explicit consent of its peoples."³ To be sure, by its own designation, the "All-Russian Empire" (*Vserossiiskaia imperiia*) was a polyethnic state that conquered territories beyond Russia proper and controlled millions of non-Russian and non-Slavic national groups from the Baltic and Black seas to the Pacific and Arctic oceans. Indeed, the very term for the Russian emperor—tsar—is a Russified derivative of that quintessential empire's ruler: the Roman Caesar.

²Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, "Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule," in *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 609-21.

³Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), xi.

Yet the Armenian experience with Russia demands more fluid interpretations of empire, which highlight the blurred lines between colonizer and colonized, metropole and periphery. For much of the nineteenth century, Armenians derived political, economic, and even cultural advantage from their association with Russia. For Armenians, and some other tsarist subjects, imperial rule meant not only subjugation and exploitation but also protection and promotion. When Khachatur Abovyan, the father of modern Armenian literature, declared in 1841, “Blessed be the hour when the blessed Russian foot stepped upon our holy Armenian land,” he was not simply pandering to his imperial masters.⁴ Although the theme of constructive and symbiotic imperial relationships has gained traction in historical studies of Russia and other empires,⁵ last century’s temptation to equate “empire” with oppression remains powerful. As Michael Reynolds has observed, only recently have we started to move away from a climate in which “the very word ‘empire’ became an almost universal word of opprobrium.”⁶

The circumstances of the Russian empire, including its contiguous structure that captured one-seventh of the planet’s landmass while contesting who qualified as *Russkie* and *Rossiane*,⁷ render it akin to the “imperial formations” described by Ann Stoler and Carole McGranham. Neither politically static nor socially rigid, “Imperial formations are polities of dislocation, processes of dispersion, appropriation, and displacement. They are dependent both on moving

⁴Khachatur Abovyan, *Rany Armenii* [Arm: *Verk Hayastani*] (Yerevan: Sovetakan grokh, 1977), 102.

⁵Alexei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: Russian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003); Paul Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9.

⁷This distinction refers to the political and ethnic categories of belonging in Russia. *Russkie* denotes members of the Russian nation, while *Rossiane* indicates inhabitants of the Russian state, irrespective of their ethnic or national identity.

categories and populations.”⁸ Such polities display “[g]radations of sovereignty and sliding scales of differentiation,” and “are not, as we once imagined them, based on fixed forms and secure relations of inequity: they produce unstable relationships of colonizer and colonized, of citizen to subject, and unequal struggles over the forms of inclusion and the principles of differentiation.”⁹ Armenians are not a unique exemplar of this circumstance in the Russian case: Robert Crews and others have shown how tsarist authorities relied on non-Russians and non-Slavs to administer and control the vast empire.¹⁰ To do so, the government coopted national elites and promoted the social and cultural standing of various groups, thus blurring the ostensibly fixed lines not only between imperial agents and subjects, but also between the dominant (i.e., Russian) and dominated nations. In promoting the Russian “imperium as a creative space,” Nicholas Breyfogle has underscored that “Russian/Soviet rule offered important opportunities and possibilities—not to mention resources—that could be used to push local agendas.”¹¹ This dissertation extends these foci to the Caucasus and Armenia, giving us a better understanding of historical and, by extension, contemporary Russo-Armenian ties that continue to influence everyday politics in the Caucasus.

⁸Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan, et al, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 8.

⁹Stoler, McGranahan, et al, eds., *Imperial Formations*, quotes from 9 and 12.

¹⁰Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹¹Nicholas Breyfogle, “Enduring Imperium: Russia/Soviet Union/Eurasia as Multiethnic, Multiconfessional Space,” in *Ab Imperio* 1 (2008): 100.

Historical Context

The Russo-Armenian encounter antedates by centuries the tsarist incorporation of Eastern Armenia in 1828. Divided between the Ottoman (Western) and Persian (Eastern) empires, Armenia lost its political independence in 1375. Since the mid-seventeenth century, Russo-Armenian relations developed around two axes: economic and ecumenical ties. Having become frequent visitors in Russian bazaars and trade posts, Armenians' real and mythologized economic prowess, as well as the value of the rare goods they carried from the Orient, earned them special status by the second half of the seventeenth century. In April 1667, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645-76), eager to take advantage of Persian Armenians' silk imports, included Armenians among ethnic groups permitted to trade at advantageous rates, often duty-free, in major Russian commercial centers, such as Astrakhan and Moscow.¹²

Under Peter the Great, Russia absorbed Armenians from abroad and sympathized with the first manifestations of an Armenian liberation movement. In 1701, the Russian emperor received Israel Ori, an envoy dispatched by Persian Armenians in hopes of securing a tsarist alliance against the shah. Peter granted the Armenian emissary the symbolic rank of colonel in the Russian army and promised to "extend his hand of assistance" toward the Armenians of Persia.¹³ Although Ori failed to deliver Eastern Armenians from the grasp of the shah, he inspired other young Armenians to look to the Russian empire for liberation. One of Ori's most ambitious successors, Joseph Emin, an Indian Armenian who had served in the British army, arrived in the South Caucasus decades later to rally Armenians and Georgians against Persia.

¹²*Sobranie aktov, odnosiaschikhsia k obozreniiu istorii Armianskogo naroda*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages Press, 1833), 3-4.

¹³*Sobranie aktov*, vol. 2, 289.

Russia codified its recruitment of Armenians from abroad in 1711, when the Governing Senate recommended that the state “increase Persian trade and court [*prilaskat*] Armenians as much as possible and ease their lot, in order to encourage them to arrive [in Russia] in large numbers.”¹⁴ In 1724 Peter issued sweeping economic privileges for Armenians settled throughout his realm, granting them exemptions from military service and other exclusive rights.¹⁵ Peter’s successors continued to grant economic privileges to Armenians in Russia. In 1746, Armenian merchants in Astrakhan, a strategically important commercial center in southern Russia, gained the right to trade tax-free and to establish their own court; in 1769, Astrakhan Armenians received the exclusive right to build seagoing vessels for trade in the Caspian Sea.¹⁶ Catherine the Great continued these policies, absorbing new Armenian subjects in 1779 by resettling Ottoman Armenians from Crimea to Nor Nakhichevan, a town on the Don River.¹⁷

Religious solidarity drove Russo-Armenian relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the adoption of Christianity by the two nations, in 301 by Armenians and 988 by Russians, the links between the Armenian Apostolic and the Russian Orthodox churches remained strong. These autocephalous national churches are members of Orthodox Christianity, with Russia part of the Eastern Orthodox branch and Armenia part of the Oriental Orthodox wing. Although close liturgical cousins, the two churches never entered into full communion and

¹⁴*Sobranie aktov*, vol. 1, 7 and 290.

¹⁵V. B. Barkhudarian, “Armianskiye kolonisty v Rossii i ikh rol’ v armiano-russkikh otnosheniakh,” in M. G. Nersisyan, ed., *Iz istorii vekovoi družby* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armianskoi SSR, 1983), 124-25.

¹⁶*Sobranie aktov*, vol. 1, 27, and Barkhudarian, “Armianskiye kolonisty v Rossii,” 126.

¹⁷George Bournoutian, “Eastern Armenia from the Seventeenth Century to the Russian Annexation” in Richard Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, volume 2. (New York: St. Martin’s, 2004), 91.

developed independently after members of Oriental Orthodoxy rejected the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Thus shared religion played at once a unifying and a divisive role between Russians and Armenians.

Religion acquired especially politicized implications for Russo-Ottoman relations as soon as the tsarist empire portrayed itself as the patron of Ottoman Christians. When Russia forced Turkey to sign the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardzhi in 1774, few contemporaries could have imagined the later reverberations of the accord's Article 7, which stipulated that the "Sublime Porte pledges to give the Christian faith and its churches firm protection and it grants the Ministers of the Russian Imperial Court [the right] to protect all interests" of Christians.¹⁸ As one of the largest Ottoman Christian subject groups, Armenians became not just an aspect of the nineteenth century's Eastern Question, but also a key part of Russia's answer to it.

Historiography

While Russian imperialism in the Caucasus attracted particularly wide attention among Anglophone historians after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several notable works emerged earlier in the twentieth century. The first serious English-language study, John Baddeley's *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, appeared in 1908. Baddeley focused on the military and political story of St. Petersburg's expansion, using Russian newspapers, periodicals, and other published sources. In a passage representative of the prose, Baddeley described General Aleksei Ermolov: "Of gigantic stature and uncommon physical strength, with round head set on mighty shoulders and framed in shaggy locks, there was something leonine in his whole appearance,

¹⁸Basil Dmytryshyn, ed. *Imperial Russia: A Source Book, 1700-1917* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Publishers, 1990), 109.

which, coupled with unsurpassed courage, was well calculated to excite the admiration of his own men and strike terror into his semi-barbarous foes.”¹⁹

World wars and revolutions delayed new scholarship on the Caucasus until David Marshall Lang began publishing in 1957, producing eight monographs on Georgian and Armenian history over the next decades. His first book, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy*, argued that Russia’s annexation of Georgia saved the tiny Christian nation from assured annihilation under the Persians.²⁰ Lang’s *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization*, which mainly focused on the prehistorical and premodern eras, was the first survey of Armenian history in English.²¹ Although Ronald Grigor Suny and Richard Hovannisian, two prominent Anglophone scholars of Armenia, began publishing in the 1980s, their most influential works came after 1991. In the meantime, Soviet scholars produced important histories.

Soviet scholarship on the Caucasus and Armenia often emphasized the historic solidarity between the Armenian and Russian peoples. Portraying Persian and Ottoman suzerainty over Armenians as wholly oppressive, Soviet scholars—mainly Armenians—presented the Russian conquest of Eastern Armenia in 1828 as the timely deliverance of a fellow Christian people, echoing the Stalinist trope of “friendship of the peoples.”²² Such narratives continued into the post-Stalinist era, reflected particularly in the surge in publications around the 150th anniversary

¹⁹John Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Longmans and Green, 1908), 94-95.

²⁰David Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658-1832* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

²¹David Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970).

²²Z. Grigorian, *Prisoedinenie Vostochnoi Armenii k Rossii v nachale XIX veka* (Moscow: Izd-vo sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959); G. M. Kazarian, ed., *Prisoedinenie Vostochnoi Armenii k Rossii i ego istoricheskoe znachenie: Sbornik statei* (Yerevan: Erevanskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1978).

of the 1828 annexation. For example, a commemorative volume published in Yerevan in 1978, *Druzhiba naveki (Eternal Friendship)*, tried to merge the “national-liberation struggle of the Armenian people” with the “revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat.”²³ Such texts sought to underscore the Marxist vision of a supranational proletarian movement that moved beyond bourgeois nationalisms on the path toward Communism.

S. A. Ter-Avakimova’s history of early-modern Russo-Armenian ties emphasized the deep efforts of Armenian ecclesiastical leaders to secure Russian patronage, highlighting in particular Israel Ori’s mission to Peter the Great.²⁴ A. M. Pogosian’s archival-based history of Kars province within the Russian empire underscored the correspondence of Western Armenian and tsarist interests.²⁵ V. G. Gukasian described the influence of the popular press on the Western Armenian nationalist movement.²⁶ Some Soviet historians infused Cold War tensions into their narratives, accusing Western powers of directly contributing to Russo-Muslim conflicts of the nineteenth century. B. P. Balaian argued that British and French diplomats pushed Persia and the Ottoman empire into wars with Russia to halt its advances into the Near East.²⁷

Glasnost’ and *perestroika* helped Soviet scholarship move away from ideologically driven histories of Russo-Armenian ties. V. G. Tunian’s history of Eastern Armenia provided a

²³*Druzhiba naveki: materialy prazdnovaniia 150-letiiia vkhozhdeniia Armenii v sostav Rossii* (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1980). See also M. G. Nersisian, ed., *Iz istorii vekovoi druzhby* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armianskoi SSR, 1983).

²⁴S. A. Ter-Avakimova, *Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v period podgotovki persidskogo pokhoda* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armianskoi SSR, 1980).

²⁵A. M. Pogosian, *Karsskaia oblast' v sostave Rossii* (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1983).

²⁶V. G. Gukasian, *Konstantinopol'skie armiane i natsional'no-prosvetitel'noe dvizhenie 30-60kh godakh XIX veka* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armianskoi SSR, 1989).

²⁷B. P. Balaian, *Diplomaticheskaiia istoriia russko-iranskikh vojn i prisoedineniia vostochnoi Armenii k Rossii* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armianskoi SSR, 1988).

sober, well-documented assessment of tsarist policies toward Armenia, even breaking with his predecessors by accusing tsarist Russia of suppressing Armenian dreams of independence.²⁸ Among late-Soviet era scholars of the Caucasus, few gained as much international recognition as D. I. Ismail-Zade, whose scholarship on the Russian colonization of the South Caucasus appeared in English translation in the early 1980s.²⁹ Ismail-Zade combined research in Soviet archives with published Western documents, such as the memoirs of French diplomats, to produce important studies of the Russian encounter with the South Caucasus.³⁰ Contemporary Russian scholarship has continued to produce well-researched narratives that utilize new archival sources. B. T. Ovanesov and N. D. Sudavtsov's coauthored volume represents the only comprehensive overview of Armenians' bureaucratic and military role in the Russian administration of the Caucasus in any language.³¹

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent opening of the archives for foreign researchers marked a watershed moment in Anglophone studies of the Russian empire, the Caucasus, and Armenia. Before Francine Hirsch identified the Soviet Union as an "Empire of Nations" and before Terry Martin illustrated the Bolsheviks' pursuit of a supranational state devoid of fracture-inducing ethnonationalisms, the emergence of "new" nation-states awakened

²⁸V. G. Tunian, *Vostochnaia Armeniia v sostave Rossii, 1828-1853 gg.* (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1989).

²⁹For one example, see D. I. Ismail-Zade, "Russian Settlements in the Transcaucasus from the 1830s to the 1880s," in Ethel Dunn and Stephen Dunn, eds., *The Molokan Heritage Collection*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

³⁰D. I. Ismail-Zade, *Naselenie gorodov Zakavkazskogo kraia v XIX-nachale XX v. Istoriko-demograficheskii analiz* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991).

³¹B. T. Ovanesov, N. D. Sudavtsov, *Voенно-administrativnaia deiatel'nost' armian v rossiiskoi imperii na kavkaze* (Stavropol: Nairi, 2008).

historians' attention to the multiethnic composition of the Russian and Soviet empires.³² Andreas Kappeler spurred the shift in imperial narratives from a metropole-centered, Orthodox tsarist state to a polyethnic and polyconfessional empire with multiple poles of power.³³ Kappeler prodded historians to consider the experiences of the diverse non-Russian subjects of the tsarist empire. His research traced the situational and fluid methods of Russian expansionism, from the acquiesced incorporation of Armenians and Georgians, to the military conquest of the North Caucasus, and the selective co-optation of elites in Central Asia.

Ronald G. Suny spearheaded the post-Soviet study of Russian imperial policies on the periphery with case studies, published in 1993 and 1994, of Armenians and Georgians (*Looking Toward Ararat* and *The Making of the Georgian Nation*).³⁴ He accented the Russian influence on the trajectory of Armenian and Georgian cultural and political thought, as well as their reciprocal effect on the metropole. He found that both nations accepted Russian absorption to escape Persian and Ottoman rule, and subsequently assimilated into the Russian bureaucracy and society, rising to prominent positions in military, cultural, academic, and economic spheres. Suny has focused particularly on the responses of Caucasian social classes to Russian imperialism, underscoring the distinct combinations of advantages and disadvantages experienced by various social groups. Suny's work has been groundbreaking in many ways, providing some of the first surveys of Georgian and Armenian history since David Lang's

³²Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Creation of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), and Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

³³Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³⁴Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), and Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

publications in the mid-twentieth century. Yet *Looking Toward Ararat* and *The Making of the Georgian Nation* were written during the turmoil of the Soviet collapse, limiting Suny's fieldwork in relevant archives.

Over the past fifteen years, American scholars have taken advantage of unfettered archival access to publish case studies of the Russian experience in the Caucasus, limiting their topics in chronology or thematic scope to produce detailed accounts. Austin Jersild studied the North Caucasus highlanders (*gortsy*) and their Georgian neighbors to the south.³⁵ Relying on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Jersild argued that the imperial project in the Caucasus required the "othering" of the locals in the Russian imperial imagination. Not only did Jersild demonstrate how the state legitimized its imperial project (and itself) through the creation of "us" and "them" discursive categories, but he also argued that Georgia represented a "closer" center/periphery relationship than that between the North Caucasus and St. Petersburg. Nicholas Breyfogle followed up Jersild's study by illustrating the colonization of the South Caucasus by Russian non-Orthodox dissenters.³⁶ *Heretics and Colonizers* emphasized the evolution of imperial methods: while St. Petersburg was quick to expel the sectarians into the Caucasus to stave off their influence within Russia, the government took advantage of the dissidents' unexpected success in the region and employed them to disseminate Russian cultural and political clout.

The research of Richard Hovannisian, professor emeritus of Armenian history at UCLA, has done much to introduce Anglophone audiences to broad surveys of Armenian history. In addition to work on the Armenian Genocide, Hovannisian has written or edited multivolume

³⁵Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain People and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

³⁶Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

metahistories of Armenians.³⁷ These syntheses have focused on the Armenian response to external political and cultural influences, highlighting the evolution of Western Armenian national identities. A protégé of Hovannisian's, George Bournoutian, has complemented his mentor's scholarship by producing several case studies of Eastern Armenian history. One of his most influential works remains his revised doctoral dissertation, *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of Persian Rule*, which argued that Persian rule in Yerevan in the early nineteenth century was not as oppressive as often assumed.³⁸ Most recently, broad syntheses by Charles King and Thomas de Waal have provided surveys of Caucasian history.³⁹ Although these works utilize little archival material and treat the various national groups of the Caucasus in unison, they provide valuable introductions to Anglophone public audiences.

Methodology and Sources

Historian Robert Geraci has rightly lamented that “in the many works published on the imperial dimension of Russian history during the past decade, it is often the mechanical or ‘nuts and bolts’ aspects of the empire’s administration that are least discussed.”⁴⁰ In recognizing this neglect, this dissertation marshals archival sources to examine closely several key themes that shaped Russia’s approach toward Armenia, such as religion, economics, and state policy. This is a one-sided story of tsarist methods of rule, with the vast majority of sources Russian. I

³⁷*The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971-96); *The Armenian Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Armenian Heritage Press, 1980); ed., *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); ed., *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

³⁸George A. Bournoutian, *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of Persian Rule, 1807-1828* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1982).

³⁹Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰Robert Geraci, “On ‘Colonial’ Forms and Functions,” in *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 180.

conducted fieldwork in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Russia; Yerevan, Armenia; and Washington, D.C. To analyze “matters of practical functionality” and the way tsarist officialdom perceived and engaged with Armenians, I use state and regional correspondence, bureaucratic reports, decrees, petitions, popular newspapers, and other sources.

In St. Petersburg, I worked in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), and two branches of the Russian National Library. RGIA contains the records of the Lazarev family (f. 880), the Caucasus Committee (f. 1268), the Interior Ministry Department of Foreign Faiths (f. 821), and other relevant collections. The Lazarev files illustrate the extent of that family’s efforts to promote Armenian interests within tsarist society. From establishing churches and academies to petitioning government officials and mediating between the Armenian Church and the tsarist state, the Lazarevs played a crucial role in Russo-Armenian ties in the nineteenth century. The files of the Caucasus Committee reveal the parallel interests between the Russian state and the Armenian Church during the nadir in Russo-Armenian relations in the late nineteenth century, when state officials closed Armenian parish schools and imprisoned clergy. Despite such obstacles, the two sides continued to cooperate to stave off the encroachment of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in eastern Anatolia and the South Caucasus. The records of the Caucasus Committee also shed light on the evolution of Armenians’ economic position in several southern Russian cities. From negotiating their tax obligations to petitioning for the renewal of exclusive economic privileges, Russian Armenians sought permanent economic rights within Russian society. Senior tsarist officials debated and often disagreed, as Tsar Alexander I phrased it in 1825, “whether it is fair to grant immigrants *eternal* advantages over native Russians.”⁴¹

⁴¹Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 1152, op. 1, d. 77, l. 38ob. Emphasis in the original.

In St. Petersburg's Russian National Library, I used the three-volume *Sobranie aktov, otnosiashchikhsia k obozreniiu armianskogo naroda* (Collection of Documents Pertaining to the Review of the Armenian People) to explore early Armenian immigration and settlement in such Russian cities as Moscow, Astrakhan, and Rostov. These communities became important hubs of Armenian life in Russian space, eliciting different responses from regional and state authorities. Additionally, the diary of Mikhail Vorontsov, the Caucasus viceroy at mid-century, provides a more detailed view of the local Russian administration than official documents from the archives. The newspaper department of the Russian National Library contains important St. Petersburg dailies, such as the newspaper *Golos* (The Voice), which in the late 1870s published recurring front-page articles in support of Ottoman Armenians. I use *Golos* to illustrate the non-official, liberal Russian perspective upon the Eastern Question and popular Russian views of the transimperial Armenian diaspora.

In Moscow, I worked in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Military History Archive (RGVIA), the Central Historical Archive of Moscow (TsIAM), and the Russian State Library. GARF houses the records of the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery, the secret imperial police active from 1826 through 1880 (f. 109), and the files of its successor, the Department of Police of the Interior Ministry, or *Okhranka* (f. 102). These collections provide an intimate view of the state's pursuit of Armenian nationalists, and also demonstrated the mechanisms of imperial nationalities policy. Letters and investigative reports elucidate not only Russian officials' response to the real and imagined threat of Armenian nationalism, but also the diversity—in terms of social and class composition, as well as divergent aims—of the Armenian groups.

RGVIA contains the records for the two Russo-Persian wars of the early nineteenth century. During the first war in 1804-13, Armenians, then Persian subjects, sympathized with Russian expansion, seeing in their northern Christian neighbor a defender against Persian excesses (f. 475). I retrieved multiple reports, orders, and correspondence pertaining to Russian Generals Tsitsianov, Ermolov, and Paskevich, who relied on Armenians in their conquest of Persian territories. During the second Russo-Persian war, in 1826-28, when Russia finally wrested Armenian-populated Yerevan khanate from Persia, Armenians played a prominent role in the Russian war effort, volunteering for military service and providing intelligence (f. 476). This depository also houses the records for the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, as well as files for the Russian administration of Kars province (f. 485 and f. 15322).

TsIAM houses documents pertaining to the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow (f. 213). Established in 1815 as the Lazarev Armenian Academy by Russian statesmen and entrepreneurs of Armenian heritage, this institution became an important center of Eastern language and culture training in imperial Russia. The institute trained many Russian specialists of Orientology (*vostokovedenie*) and related languages, including Armenian.

The Russian State Library in Moscow and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. hold the twelve-volume *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Kommissieiu* (Documents Collected by the Caucasus Archeographical Commission). This rare published collection of primary sources contains thousands of official correspondence, royal decrees, orders, and petitions, regarding the Russian administration of its Caucasus territories. An academic-bureaucratic entity, the Caucasus Archeographical Commission assembled the records of the local administration and studied Russian-native interactions, facilitating a closer understanding of the relationships characterizing St. Petersburg's project in the Caucasus.

In Yerevan, the National Archive of Armenia (NAA) contains the files of the Russian administration: *Armianskaia oblast'* (f. 90) and *Yerevan guberniia* (f. 94). These records illustrate Russian efforts to relocate Armenians from the Ottoman empire and Persia into the newly annexed territories of the South Caucasus. Although some of this material is at RGVIA, NAA holds detailed files pertaining to the resettlement of Armenian refugees after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78. Some of the statistical data at NAA is more detailed than the records from Moscow and Petersburg, and is especially useful for illustrating tsarist policies vis-à-vis Armenian immigrants and local Muslims, shedding light on the political and economic incentives for such large-scale population transfers.

Chapter Overview

Claiming the Caucasus comprises five chronologically arranged chapters. I begin my narrative in 1801, when Russia entered the interimperial politics of the South Caucasus by annexing from Persia the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakhetia. The dissertation concludes with the death of Tsar Alexander III in 1894, by which date Russian officials had made the crucial decision to resist the immigration of Ottoman Armenians into tsarist territory, the policy that dominated until the Bolshevik Revolution.

In chapter 1, I advance several interrelated points. First, I argue that mutual distrust hindered early Russo-Georgian and Armeno-Georgian ties. Second, this chapter illustrates the systematic Armenian cooperation with Russian imperial aims during and after the Russo-Persian war. Third, this chapter examines the tsarist state's approach toward the Armenian Church and its head, the Catholicos. Although the government prioritized the election of a pro-Russian Catholicos, it sought to merge its political interests with Armenian desires. Indeed, this chapter shows that Russians needed Armenians as much as Armenians needed Russians.

In chapter 2, I demonstrate how and why the Russian state recruited and distrusted Armenians from abroad, and also promoted and restrained their commerce in southern Russia, illustrating the evolution of a multifaceted project that resists traditional labels of “colonial expansion” or “economic exploitation.” I contrast the Armenian resettlement into Russia with the acrimony resulting from Armenians’ growing economic position in imperial society.

In the third chapter, I focus on the religious and economic aspects of Russo-Armenian ties under Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55). This chapter examines how, and why, the state codified the rights and activities of the Armenian Church in 1836 and argues that in considering Armenian legal status in Russia, the government often prioritized geopolitical aims beyond Russia’s frontiers, eager to utilize the diaspora for its political goals. Officials struggled to reconcile the demands of a well-regulated country with the special circumstances of such imperial minorities as Armenians.

In chapter 4, I consider Russo-Armenian relations within the broader context of the Eastern Question. This chapter demonstrates how Armenians were key to tsarist foreign policy in the East in general and to the Eastern Question in particular. Because St. Petersburg ruled over only a portion of the Armenian diaspora, a large proportion of which resided in the Ottoman empire, it had to contend with a unique set of political circumstances.

The final chapter examines the rise of a diverse Armenian nationalist movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It also assesses the political responses of Russian officials in St. Petersburg and in the Caucasus to the illicit raids of Eastern Armenians into Anatolia. More broadly, this analysis illuminates the tensions between the integrating forces of ecumenical solidarity and the alienating forces of nationalist discord, which defined Russo-Armenian interactions for much of the nineteenth century.

Terms and Dates

Owing to the historical distribution of Armenians across Eurasia, distinguishing them according to their political affiliations results in multiple labels. To denote Armenian subjects of the Russian tsar, I use “tsarist Armenians,” “Russian Armenians,” and “Eastern Armenians.” Those outside Russia are described either as “foreign Armenians,” or according to their imperial overlord, such as “Ottoman” or “Western Armenians,” and “Persian Armenians.” I opt for the neutral “South Caucasus” rather than the Russian-inspired “Transcaucasus” (*Zakavkaz’ e*). Unless otherwise noted, I use “Patriarch” and “Catholicos” interchangeably to refer to the leader of the Armenian Church based in Echmiadzin. To avoid confusion, I use the modern “Yerevan” for the capital of Eastern Armenia, rather than the “Erivan” [Эривань] of pre-1936 Russian sources. All dates are given according to the Julian calendar used in imperial Russia. Russian and Armenian words are transliterated according to the modified Library of Congress system.



Figure 1. Monument to Russian-Armenian Friendship in Yerevan.
Photo property of the author.

CHAPTER 1: THE EMBRACE OF AN EMPIRE, 1801-1814

“Better to have allies interested in an alliance than unreliable subjects.”

-Tsar Paul, 1801

“From ancient times the Armenian nation has awaited liberation from the yoke of its merciless rulers. At last the coveted hour has arrived under the scepter of the august northern monarch.”

-Armenians of Baku, 1809

In the early nineteenth century, the expanding Russian empire searched for non-Russian allies. In the first fourteen years of that century, Tsar Alexander I (1801-25) annexed the Georgian kingdom of Kartli Kakhetia, defeated the shah in the First Russo-Persian War (1804-13), and incorporated new Armenian subjects into his realm. This chapter tracks these developments to advance three aims. First, I argue that mutual distrust hindered early Russo-Georgian and Armeno-Georgian ties. This strife manifested especially among Georgian elites, including members of the dethroned royal family, and the increasingly powerless Georgian nobles. Second, this chapter illustrates the systematic Armenian cooperation with Russian imperial goals during and after the Russo-Persian war. Armenians served not only as tsarist spies, messengers, and negotiators, but also became the frontiersmen of Russian expansion into the region, settling newly conquered territories. Third, this chapter examines the tsarist state’s approach toward the Armenian Church and its head, the patriarch or Catholicos, the ecclesiastical and often political leader of the stateless Armenians. Although the government prioritized the election of a pro-Russian Catholicos, it sought to merge its political interests with

Armenian desires. Indeed, this chapter shows that Russians needed Armenians as much as Armenians needed Russians. Driven by ecumenical solidarity, Armenian peasants, clergymen, and nobles defected from the shah's khanates to the tsar's provinces in search of security and prosperity, while Russian generals and administrators recruited Armenian spies, settlers, and translators to advance tsarist political objectives.

Tsarist authorities chose Armenians as their key diplomatic and military ally because of their diasporic distribution along not only social and economic lines but also across imperial borders. While Georgians possessed a large aristocracy with sizable resources at its disposal, Russian statesmen sought to capitalize on Armenian commercial and religious networks that penetrated countries and societies inaccessible to Russian agents. Indeed, Russia's borders with Persia and Turkey, effectively impenetrable to Russian and even Georgian elements, remained porous to Armenian merchants and priests. Beyond the Caucasus, too, the potential political advantages of the Armenian diaspora informed Russian foreign policy.

Russia's methods in annexing the South Caucasus blended the settler colonialism of an external intruder with the indirect rule of an indigenously administered dependent. More specifically, as this chapter demonstrates, Armenians at once *colonized* and *were colonized* in the South Caucasus during the first two decades of the tsarist absorption of the region. Armenians blurred the traditional colonizer/colonized binary by becoming both the agents and the subjects of imperial expansion. They joined the Russian bureaucracy and army, attended elite institutions in St. Petersburg and commanded (Russian) troops in the Caucasus. At the same time, scores of new Armenian refugees and immigrants from Persian khanates, such as Yerevan, gravitated toward life in the tsar's dominion, not only settling recently annexed territories but also fighting alongside tsarist forces and supplying them with intelligence.

In their initial forays into the politics of the South Caucasus, tsarist imperial agents defined Armenians as ethnically distinct “Orientals.” Armenians’ brand of Christianity may have been a close dogmatic cousin of their new overlords’ religion and a co-member of Orthodox Christianity,⁴² but that did not keep it from being lumped together with Islam and Judaism as a “foreign confession” (*innostrannoe ispovedanie*).⁴³ Russian statesmen concurrently delineated culturally between the Great Russian nation and Armenians, and distinguished politically between Armenians and the ostensibly less reliable Georgians and other regional natives.

Thus Armenians resisted the traditional characteristics of assigned otherness by challenging Russian officials to redefine and maintain their difference. To be sure, St. Petersburg’s incorporation of the South Caucasus in the early nineteenth century produced a space of increasingly unclear divisions. Many prominent tsarist officials tasked with expanding and securing new frontiers were non-Russians, reflecting both Alexander I’s cosmopolitanism and the realities of empire-building. Such generals and administrators as the Baltic German Karl Heinrich Knorring, the Italian Philip Paulucci, the Georgian Pavel Tsitsianov (Tsitsishvili), and the Armenian Ivan Petrovich Lazarev (Lazarian) are but the most famous examples. Their superiors in the imperial metropole, too, included powerful non-Russian officials, such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Karl Nesselrode, a Baltic German. Thus to speak of “Russian imperialism” in “Eastern Armenia” in the early nineteenth century is to speak of a complex

⁴²Orthodox Christianity is divided into two branches: the Eastern Orthodox Church (which includes Russia), and the Oriental Orthodox Church (which includes Armenia).

⁴³For a recent analysis of Russia’s heterodox subjects and their political role in the Russian empire, see Paul Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

dialogue that involved not only some tsarist imperialists who were not Russians at all, but also imperial agents and subjects who often belonged to the same ethnic and national group.

Early Armeno-Georgian and Russo-Georgian Strife

To understand Russo-Armenian ties in the early nineteenth century, an analysis of contemporaneous South Caucasian political and social developments is necessary. Because of Georgians' numerical and political importance in the region, we must examine Armeno-Georgian and Russo-Georgian relations during and after St. Petersburg's annexation of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli Kakhetia in 1801. While it is tempting to see Georgia as a precursor to the Armenian case, significant contrasts marked their respective encounters with the tsarist state. True, both of these Christian nations sought Russian refuge from imminent Persian and Ottoman threats. However, Georgian elites objected to the methods of tsarist annexation and hesitated to accept their new imperial overlord. Additionally, Armeno-Georgian social and cultural strife not only estranged these neighbors but also informed Russian understandings of the two nations. Armenians and Georgians, the two largest and most prominent representatives of Christianity in the Caucasus, shared deep cultural ties since the premodern era yet tensions between the two nations defined the nineteenth century and continue to influence contemporary regional politics. "To the outsider," Thomas de Waal has observed, "one of the mysteries of the Caucasus is why the relationship between Armenians and the Georgians, two old Christian nations, is frequently fraught and suspicious."⁴⁴

The roots of this discord reach into antiquity. Georgian King Mirian III adopted Christianity around 330, just a few decades after his Armenian counterpart's conversion in 301. Their faith became a sacrosanct cornerstone of Georgian and Armenian national identities, linked

⁴⁴Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

by their perennial tensions with neighboring Muslims. But, as early as the fifth century, the two national churches chose separate paths. Because of doctrinal disagreements over the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Georgian Orthodox Church looked toward Byzantium and Eastern Orthodoxy, while the Armenian Apostolic Church aligned itself with the Oriental Orthodox branch of Christianity. Consequently, as De Waal notes, “the Armenian and Georgian churches traded anathemas, and the Armenian catholicos forbade Armenians to communicate with, eat with, pray with, or marry Georgians.”⁴⁵

In the modern era, social and economic factors divided Armenians and Georgians more than theology. From the late Middle Ages and well into the nineteenth century, Armenians, Muslims, and other foreigners outnumbered Georgians in Georgian towns.⁴⁶ Fleeing Seljuk advances and the Byzantine conquest of Ani, the short-lived Armenian city-state (961-1045) in 1045, Armenian nobles and their peasants found asylum in Georgian towns, especially Tiflis. Georgian kings ascribed to them the role of urban traders, a vocation in which Armenians soon excelled, engaging in regional and long-distance trade. By the turn of the nineteenth century, outsiders and locals alike concurred that among the Georgian capital’s population, “the group that truly stood out in the economic and administrative life of the city was the Armenians.”⁴⁷ This reputation of Armenians as the merchants of the Caucasus endured for the rest of the century. By contrast, as historian Ronald G. Suny has observed, Georgians relied on an agrarian

⁴⁵De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 21.

⁴⁶Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, second edition, 1994), 38.

⁴⁷Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 147.

economy in the countryside that sought to satisfy local needs without producing surplus for resale and trade.⁴⁸

Lopsided national proportions of the Tiflis population contributed to Armeno-Georgian tensions. By some estimates, the Armenian domination of Tiflis amounted to three-fourths of the city's population when Russia annexed Kartli Kakhetia in 1801.⁴⁹ Armenians reigned over the city's bazaars and moneylending sector, accruing not only financial gain but also the attendant social and political leverage. Some of the first tsarist officials to arrive in Tiflis reported to St. Petersburg that "the Armenians control most of the trade here."⁵⁰ A decade later, one of the tsarist commanders of the Caucasus remarked that in Tiflis "the merchantry is comprised almost exclusively of Armenians."⁵¹ Georgian nobles and peasants, more at ease with the seigniorial economy of the early modern era than the mercantile practices of urban retailers, disdained the Armenians who dominated the Georgian capital and other towns. One indignant Georgian noble, Prince Iese Baratashvili, derided Armenians for their lack of aristocratic pedigree and for their diasporic distribution, "Where do Armenians possess nobility? They have been dispersed by God! Is it in Man's power to reunite them?"⁵²

Visitors to Georgia from Russia and the west often noted the ostensibly "indolent" work ethic of Georgians, although such observations often tell us more about the authors than their

⁴⁸Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 77.

⁴⁹King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 147-148.

⁵⁰Quoted in Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 37.

⁵¹Philip Paulucci, quoted in D. I. Ismail-Zade, *Naselenie gorodov Zakavkazskogo kraia v XIX-nachale XX v. Istoriko-demograficheskii analiz* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 130.

⁵²Quoted in Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 38.

subjects. To be sure, as Suny has stressed, “consistently distressed by the Georgians’ attitude toward work, economy, and self-employment, noble officers from the north or travelers from the West found their explanations in racial, climatic, or educational factors.”⁵³ English writer and diplomat Robert Ker Porter, for example, upon visiting Tiflis in 1817, remarked that “the Armenians set a stimulating example of the ways and means of industry, and show many persuasive advantages, resulting from their extensive exercise,” a trend that he hoped would “inspire” Georgians.⁵⁴ Moreover, arriving Russian agents expressed surprise at the degree to which Georgian elites had retreated from the economic and social life of Tiflis, Gori and other cities, apparently contented with age-old arrangements of enserfed labor and wanting little to do with trade and industry. Thus the image of Georgians as economically backward and socially isolated began to solidify in the political imagination of early Russian imperial agents.

Yet aristocratic Russian officers often found more in common with the Georgian noblemen of the countryside than the Armenian merchants of the towns. Based on “shared values of military bravery, chivalry, and a love of grace and largess,” tsarist elites welcomed the few Georgian nobles who joined the Russian service.⁵⁵ However, at the same time as Russian administrators faulted Armenians for what they perceived as avarice, their eagerness to animate regional commerce necessitated the Russian reliance on the Armenian bourgeoisie and its commercial networks. Armenians, therefore, gradually earned the reputation of “diligent” natives, juxtaposed by Russian observers against their supposedly less-ambitious Georgian

⁵³Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 77.

⁵⁴Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821), 133.

⁵⁵Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 38.

neighbors. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that tsarist officials, despite residual distrust of Armenian entrepreneurship, looked to Armenians as their more capable indigenous ally in the Caucasus.

Economic competition and social strife defined Armeno-Georgian relations at the turn of the nineteenth century. Georgians were not only in the minority in Tiflis, but also felt increasingly marginalized in the city's commercial culture. The combination of theological, national, economic, and social differences between Armenians and Georgians fueled a "smoldering hostility" between the two groups and also precipitated distinct Russian understandings of those two nations and their roles in the tsarist expansion into the South Caucasus. Russia's seizure of Tiflis in 1801 exacerbated old tensions and created new ones.

The tsarist annexation of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli Kakhetia does not need retelling.⁵⁶ What is important for our purposes is an overview of the Russo-Georgian discord caused by the manner of the Russian incorporation of Georgia. Although between 1795 and 1801 Persia redoubled its efforts to bring Kartli Kakhetia to heel and to reestablish a vassal state relationship, no more attacks followed after 1795, and King Erekle II remained on the throne until his death in 1798. Despite the fact that in 1795, during the Persian assault of Tiflis, the 1783 agreement with the Russian empire had proved tragically insufficient against Persian aggression, Georgian elites sought deeper ties to their northern neighbor. In September 1799, Erekle's successor, Giorgii XII (1798-1800), personally petitioned Tsar Paul I (1796-1801) for the Kartli Kakheti kingdom to become part of the tsarist empire "on the same footing as the other provinces

⁵⁶For some overviews, see Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, especially 63-64. Also King, *The Ghost of Freedom*; and de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*.

of Russia.”⁵⁷ Giorgii likely understood this as legal protection of his territory’s status within Russia concurrent with the continuation of his reign over Georgia. In return for fusing his nation to Russia, Giorgii asked that the Bagrationi family remain on the Georgian throne and that the Georgian nobility be absorbed into the Russian system of ranks.

Even before Giorgii’s petition, Paul looked to project his empire’s authority into Kartli Kahetia. In April 1799, a special “minister” in Georgia was chosen, State Councilor Petr Kovalenskii. Citing the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk as legal precedent, Paul dispatched this envoy to the Georgian court to represent Russia’s interests, protect economic links, and to gather intelligence.⁵⁸ A specific objective, however, concerns us here.

In a development that would soon become state policy, the tsarist government tasked Kovalenskii with enabling the arrival of Armenians from abroad in the South Caucasus. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MID) instructed him to facilitate the resettlement of several Armenian communities, per their wishes, from such nearby Persian khanates as Karabakh into Kartli Kakhetia.⁵⁹ Kovalenskii was to secure favorable land grants from King Giorgii for the use of these hereditary Armenian nobles, or *meliks*, and their communities. Tsar Paul, who wished to see “this new Christian community in Georgia prosper as much as possible,” was convinced that the influx of Persian Armenians would only benefit the Georgian kingdom. He impressed on Kovalenskii the importance of securing from Giorgii land grants for Armenians “on as favorable terms as possible,” and emphasized that these new Armenian communities

⁵⁷Quoted in King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 28.

⁵⁸*Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Kommissieiu* (hereafter *AKAK*) (Tiflis: Glavnoe upravlenie namestnika kavkazskogo, 1866, vol. I), 93-96.

⁵⁹*AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 94-95 and 635-36.

should “not be a kind of vassals” of the Georgian king, although they were expected to pay “moderate” tribute and do their share to protect the region from external attack. “In any case,” concluded the MID’s instructions to Kovalenskii, “you will have no trouble in making the Georgian tsar understand how beneficial for him can be the settlement of various Christian communities in those areas, where [they can] counteract the activity of Muslims, so harmful and ruinous to Christian peoples.”⁶⁰

Tsar Paul drove home the point himself by asking the Georgian king in June 1799 to “grant the requested land for them, give them the freedom and privileges proper for guests, and maintain all of the rights and advantages over their Armenian subjects [i.e., peasants] that they enjoyed in their former homelands, never depriving them of this rightful authority, as long as they stay loyal and diligent.”⁶¹ Giorgii acquiesced, presenting to one of the Armenian *meliks*, Dzhimshid Shakhnazarov, the stately Lori fortress and the territory surrounding it, with control over the area’s non-Armenian peasants.

King Giorgii had every reason to accept Kovalenskii’s arrival in hopes that a repeat of the 1795 attack would be impossible with St. Petersburg’s new attention toward his kingdom.⁶² But the tsarist diplomat’s presence alone was insufficient guarantee of security for Giorgii, who continued to lobby for Russian troops to be stationed in his kingdom as a redoubt against Persian invasion. Anticipation of an impending Persian attack grew in 1800, as repetitive reports of

⁶⁰AKAK, vol. I (1866), 95.

⁶¹AKAK, vol. I (1866), 636.

⁶² Indeed, Giorgii initially embraced Kovalenskii’s appointment to Tiflis. The Russian envoy sent a gushing report a few months after his arrival, also boasting of his influence over the Georgian monarch: “I cannot praise enough the welcome, affection, and zeal that [King Giorgii] has demonstrated to me and our people; his sincere loyalty to us is evident in all his actions. He has come to love me as a son and a friend, accepting all my suggestions as holy.” See AKAK, vol. I (1866), 99.

gathering Persian forces inundated Georgian and Russian officials.⁶³ Yet the tsarist empire's newfound dedication to Georgia's security *vis-à-vis* Persia had to be balanced with a desire to expand economic ties between the two empires.

In late 1799 Tsar Paul consented to Giorgii's requests for military protection, dispatching two small forces. General Karl Heinrich Knorring, a Baltic German, led the first group, while General Ivan Petrovich Lazarev, an ethnic Armenian born in Russia, marched another contingent of soldiers into Tiflis. But the Georgian king grew increasingly frustrated by what he saw as Russia's inadequate military assistance, imploring Knorring to double the size of the Russian contingent from 3,000 to 6,000 men.⁶⁴ Indeed, the Persian threat to Kartli Kakhelia had risen to new levels in the summer of 1800. In July, Abbas-Mirza, son of Shah Baba Khan, encamped his army at Yerevan, a short distance from the Georgian capital. Abbas Mirza demanded that Giorgii send his eldest son to Tehran as a sign of his continued loyalty.⁶⁵ As the first year of the nineteenth century drew to a close, these tensions in the Russo-Georgian encounter swelled.

Giorgii was not alone in his growing frustration with the kingdom's geopolitical situation. Questions of royal succession began to crescendo as it became clear that Giorgii intended to fuse the kingdom to Russia. The fleeing of Giorgii's half-brother, Alexander, from Kartli Kakhelia evinced this anxiety. Alexander had long opposed Giorgii's orientation toward Russia's orbit and found an eager welcome from neighboring khans. Alexander represented a simmering Georgian elite that grew wary of Giorgii's policies, fearing the loss of its authority and wealth. His protracted anti-Russian rebellion, stretching over a decade and backed not only

⁶³Russian State Military Historical Archive (hereafter RGVIA), f. 482, op. 1, d. 6, l. 2.

⁶⁴*AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 144-47.

⁶⁵*AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 132.

by some Persian khans but also by various North Caucasian tribes, would drive a wedge between Russo-Georgian ties of the early nineteenth century. Alexander's first strike came in November 1800, when he and Omar Khan, the ruler of Dagestani Avars, launched a unified attack. A joint Russian-Georgian army that enjoyed the advantage of artillery, however, repelled the assault.⁶⁶

Alexander's abortive attempt to expel Russians from Kartli Kakhetia not only failed, but also directly precipitated the final act of the tsarist empire's annexation of Georgia. Just eight days after the battle, on 15 November 1800, Tsar Paul informed General Knorring that King Giorgii, "seeing his kingdom threatened by external foes as much as, and perhaps more, by the growing internecine war within his own family over succession to the throne, has ordered his embassy to declare to me his wish to see Georgian lands in our direct subjecthood [*poddanstvo*]."⁶⁷ Paul was not exaggerating. Under Giorgii's orders, the Georgian legation in St. Petersburg had declared to the Russian court: "King Giorgii of Georgia, . . . dignitaries, the clergy, and the people, unanimously wish to enter forever into the subjecthood of the Russian empire, solemnly pledging to carry out all that, which Russian subjects carry out, without avoiding any laws or commands."⁶⁸ In January 1801, a month after the Georgian monarch's death, and just two months before his own murder at the hands of palace conspirators, the tsar signed a decree establishing Georgia as part of the Romanov empire.

Paul's successor, Alexander I, confirmed his father's last foreign policy decision, but chose to dethrone the Georgian royal family, contradicting the agreement his father had reached with the Bagrationi family. Despite the outcry of Georgian nobles, Alexander claimed the

⁶⁶AKAK, vol. I (1866), 168.

⁶⁷AKAK, vol. I (1866), 177-78.

⁶⁸AKAK, vol. I (1866), 179.

decision was not calculated to “increase my powers, secure profit, nor enlarge the boundaries of an already vast empire,” but rather was intended to “establish in Georgia a government that can maintain justice, ensure the security of persons and of property, and give to everyone the protection of law.”⁶⁹ Suny has argued that Alexander “decided that Russia’s interests and Georgia’s future could best be guaranteed by outright incorporation into the empire.”⁷⁰ Few sources survive to illustrate more precise reasoning for Alexander’s reversal of his father’s agreement, but imperial events in a different corner of the world may shed light here.

The Russian autocracy closely watched Napoleon’s invasion of Ottoman-administered Egypt in 1798, hostile to both empires’ expansionist ambitions.⁷¹ With the tide of war having turned decidedly to the Ottoman side by early 1801, Russia saw a renewed threat from the sultan’s empire. It is fair to interpret Alexander’s decision regarding Georgia, made almost concurrently with the French defeat in Egypt, as calculated to secure Russia’s borders with the Sublime Porte. The Bagrationi dynasty, weakened as it was by internal havoc as well as neighboring *gortsy*, khans, and the shah, was likely to become a liability in the event of a new Russo-Ottoman showdown. With the Georgian royal family forcefully removed to Russia, the ancient Bagrationi lineage—for centuries the steadfast political representative of the Georgian nation—ceased to exist as a political entity.

⁶⁹AKAK, vol. I (1866), 433.

⁷⁰Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 59. Suny does not explain Alexander’s decision beyond this statement.

⁷¹See Juan Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). French imperialism was of such concern to Paul that in 1798 he formed a shaky alliance with the Porte against Napoleon.

Capitalizing on his gains and emboldened by Persian inaction, the young tsar set his sights on further expansion, instructing his ministers in March 1802 that all territory north of the Kura and Arax rivers must be conquered.⁷² Responding to complaints about Knorring and unsatisfied with the general's "weak" command of the Georgian situation, Alexander removed him from command in the fall of 1802.⁷³ Perhaps seeking to smooth the tumultuous relationship with Georgian elites who continued to resist the unilateral annexation of their kingdom, Alexander appointed General Pavel Tsitsianov as High Commissioner (*glavnoupravliaiushchii*) of Georgia.⁷⁴ A Russian-educated Georgian with an impressive military record, the general took up the tsar's task with alacrity. Although his tenure at the helm of the Caucasus administration would last less than three and a half years—cut short by his death at the siege of Baku in 1806—Tsitsianov's influence on Russo-Georgian and broader Russo-Caucasian narratives cannot be underestimated. Tsitsianov was Russia's first Caucasus commander to be granted both military and civilian jurisdiction, eventually taking over the responsibilities previously carried out by Knorring and Kovalenskii, respectively. The reasons for such a promotion are important.

Knorring's dismissal stemmed from the tsar's general "dissatisfaction" with his performance, but the practically unknown story of Kovalenskii's demotion deserves attention for the insight it provides into the gestation of early Russian knowledge about the South Caucasus and its inhabitants.⁷⁵ While the roots of the problem stemmed from the envoy's personal

⁷²By north of the Kura he probably referred to the still-unconquered North Caucasus, and by north of the Arax he targeted Persian-held Eastern Armenia. See de Waal, *The Caucasus*, 39.

⁷³*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), iii and 3.

⁷⁴Some authors, such as King, 85, translate *glavnoupravliaiushchii* as "chief administrator."

⁷⁵Alexander complained about Knorring's excessive caution and indecision, although few sources survive to illustrate this development in detail. See *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 3.

arrogance vis-à-vis his Russian colleagues and Georgian counterparts, the wider tensions he caused in Russo-Georgian ties reverberated deeply. Essentially, Kovalenskii ignored the *de rigueur* observances of diplomatic protocol, seemingly trivial actions that in practice produced animosity between the Russian administration and the Georgian elite. From the beginning, he displayed insufficient deference toward the Georgian king, failing to report to him immediately upon arrival in Tiflis and repeatedly declined the king's dinner invitations, citing ill health, but sending in his stead low-ranking representatives. He also demanded that custom-built armchairs be provided for his audience with the Georgian monarch, which he moved so close to the king during their meeting that their feet touched, a gross breach of etiquette.⁷⁶ In putting an end to Kovalenskii's debauchery, Tsitsianov scolded the bureaucrat that his downfall was "a consequence of your insensitivity toward local nobles, whom you offended by your behavior and thereby compelled to come to hate [our] administration to such a degree, that I have found a terrible wavering of minds against the Russian administration."⁷⁷

If the Kovalenskii affair was grounded in individual haughtiness, more consequential factors obstructed early Russo-Georgian ties. In one of the most salient manifestations of their friction, General Lazarev was murdered in April 1803, not by a disgruntled Georgian prince, noble, or an obscure sympathizer, but by Queen Mariam, the widow of Georgia's last king.⁷⁸ When Tsitsianov ordered Lazarev to detain the queen and her children to prevent their imminent fleeing of Tiflis, Mariam stabbed Lazarev with a dagger when he approached her. Before his

⁷⁶Throughout 1801 and 1802 secret reports reached St. Petersburg about Kovalenskii's supercilious behavior *vis-à-vis* the Georgians. See *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 5-6.

⁷⁷*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 20.

⁷⁸David Lang, *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 46-47. See also King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 29.

demise, Lazarev had characterized the entire Georgian court and nobility as “filled with intrigues and internecine conflicts [*mezhdusobiia*]”⁷⁹ He found that not only external threats but also internal “secret conspiracies of various prominent people” compromised Georgia’s security. The Russian general’s reports to St. Petersburg illustrated Bagrationi family schemes and summarized the discontent of the king’s sons, his stepmother, Dariia, and his wife, Mariam.

Beyond the family politics of the Georgian court, tsarist officials elucidated the rift between their administration and the locals. Although Tsitsianov initiated several measures to soothe relations with the Georgian nobility, his efforts remained informed by notions of Russian cultural superiority. True, in his first year in command he opened doors to Georgian elites for daily meetings, issued orders to local officials about the primacy of egalitarian “justice” in all aspects of law enforcement, and even declared a two-month amnesty for all nobles who had fled Tiflis with Prince Alexander and other rebellious Bagratids. Tsitsianov also supported the spread of schools and education throughout the Caucasus, the expansion of trade, and the official recognition of Islam.⁸⁰ At the same time, Tsitsianov remained convinced that “nature, which delegated Asiatic peoples to unlimited autocratic authority, has left an indelible mark here. Against wildness and intransigence strong and determined measures are necessary.”⁸¹ Georgian nobles, for whom “the word ‘law’ has no meaning,” grumbled the tsarist general, sought every opportunity to avoid obeying new laws and regulations, and treated Russian officials with contempt if their familial background did not match Georgian notions of eminence and status.

⁷⁹AKAK, vol. I (1866), 184.

⁸⁰Walter Richmond, *The Northwest Caucasus: Past, Present, Future* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 82.

⁸¹AKAK, vol. II (1868), 45.

Tsitsianov, in essence, highlighted the early gulf between Russian officials and the Georgian elite. “For them everything is new; for us everything is strange,” he quipped.⁸²

Georgian nobles had tangible reasons for their discontent. New Russian laws had opened doors for peasants to file complaints against their hereditary overlords. Many landowners were incensed, according to a parting letter from Knorring to Tsitsianov, when provincial police and newly established courts demanded that nobles account for their mistreatment of their serfs and respond to accusations of physical abuse.⁸³ Moreover, argued Knorring, the removal from political office of several aristocrats, who had achieved their positions through hereditary prestige rather than merit, as well as a broader “reduction of the methods, through which the nobles enriched themselves at the expense of the people, has given [another] reason for discontent to those who place their individual wellbeing ahead of that of the community.”⁸⁴ Despite his engagement with Georgian elites, Tsitsianov’s actions unnerved them as much as Knorring’s policies had, especially after Tsitsianov confiscated all estates and properties belonging to nobles who had fled Kartli Kakhetia after the annexation.⁸⁵

Finally, ordinary Georgians voiced their own grievances. “Many” Georgians protested to General Lazarev that locally stationed Russian troops “interfere in the internal affairs of the locals, willfully taking supplies and horses—less out of necessity than whim,” and refusing to compensate the peasants. Rank-and-file Russian soldiers also “inflicted personal harm on the

⁸² *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 45. Tsitsianov’s solution to these issues was an expansion of Russian bureaucracy and judiciary in Georgia. See *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 46.

⁸³ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 406.

⁸⁴ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 407.

⁸⁵ *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 44.

residents, stole their cattle, fowl, produce, wine” and filled emptied wine jugs with sand out of “reckless mischief” (*bezrasudnaia shalost*).⁸⁶

The discontent of the dethroned Bagratids and other Georgian nobles boiled over into open rebellion periodically throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1810-11, Prince Levan, a grandson of King Giorgii, mobilized Ossetians into an anti-Russian insurrection.⁸⁷ More Georgian uprisings followed in Kakhetiia in 1812-13, in Imeretiia in 1819-20, a pan-Georgian rebellion in 1832, and even large peasant disturbances in Guriia in 1841 and in Mingreliia in 1857.⁸⁸ Although tsarist authorities easily quelled such resistance, the image of Georgians as unreliable at best and rebellious at worst took hold in the imagination of early Russian administrators of the South Caucasus. With few trustworthy subjects, Russia searched the South Caucasus for new, reliable allies.

The Napoleonic Backdrop and Imperial Ambitions

In the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century, the tsarist empire maintained its grip on Georgia despite actively feuding or battling with Persians, Ottomans, the French, Georgian rebels, North Caucasian highlanders, and the British. Against the efforts of these parties, the tsarist state fortified its position as a regional power and made preparations for further expansion into the shah’s domain. Russia’s goals and incentives for conquest in the South Caucasus, and their implications for Russo-Armenian ties, cannot be divorced from the context of the Napoleonic Wars and broader Russian imperial strategy.

⁸⁶*AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 412.

⁸⁷*AKAK*, vol. IV (1870), 109. Russian officials bribed the Ossetians into turning over Levan, but he escaped—alone and barefoot—during the handover. Reportedly soon thereafter Lezgins killed him.

⁸⁸Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 169.

The Napoleonic Wars and rapidly changing European alliances informed Russia's engagement with Armenians as much, or more, as Caucasian developments. St. Petersburg's imperial ambitions in northern Persia and eastern Anatolia were often defined vis-à-vis its European rivals' actions: competition among Russia, France, Britain, Austria, and Prussia in the early nineteenth century affected the tsar's relations with the shah and the sultan.

With Napoleon's ascension to power a decade after the 1789 revolution, France gained a leader whose military genius and expansionist resolve revitalized France's geopolitical aspirations, pitting it not only against its staunch foe, Britain, but also against the other three major European powers: Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Although Russian elites often distrusted their British counterparts, at the turn of the nineteenth century Russia sided with London against Paris, wary of French overtures toward its traditional adversaries: Swedes, Poles, and Ottomans.⁸⁹ By 1805, two years after it launched a major anti-French campaign, Britain recruited Russia into the Third Coalition. Equally concerned about Napoleon's conquest of central Europe and the economic repercussions of French expansion, London and St. Petersburg had many reasons to cooperate.

Despite the broad alliance seeking Napoleon's defeat, by 1807 the French emperor had routed Europe's largest armies and forced Britain into a defensive war, protected by its superior navy. In July 1807, Tsar Alexander had few options but to sign the Treaty of Tilsit with Napoleon, which stipulated Russian assistance to France against its British and Swedish enemies. At the same time, as Dominic Lieven notes, Alexander "gained a peace which would be more than a temporary truce, without paying the vanquished side's usual price of territorial

⁸⁹Dominic Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 33-34.

concessions and a war indemnity.”⁹⁰ Yet the new accord required Russia to support Napoleon’s Continental System, which sought to suffocate London’s economy by restricting its commerce on the continent. The tsarist court’s formal declaration of a “rupture” in Russo-British relations, dated October 1807, presented a litany of grievances against London. From stifling Russian trade on the high seas to providing inadequate cooperation during the earlier anti-Napoleonic coalitions, Alexander enumerated the reasons for the break and accused Britain of seeking to “ignite a new war in northern Europe.”⁹¹

In the years leading up to Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812, the Russian elite grumbled against Alexander’s treaty with France. Admiral Nikolai Mordvinov, the Anglophile minister and economist, was not alone in arguing that Russia’s economic and political interests aligned with Britain’s, and emphasized that Britain was Russia’s most prized commodities market.⁹² Foreign Minister Rumiantsev argued that the Continental System effectively punished Britain’s major trading partners, including Russia, more than it punished London. Additionally, Russian foreign policy could hardly benefit from a French victory over Britain. Numerous statesmen and cultural leaders, such as Nikolai Karamzin, feared Napoleon’s ability to establish an independent Polish state, anathema to tsarist imperial policy. Moreover, Mordvinov, General Levin von Bennigsen, and other eminent officials privately expressed concern that “if Napoleon was allowed to strangle Russia’s foreign trade [through the restrictions of the Continental System] then the economy would no longer be able to sustain Russia’s armed forces or the European culture of its elites. The country would revert to its pre-Petrine, semi-Asiatic

⁹⁰Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 51.

⁹¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 377, ll. 1-2.

⁹²Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 63.

condition.”⁹³ Such individuals advocated Russia’s withdrawal from European rivalries, proposing instead that the state return to its eighteenth-century foreign policy of expansion at the expense of the Ottoman and Persian empires.⁹⁴

An array of factors contributed to the breakdown of the Russo-French union. Napoleon’s invasion of Austria, a Russian partner, in the spring of 1809 gave Alexander another reason to suspect French expansionist ambitions. Soon Russian spies in Paris flooded St. Petersburg with reports of French overtures toward Russia’s neighboring antagonists, including the Ottomans, Poles, and Swedes.⁹⁵ By the summer of 1810 the prospect of a Russo-French war grew and tsarist War Minister Barclay de Tolly initiated defensive measures against a potential French attack. This political climate directly influenced the tsar’s calculations regarding his ties with the shah and the sultan, both of whom waged war against Russia at this time: in 1804-13 and 1806-12, respectively. For example, when Ottoman forces attacked Russian troops in 1806 but were quickly overwhelmed in Moldavia and Wallachia, the sultan dragged out negotiations in anticipation of an imminent Russo-French break. General Mikhail Kutuzov forced the Turks to sign a treaty only in June 1812, just days before the French invasion of Russia.

The rivalry with European powers hardly constrained Russia’s imperial ambitions in the Caucasus. To the contrary, facing threats from the west, St. Petersburg looked for resources and allies in the south. Within a couple years of securing Kartli Kakhetia and establishing Tiflis as the regional seat of the Russian administration, the tsarist empire continued to expand into the Caucasus. The incentives for this growth were primarily political and secondarily economic.

⁹³Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 64.

⁹⁴Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 67.

⁹⁵Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 83.

First, several formidable fortress cities remained between Persia proper (to the south of the Arax River) and the newly annexed Russian territories. The tsar and his officials saw these citadels, including at Yerevan, Shusha (in Karabakh), and Baku, as potential bases for Persian incursions into Georgia and the rest of the Russian Caucasus domain.

As early as April 1802, Tsar Alexander supported Knorring's aspirations for Yerevan as "a measure of utmost necessity."⁹⁶ When Russians learned that the city's *sardar* (prince-governor) refused to recognize the authority of Shah Baba Khan and was in open rebellion, they saw an opportunity. The *sardar* had expressed vague interest in coming under the tsar's aegis, yet during protracted negotiations he hesitated to accept the main demand of the tsarist side—that the Yerevan fortress be garrisoned by Russian forces. Alexander was certain that rebellious Persian khans south of Georgia would recognize the necessity of his protection against the shah's army. "These reasons are so self-evident, that he must recognize them himself and agree to our demands," confidently declared Alexander about Yerevan's overlord. Alexander remained convinced that by occupying the fortress cities between Georgia and the Arax River, the Russian empire would "not only place Georgia beyond danger, but also . . . take away from the foe his best means and, most importantly, will provide a much-needed confirmation to local lords (*vladel'tsy*) of Russian patronage and thus will strengthen their trust."

Political considerations beyond the South Caucasus also drove Russia's pursuit of the Yerevan khanate. Just twenty kilometers from the Yerevan fortress stood the Echmiadzin monastery complex, the headquarters of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to whose authority submitted the entire dispersed Armenian diaspora. While control of Yerevan, the region's second city after Tiflis, promised Russia full dominion over the South Caucasus, control of Echmiadzin

⁹⁶*AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 689.

promised extensive political and economic sway into those countries, such as Turkey, Persia, and even India, where Russian diplomats struggled for influence while local Armenian bishops enjoyed social prominence. Enticed by the strategic advantage of the Yerevan fortress and the ecumenical-political clout of the Echmiadzin monastery, St. Petersburg viewed those historic Armenian centers as vital components of its broader foreign policy in the East.

Although political incentives for Russian expansion into Persian-held territory overshadowed economic reasons, the latter constituted important considerations for St. Petersburg. Trade between Georgia and Persian khanates, such as Yerevan, rendered Georgia one of Russia's most profitable imperial territories, and even during the height of the first Russo-Persian war, cross-border commerce continued almost uninterrupted. For example, by mid-1809, about 1,080,000 pounds of cotton, valued at about 250,000 rubles, reached Tiflis from Yerevan, usually delivered by Armenians.⁹⁷ Moreover, the famously lucrative vineyards and other agricultural industry of the Yerevan khanate, coupled with the metal ores of the eastern South Caucasus (today's Azerbaijan), promised to reimburse the tsarist treasury for the costs of the Georgian annexation and maintenance. Alexander made this clear to Knorring's successor, General Tsitsianov, to whom he complained in September 1802 that despite Knorring's assurances that Georgia would be financially self-sufficient, it continued to drain the state treasury and inundate St. Petersburg with requests for financial assistance.⁹⁸ "There is still nothing from [Knorring] about the profits derived [from Georgia]," carped the tsar, "meanwhile the costs of various issues, multiplying from day to day, have risen to a very deliberate

⁹⁷*AKAK*, vol. IV (1870), 79. It is unclear over which period of time this amount was imported into Tiflis, but I assume these are annual statistics.

⁹⁸*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 4.

[*narochitaia*] sum, and while the welfare of this people has become the government's general concern, I would not want the weight of its administration to fall solely upon Russia.”⁹⁹

Tsitsianov wasted no time in responding to this expansionist mandate. Through a deft combination of negotiation and coercion, in 1803 and 1804 he brought several Persian-held khanates and principalities, including Georgian Mingrelia and Imeretia, into the tsar's realm. When, however, in January 1804 Tsitsianov entered Ganje khanate, ostensibly part of Georgia, the First Russo-Persian War (1804-13) erupted.¹⁰⁰ The Russian army's first and most formidable objective at the onset of the war was Yerevan and its large, strategically positioned fortress.

The invitations and pleas that tsarist agents received from local Armenians made Yerevan's capture more appealing. As early as April 1803, Tsitsianov reported to Tsar Alexander that “Armenians who populate [northern Persian provinces], owing to a single Christianity and to their confidence in commerce under the protection of Russian rule, for their own wellbeing exhibit toward us devotion [*predannost'*] and a desire to see the speedy and successful establishment in these lands of Russian overlordship [*vladychestvo*], [and] call to me every day to hasten [our] expedition on Yerevan.”¹⁰¹ The citation of the two nations' ecumenical bond, well entrenched in Russian society and culture by this stage, provided the type of guarantee that tsarist agents sought in their imperial mission in the Caucasus. Even if, as historian George Bournoutian has argued, Armenians and other religious minorities of Persian

⁹⁹AKAK, vol. II (1868), 4.

¹⁰⁰For an overview of Tsitsianov's aggressive imperialism against Persian khans, see Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus* (London: Tauris, 2006), 13-18. Tsitsianov's army easily overran Ganje, killing the khan and 3,000 of his men. Renamed Elizavetpol in honor of the tsaritsa, the territory became part of the Russian empire.

¹⁰¹AKAK, vol. II (1868), 290.

domains were not as oppressed as Russian officials imagined, their marginalization in local communities provided them with incentives to seek Russian annexation.¹⁰² The steady stream of Armenian refugees escaping from Persian to Russian territory confirmed this for Tsar Alexander, his ministers, and generals.

In anticipation of the approaching Russian army, in the summer of 1804 several Armenian *meliks* fled from Yerevan to Russian territory.¹⁰³ These hereditary Armenian nobles brought with them “over 200 families” of their peasants, likely numbering between 800 and 1,000 individuals. While pleased to find sanctuary, they immediately urged Tsitsianov to rescue over 500 other Armenian families from Yerevan, who had been left, under guard, “in the hands of the unreliable Persians.”¹⁰⁴ As would become a staple of Russo-Armenian engagement in the South Caucasus for the next several years, these Armenians also provided tactical information about the size and strength of the Persian contingent. Warning that the *sardar* had already executed several Armenians, seized the property of others, and threatened to expel the rest of the khanate’s Christians to Persia proper, the newly resettled Armenians implored Tsitsianov, “with tears we beg you, be the savior [*spasitel*]’ of the Armenians left behind, who are in an extreme situation, have no help from anywhere, and suffer various offenses and persecutions.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²George A. Bournoutian, *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of Persian Rule, 1807-1828* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1982).

¹⁰³*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 604.

¹⁰⁴*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 604.

¹⁰⁵*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 604.

In May 1804, Tsitsianov issued to Yerevan's *sardar* several peremptory demands, which he likely knew would be unacceptable.¹⁰⁶ The *sardar* had to recognize the tsar as his supreme ruler, yield the fortress to Russian forces, and agree to pay a large annual tribute.¹⁰⁷ In return, Yerevan's overlord would be permitted to maintain his current rights and powers, except the ability to decree the death penalty, and guaranteed safety and protection. When the khan dawdled, Tsitsianov thundered, "I do not frighten with words but act with bayonets and prove with deeds."¹⁰⁸ By June, the general wrote: "According to European custom, before launching an assault on the city, I must offer it to surrender, but if I do not receive by tonight a satisfactory and definitive answer, then God and bayonets will deliver it for me, despite a hundred Baba Khans or his son, who rides around in the distance like a hare avoiding a pack of lions."¹⁰⁹

Memorable as they were, Tsitsianov's threats soon proved futile, and the city's Persian garrison repelled a Russian attack. Despite this setback, or perhaps due to it, the Russian general continued to look toward Armenians to advance tsarist borders in the South Caucasus. When, in 1805, Persian reinforcements arrived in the region, replaced the rebellious Yerevan *sardar*, and once again threatened to remove local Armenians beyond the Arax, Tsitsianov expressed his hope that "if the developments of this war do not interfere and God helps us drive Baba Khan from Karabakh, then I will try to resettle [Armenians] in Georgia, which is what they want."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶The Russian general had a habit of making large demands of Persians. The following year, after the failed assault on Yerevan, Tsitsianov demanded that Persia pay war reparations of 1,000,000 rubles in addition to meeting several other conditions for a peace treaty. See RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4262, l. 3.

¹⁰⁷AKAK, vol. II (1868), 614. Tsitsianov set the tribute at 80,000 rubles per year.

¹⁰⁸AKAK, vol. II (1868), 605.

¹⁰⁹AKAK, vol. II (1868), 615-16.

¹¹⁰AKAK, vol. II (1868), 625.

At the same time, the Russian commander sought the Armenians' active participation in their "liberation" and the expansion of Romanov domains.

In June 1805, a year after his abortive assault on Yerevan, Tsitsianov sought to recruit Armenians from Karabakh to fight against the shah's army. His declaration to them lauded their one-time "famous bravery" and questioned whether they had lost it, becoming "womanly [*zhenopodobnymi*], like those Armenians who engage only in commerce."¹¹¹ "No," implied Tsitsianov himself, "I am aware of your past bravery, which is why I call on you . . . with the glorious and invincible Russian army . . . to help the strong and unsurpassable Russian troops against the Persian forces, which are encroaching to ruin Karabakh and to steal each one of your properties."¹¹² Specifically, Tsitsianov urged Karabakh Armenians to attack retreating Persian forces after the main Russian assault. Few sources survive to illustrate the exact result of this recruitment, but by the latter half of 1805 the tsarist army firmly controlled Karabakh,¹¹³ no doubt in part thanks to the participation of local Armenians. Moreover, the general Russian satisfaction with Karabakh Armenians' efforts suggests that Tsitsianov's petition was heeded.¹¹⁴

At the same time as he recruited these regional natives to cooperate in St. Petersburg's expansion, Tsitsianov promoted ethnic hierarchies and tightened his state's control over newly annexed societies and spaces. The general represented Russia's ideas of itself as empire, where the participation of non-Russian groups in the state's imperial project was welcomed as long as

¹¹¹ *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 833.

¹¹² *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 833.

¹¹³ *RGVIA*, f. 482, op. 1, d. 200, l. 2.

¹¹⁴ Tsitsianov also proposed other, even more audacious strategies, such as a naval assault and invasion of eastern Persia through the Caspian Sea. See *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4262, l. 3.

the initiative for such actions came from the metropole. For example, when in January 1806 Tsitsianov learned that up to 10,000 Armenian families from the Western Armenian town of Bayazit in Anatolia had expressed a desire to resettle in Yerevan upon its capture by the tsar's army, Tsitsianov feared that the immigrants would eschew "proper obedience" and would maintain ties to elements in Anatolia and Persia without tsarist approval.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Tsitsianov accused Armenian merchants of the South Caucasus of raising prices during wartime, and consequently prohibited them from trading in mountainous villages (*auly*).¹¹⁶ In April 1804, he ordered regional police to monitor local commerce, seeking out "resellers who greedily raise prices on necessities, a practice in which, after the Yids, the Armenians are the most capable, to the general detriment of the population."¹¹⁷

Such sentiments were in line with Tsitsianov's broader perception of the region's residents and Russia's new role in the South Caucasus. A committed imperialist who took pride not only in military glory but also in administrative efficiency, Tsitsianov set the contours of the tsarist imperial policy for decades to come. Such successors as Paskevich later echoed many of the views Tsitsianov expressed in the early 1800s. The *sine qua non* of successful imperial administration, Tsitsianov believed, lay in "sternness" (*strogost'*), coupled with "fairness" (*spravedlivost'*) and "selflessness" (*bezkorystie*).¹¹⁸

"Asiatic" intransigence, argued the Russian general, could not be eradicated through annual tribute payments or even extended sojourns in St. Petersburg. To combat supposedly

¹¹⁵AKAK, vol. II (1868), 632.

¹¹⁶AKAK, vol. II (1868), 943.

¹¹⁷AKAK, vol. II (1868), 49.

¹¹⁸AKAK, vol. II (1868), 1036-37.

egocentric and corrupting tendencies of the locals, the tsarist administration had to demonstrate both the benefits of egalitarian justice and the consequences of straying from prescribed norms and laws. “In an Asiatic,” insisted Tsitsianov, “nothing is as effective as fear, as a natural consequence of force. Thus, in my opinion, while expecting, with God’s help, a change in Asiatic mores and customs over the course of several generations, for at least thirty years fear, sternness, fairness, justice, and selflessness must be the characteristics or rules of the local administration.”¹¹⁹

Tsitsianov’s bravado caught up to him on 8 February 1806, when he rode up to the walls of besieged Baku to demand its surrender. The Persian forces inside the city shot the Russian general and mutilated his corpse. Tsitsianov’s body was held hostage for five years, and its release to Russian officials once again confirmed tsarist agents’ reliance on the region’s Armenians. In November 1811, Baku’s Armenians, who had kept the slain Russian commander’s body in the city’s main Armenian church, played the intermediary in the ceremonial handoff of the general’s casket to Russian officials.¹²⁰

After Tsitsianov’s death, St. Petersburg had to reorient its military, economic, and political resources away from the Caucasus. Facing Napoleon’s forces in 1804-07 and the sultan’s army in the Balkans in 1806 required a focus on the European theater. Nevertheless, Tsitsianov’s successor, General Ivan Vasil’evich Gudovich, continued the Russian war effort against Persia in the South Caucasus. A less ostentatious and more experienced commander than his predecessor, Gudovich was as eager to conquer Yerevan. Soon after his arrival in Tiflis, the

¹¹⁹AKAK, vol. II (1868), 1037.

¹²⁰AKAK, vol. V (1873), 10.

general beseeched the tsar to send him additional troops in order “not only to maintain the integrity of Your Majesty’s borders, but also to make incursions into enemy territory.”¹²¹

Making the most of his available resources,¹²² Gudovich by October 1808 besieged Yerevan.¹²³ The Russian general promised to spare life and property if the city surrendered voluntarily and guaranteed safe passage for the Persian garrison back to Persia proper. Should they refuse, however, he vowed to take the city by force and to slaughter the Persian forces. With Tsitsianov’s failed assault fresh in the minds of the attackers and defenders alike, Gudovich warned the inhabitants of Yerevan to ignore the Russian attack of 1804, when the young Tsitsianov, “not yet experienced in the military art,” failed to take the city.¹²⁴ Now, armed with decades of experience and a seasoned army, Gudovich thundered that he had come with enough soldiers “not only to annihilate [*istrebit*] the fortress, but also to march through all of Persia.”¹²⁵ Apparently unmoved by the threats, the commander of the Persian garrison sardonically offered Gudovich to join the shah’s army, in return for which the Russian general was promised to receive overlordship of the Yerevan and Tavriz khanates.¹²⁶

A two-month-siege ensued, during which Gudovich bombarded the fortress with as many ultimatums as artillery shells.¹²⁷ But even as small groups of residents, mainly Armenians,

¹²¹ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 99-100.

¹²² By one estimate, Gudovich commanded an army of 20,000 men. See *RGVIA*, f. 470, op. 1, d. 8, l. 1.

¹²³ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, ll. 25-54. And also *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 237-53.

¹²⁴ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, l. 29.

¹²⁵ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, l. 30.

¹²⁶ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, l. 34.

¹²⁷ For detailed reports of this siege, see *RGVIA*, f. 482, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 5-49.

voluntarily crossed into tsarist territory during this time,¹²⁸ the tsar's army failed—for the second time in four years—to capture Yerevan. An assault on November 17 was repelled at a high cost for the Russian side, and by November 28 Gudovich ordered a retreat.¹²⁹ In his report to the tsar, the general blamed the failure on European interference: French engineers, not Persian riflemen, had created the greatest obstacle to Russian victory at Yerevan. Gudovich conceded that the citadel had been buttressed according to “all European military standards,” and that the work of French advisors was evident not only in the design of the fortifications and the sophisticated weaponry but also in the previously unseen tactics the Persians employed.¹³⁰

Tsarist officials saw French interference in Russia's conquest of Persian lands manifested beyond the supply of weapons and engineers. Gudovich complained during the siege that “the French mission to Persia, despite the friendly relations with us, harms my affairs with Persia now more than they did during the war with France. For they have empowered [*vozgordili*] Baba Khan and convinced the Persian government that it can do whatever it wishes.”¹³¹ Evidence of European collusion included intercepted letters from the French representative in Tehran, diplomat and general Claude Gardane, to the *sardar* of Yerevan.¹³² Despite the Treaty of Tilsit between Napoleon and Alexander, a steady stream of reports reached Gudovich and other tsarist

¹²⁸*AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 246.

¹²⁹The details of the Russian casualties can be found in RGVIA, f. 482, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 1-4. Out of Gudovich's original Yerevan expeditionary force of 8,251 men, 1,254 men, or 15 percent, were killed or wounded during the incursion into Yerevan and the assault of the fortress. However, a different Russian source, somewhat less reliable for its lack of detail, puts the total number of Russian casualties at slightly under 900 men. See RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4266, ll. 4-9.

¹³⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, ll. 49-50.

¹³¹ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, l. 17.

¹³²T. Kh. Akopian, ed., *Razvitie Erevana posle prisoedineniia Vostochnoi Armenii k Rossii: Sbornik dokumentov, 1801-1917 gg.* (Yerevan: Erevanskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1978), 50.

officials about the strengthening Franco-Persian alliance, in which Napoleon had assured the shah of his support against the tsar, promising various rewards and territorial gains.¹³³ Gudovich also received personal letters from various French officials, including from Gardane in Tehran, urging the Russian general to withdraw from Yerevan khanate and other Persian territories.¹³⁴

Although St. Petersburg's main military objective failed in 1808 and Persian forces remained stationed to the north of the Arax River, other developments heralded success for Russia's imperial ambitions. First, Gudovich's army easily overwhelmed Persian opposition in Nakhichevan and Karabakh, confirming for tsarist officials that only such city-fortresses as Yerevan helped the shah to maintain his grip on the South Caucasus. Second, several local communities welcomed Gudovich's advancing army. He reported that retreating Persian forces had razed Armenian villages and seized their harvests, giving new incentive for the Armenians to turn to Russian protection.¹³⁵

When, during his march to Yerevan, Gudovich stopped at the Echmiadzin monastery, the senior Armenian clergy "joyfully welcomed" him.¹³⁶ The Russian general's increasingly close rapport with ecclesiastical and lay Armenians boded well for imperial policy, a fact that Prince Alexander Saltykov, a senior aide to the minister of foreign affairs, reinforced to the general after the abortive assault on Yerevan. Saltykov emphasized that the tsar "is particularly pleased to see the care with which you protect residents from the effects of war, which roots in them trust and attachment toward the Russian government, to which end especially helpful can be the patronage

¹³³ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 447-48.

¹³⁴ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, ll. 45-46.

¹³⁵ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 246.

¹³⁶ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4265, l. 8.

that you demonstrate to the Armenian Echmiadzin monastery.”¹³⁷ Tsarist agents would soon capitalize on this merger of interests between the Russian state and the Armenians of the South Caucasus to advance their goals.

With the Russian army’s withdrawal from Yerevan khanate, the First Russo-Persian war turned into a tense standoff. Between 1808 and 1813, occasional skirmishes and many failed negotiations yielded no progress and the dynamic remained influenced as much by European as Caucasian developments.¹³⁸ Citing ill health but perhaps also frustrated by the lack of progress, Tormasov retired and in September 1811 was replaced by the joint command of generals Philip Paulucci and Nikolai Rtishchev.¹³⁹ The former headed the administration of the South Caucasus, while the latter commanded the Caucasus Line and the nearby Astrakhan province. Within half a year, however, Paulucci was recalled to St. Petersburg and the region’s supreme power fell to Rtishchev, who would remain in charge until the arrival in 1816 of one of Russia’s most celebrated Caucasus field marshals, General Aleksei Ermolov. But while Rtishchev’s tenure outlasted most of his predecessors, it was frustrated by St. Petersburg’s preoccupation with Napoleon’s invasion and with maintaining the European balance of power. The general, in fact, at one point voiced frustration that such senior tsarist officials as Karl Nesselrode, the soon to be

¹³⁷ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 502.

¹³⁸ For reports about Russo-Persian skirmishes in the fall of 1809, see RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4267.

¹³⁹ Paulucci was an Italian marquis in the Russian service. After Napoleon’s invasion, he was recalled from the Caucasus to head the Army Chief of Staff, but held this post for a short time. He left the Russian service in 1829 and returned to Italy, where he commanded the army of Piedmont.

foreign minister, had ceased almost all communications with him and had granted him not a single permission for even the most serious requests in some two years.¹⁴⁰

While the core of the tsarist army struggled against the onslaught of the *Grande Armée* in Russia proper, in the Caucasus Russian forces confronted an unprecedented array of formidable threats. In the spring of 1812, local Russian troops not only vied for control of Dagestan in the North Caucasus, but also fought on three fronts in the South Caucasus: against an Ottoman assault on the Akhalkalaki fortress (which threatened to open an unimpeded corridor to Tiflis¹⁴¹), against Persians in Karabakh, and against a new Georgian uprising in Kakhetia. The latter threat particularly unnerved tsarist authorities not only because of its epicenter in the heart of the regional Russian administration, but also because of the furtive manner in which the conspirators had launched their attack by slaughtering Russian soldiers sleeping in their quarters. In his report to the tsar, Paulucci vented that the rebels had “carried out horrifying atrocities, examples of which the French Revolution presents to us.”¹⁴² In no small part thanks to the cooperation of local Armenians, who not only provided information but also fought alongside Russian troops, by early spring Paulucci and Rtishchev had quelled the Georgian uprising and captured its leader, Prince Giorgii, a grandson of the late King Giorgii.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰AKAK, vol. V (1873), ii. Karl Nesselrode, an ethnic Baltic German, became Foreign Minister in 1816 and remained in that position for four decades, securing his place in history as the longest-serving Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁴¹AKAK, vol. V (1873), 63. The Russian garrison repelled the Ottoman assault.

¹⁴²AKAK, vol. V (1873), 60.

¹⁴³AKAK, vol. V (1873), 221-22.

Despite these conflicts, and unfazed by the two abortive attempts to capture Yerevan, Paulucci and Rtishchev made several incursions into Yerevan khanate to force a peace treaty.¹⁴⁴ By September 1812, reflecting the turn of the tide in the Russo-French and Russo-Ottoman wars, and also the signing of an anti-French Russo-British pact, Rtishchev succeeded in forcing Abbas Mirza to the negotiating table. Although Persians invited British officers to mediate,¹⁴⁵ the shah had few options in the wake of Russian advances in Karabakh and the capture of the British-fortified Lenkoran fortress.¹⁴⁶ On 12 October 1813, the Treaty of Gulistan in Karabakh ended the First Russo-Persian War.¹⁴⁷ The terms of the accord proved generous to the victor. Persia relinquished control of the khanates of Karabakh, Baku, Ganje, Shakki, Kuba, Shirvan, and parts of Talesh.¹⁴⁸ Crucially, however, the Yerevan khanate, with its eponymous capital city and the Echmiadzin monastery, remained under the shah's control. Although population statistics do not survive from the era, it is clear that by 1814 thousands of new Armenian subjects had joined the expanding tsarist empire. The turmoil of the preceding decade had pitted St. Petersburg against an array of enemies in the Caucasus. To fortify itself in the newly conquered territories, Russia searched for an ally.

¹⁴⁴AKAK, vol. V (1873), 121.

¹⁴⁵AKAK, vol. V (1873), 668-70.

¹⁴⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4259, ch. 5, l. 117.

¹⁴⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4272.

¹⁴⁸Bournoutian, *Eastern Armenia*, 17.

Spies and Settlers: Armenians in the Russian Service

Russia looked to Armenian collaboration to facilitate its expansion as soon as it entered the interimperial politics of the South Caucasus with the annexation of Kartli Kakhetia. From 1801, the aims of tsarist agents and the hopes of the region's Armenians coincided. Russia relied on Armenians—with their eager participation—to advance into Persian territory, secure its new domains, and to settle newly conquered lands in the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century.

Just weeks before his assassination, Tsar Paul tasked General Knorring with expanding the Romanov realm in the South Caucasus through diplomacy. The tsar cautioned the general: “do not seek new [territorial] acquisitions, aside from those that voluntarily search for my patronage; it is better to have allies interested in an alliance than unreliable subjects.”¹⁴⁹ Paul made clear which of the indigenous national groups he had in mind. “Look to attract Armenia,” he wrote, “into a rapprochement [*sblizhenie*] for, and through, trade, in order to establish avenues through them, and maintain [their] privileges, but institute our order.” More explicitly, the tsar identified Armenians as the key to expanding Russian borders and influence in the region: “engage now not in conquest but in acquisition through the voluntary consent of Armenia.”¹⁵⁰ The tsar had good reason to expect Armenians' cooperation. In February 1801, Armenians from Constantinople petitioned tsarist officials to permit their immigration to Crimea, where they wished to become tsarist subjects.¹⁵¹ The Armenians pledged to advance regional commerce by establishing silk and paper mills on the peninsula, and they asked for no additional privileges in

¹⁴⁹ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 414.

¹⁵⁰ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 414. Paul's citation of “Armenia” should be interpreted not as a strict reference to a territory or space, but a broader designation of the Armenian people.

¹⁵¹ Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 13, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 1-1ob.

return beyond those granted to Armenians already living in Crimea. Apparently sympathetic to this request, Tsar Paul forwarded it to the Senate not long before his death.¹⁵²

Paul's successor, Alexander, shared his father's commitment to an alliance with Armenians. Persian and Ottoman Armenians, as well as other regional Christian groups, were to be recruited to settle the newly annexed Georgian territories. In September 1801, Alexander emphasized to Knorring that his "particular attention must be given to the attraction [*privlechenie*] into Georgia of settlers from abroad, especially Christians."¹⁵³ These colonizers were to be granted fertile land, as well as various "assistance," "benefits," and "privileges." For these relocation efforts, Russia specifically targeted Armenians from among the Christian communities living in Ottoman and Persian territories adjacent to Georgia. Alexander's instructions to Knorring in this regard were unequivocal:

I place under your particular attention the attraction of the Armenian nation through various kindnesses [*oblaskaniia*]. This method, owing to the large population of this people in regions adjacent to Georgia, is one of the most reliable ways for increasing the [regional] population's strength and also for ensuring the dominance of Christians. To this end, I decree that you demonstrate whatever possible patronage of the Echmiadzin patriarchal monastery and maintain friendly relations with its head.¹⁵⁴

Foreign-subject Armenians had been enticed by economic privileges in Russia proper since the seventeenth century, but with the turn of the nineteenth century their economic role assumed a broader dimension. Armenians became, in essence, the frontiersmen of Russian expansion. Several closely intertwined factors coalesced to grant Armenians this status in the Russian political imagination. First, their real and mythologized economic prowess under

¹⁵²RGIA, f. 13, op. 1, d. 28, l. 6.

¹⁵³AKAK, vol. I (1866), 435.

¹⁵⁴AKAK, vol. I (1866), 436.

difficult political and social conditions was seen as a sign of Christian resilience in hostile environments, underscoring the Russian attraction to settling new domains with economically capable residents. Second, the ecumenical bond between Orthodox Russians and Apostolic Armenians, the majority of whom remained under the hegemony of the shah and the sultan, provided the kind of guarantee of loyalty that the tsar sought in recruiting colonizers. Third, Russian agents often exaggerated and took advantage of Persian and Ottoman Armenians' minority status in Muslim empires to advocate for their resettlement into ostensibly more welcoming and egalitarian tsarist territories. The tsar summarized some of these perceptions to Tsitsianov in September 1802: "Armenians, as an industrious people that holds in its hands the entire trade of this part of the Orient, deserve your particular attention and protection, for, given their persecution in Persia, there can be no doubt that the majority of that people will settle in Georgia as soon as they feel themselves provided with an orderly government."¹⁵⁵

Armenians heeded the Russian calls. During the First Russo-Persian War, in particular, significant numbers of Persian Armenians became Russian subjects. Most frequently, Armenian *meliks* defected from Persia to Russia with their Armenian peasants. For example, in November 1807, two Armenian *meliks* from Yerevan crossed into Georgia with their peasants and requested noble status in Russian society.¹⁵⁶ General Gudovich reviewed their credentials and granted their request, admitting them into the Russian table of ranks with all of its rights and privileges. The Russian commander demonstrated similar flexibility and openness to Armenian migrants in another case, where an Armenian *melik* refused to settle on land picked for him by tsarist officials. After the Armenian's protest, Gudovich acquiesced to his demands and granted him

¹⁵⁵AKAK, vol. II (1868), 9.

¹⁵⁶AKAK, vol. III (1869), 235-36.

and his peasants “however much they need” of state-owned land in the exact locale that the *melik* had specified.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, in March 1809, during heightened tensions with the Yerevan *sardar* in the wake of the abortive Russian assault, incoming Armenians refused to settle in districts adjacent to Persia’s borders, fearing incursions from the shah’s forces. Once again, Gudovich agreed to their requests and facilitated their relocation to territory farther north, away from Yerevan.¹⁵⁸ In the last stages of the war, with the Persian army on the retreat, tsarist troops freed captured Armenians and resettled them into Russian territory. In one such example from December 1812, Russian soldiers “liberated” 3,000 Armenian families that had been “captured” by Persians near Lenkoran and brought them to Russian-held Karabakh.¹⁵⁹

Tsarist officials not only invited the Armenian colonization of the South Caucasus, but also took advantage of Armenian participation in the military conquest of Persian lands. Before his fall from grace, Petr Kovalenskii argued that Georgian kings’ ancient control over Yerevan and surrounding lands justified claiming those Persian domains along with the rest of Georgia.¹⁶⁰ To achieve these goals, Kovalenskii emphasized that local Armenians, seeing the Echmiadzin monastery come under tsarist protection, were sure to support Russian expansion. It is hardly surprising, then, that Tsitsianov and other tsarist generals recruited Armenians in Karabakh, Yerevan, and elsewhere to fight alongside the Russian army.

Active Armenian participation in the Russian war effort in 1804-13 manifested itself primarily in the form of intelligence gathering. Broadly speaking, these activities fell into two

¹⁵⁷AKAK, vol. III (1869), 236-37.

¹⁵⁸AKAK, vol. III (1869), 265.

¹⁵⁹RGVIA, f. 482, op. 1, d. 23, ll. 1-1ob.

¹⁶⁰RGVIA, f. 482, op. 1, d. 131, ll. 48-49.

categories: Persian Armenians sneaking out of Yerevan and other Persian territories into Russian camps with information, and Russian officials dispatching Armenians on specific espionage missions. Armenians also served as intermediaries between Russian and Persian negotiators, often ferrying messages between the two sides. Successive tsarist commanders relied on the reports and information provided by Armenians to formulate strategy, ascertain Persian and Ottoman actions, and communicate with entities where the Russian presence was impossible.

Tsarist officials capitalized on the Armenian diaspora's transimperial links. As early as 1802, tsarist officials dispatched Armenians from Tiflis into the neighboring states to determine the activities of hostile forces. In one example from June 1802, a Tiflis Armenian returned from Ottoman Akhaltsykh to report to Russian commanders that the Georgian rebel Prince Alexander had joined forces with Lezgin highlanders from Dagestan to mount an anti-Russian campaign.¹⁶¹ Tsarist agents tracked Alexander's movements in no small part thanks to the work of such Armenian sympathizers. One Armenian merchant from the Persian city of Ganje, upon arriving in Tiflis to conduct trade, reported to local Russian officials about Alexander's arrival in that city with a small army and eagerly answered all Russian queries.¹⁶² When Prince Alexander set his sights on an outpost with a small Russian garrison in November 1802, several local Armenians snuck into the Russian camps to alert tsarist officials to the imminent danger.¹⁶³ A month later, another Armenian merchant of Tiflis who had traveled to Ganje for commerce returned to report to Russian commanders about the composition and location of Prince Alexander and his allies.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 702.

¹⁶² *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 287.

¹⁶³ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 289-91.

¹⁶⁴ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 292-93. More examples on 294.

Russian commanders dispatched Armenians to Yerevan not only to spy but also to deliver messages to Persian forces.¹⁶⁵ During the Russo-Ottoman conflict, too, Armenians from Kars made unsolicited reports to Russian officers about the movement and composition of local Ottoman forces.¹⁶⁶ Gudovich and his commanders also employed trusted Armenians to gather intelligence in eastern Anatolia, often sending them to Armenian monasteries and churches to speak with the clergy and to determine local conditions.¹⁶⁷ Despite individual instances of Armenian collusion with anti-Russian forces,¹⁶⁸ Armenians cooperated with tsarist authorities by taking advantage of their relatively unhindered cross-border traffic.

Of the diverse intelligence that Armenians provided to Russians before and during the First Russo-Persian War, perhaps none of it was as sensational as the information that Armenian escapees from Yerevan delivered to tsarist officers in July 1806.¹⁶⁹ The men told General Nesvetaev that two French envoys, Pierre Amédée Jaubert and General Romie, had recently arrived at the Persian court.¹⁷⁰ The emissaries had conveyed to the shah Napoleon's request to allow the French navy access to Persian shores and to use the shah's territory to strike the Russian empire through the South Caucasus. Various promises and assurances accompanied this

¹⁶⁵ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 235.

¹⁶⁶ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 612.

¹⁶⁷ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 614.

¹⁶⁸ For example, in December 1802, Russian troops captured in Georgia an Armenian man who had fled Kartli Kakhetia two years earlier together with Prince Alexander. His interrogation revealed that Alexander had relied on him to communicate with Imeretian King Solomon and, most likely, to report information about Russian activities in Tiflis and elsewhere. See *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 293.

¹⁶⁹ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 416-17.

¹⁷⁰ The French emissaries reached Persia by traveling through Ottoman territory, underscoring the broad anti-Russian coalition. More broadly, Napoleon aimed to attack India through Persia.

audacious scheme to assuage the shah's fears. Nevertheless, the Armenians reported—and Nesvetaev verified through other sources—that the shah had declined Napoleon's request, because this daring plot, no matter the result, would only further complicate the shah's relations with the tsar. Disappointed, the Frenchmen returned to France through Ottoman lands. Learning of these developments, generals Nesvetaev and Gudovich entreated local Ottoman *pashas* to detain and hand over the French emissaries, promising lucrative rewards.¹⁷¹ Napoleon and Baba Khan did sign an accord in May 1807, the Treaty of Finkenstein, but it fell far short of the French emperor's dreams of a strategic alliance.¹⁷²

The autocracy prized Armenians' ability to reach distant elements beyond the Caucasus. In April 1810, Foreign Minister Nikolai Rumiantsev proposed to Caucasus commander General Nikolai Rtishchev that an anti-Persian partnership with Afghans could be arranged “through the help of Armenians.”¹⁷³ Although little came of this initiative, its deliberation among senior tsarist statesmen reveals the Russian confidence in transregional Armenian networks. In this case, Armenians were seen as a means toward securing new military alliances. Coupled with Armenians' active participation in the Russian war effort in the South Caucasus—from Karabakh Armenians' fighting alongside Tsitsianov's army to their espionage for Gudovich—the view of Armenians as St. Petersburg's key regional ally set the stage for a partnership that would remain intact for several decades.

¹⁷¹ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 417-18. These appeals failed, and the generals safely returned to France.

¹⁷² For the details of this accord and an overview of contemporary Franco-Persian diplomacy, see R. M. Savory, “British and French Diplomacy in Persia, 1800-1810,” in *Iran* 10 (1972): 31-44.

¹⁷³ *AKAK*, vol. IV (1870), 707.

This Russian view of Armenians grew stronger in late 1812, when an uprising by elite Georgian subjects of the tsar provided a new opportunity for Armenians to demonstrate their loyalty to the tsarist empire. During this rebellion, unusual for the participation in it of Christian and long-incorporated tsarist subjects, members of the dethroned Bagrationi family and their allies sought to regain control of Kartli Kakhetia by expelling the Russian administration. General Rtishchev's report to the tsar emphasized that nearly "all Kakhnetinian nobles and princes" had taken part in the rebellion.¹⁷⁴ Although thousands of ordinary Georgians remained devoted to the tsarist state, the protracted resistance of Georgian elites to tsarist rule eroded the foundations of Russo-Georgian partnership and promoted the increasingly exclusive standing of the South Caucasian Armenians within the imperial hierarchy.

In May 1813, Rtishchev, the supreme commander of the Caucasus, submitted to Tsar Alexander an effusive report on the Armenian role in recent developments. The document's implications cannot be ignored, for, indeed, it set a precedent for Russo-Armenian collaboration for much of the nineteenth century. "The Armenian people [*narod*]," wrote the tsarist general, "comprising a notable portion of Georgia's population,

continues to demonstrate exemplary zeal and unwavering loyalty to the Russian empire. From the establishment of the Russian administration here, the Armenian society has always distinguished itself by its devotion to it and during all of the often-rising malicious Georgian parties . . . our administration always found in Armenians faithfulness, unmovable by any deceits, and zealous service that they contributed to Your Majesty's advantage.¹⁷⁵

This juxtaposition of Armenians with Georgians, the two main Christian national groups in the Caucasus, is particularly important not only because the Georgian faith represented a closer

¹⁷⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4271, l. 1.

¹⁷⁵AKAK, vol. V (1873), 221-22.

dogmatic cousin of Russian Orthodoxy than the Armenian Apostolic creed, but also because Georgians possessed a large aristocracy with sizable resources at its disposal. Yet tsarist statesmen identified Armenians as their indigenous allies, eager to capitalize on their commercial and religious networks, which penetrated countries and societies inaccessible to Russian agents.

To be sure, Rtishchev singled out Armenians as an example of a loyal national group. During the recent Georgian uprising in Kartli Kakhetia, continued the general, when “almost all” locals took up arms or in other ways resisted the Russian presence, Armenians “sacrificed their property and, indeed, their lives, in solidarity with Russian troops, arming themselves in Kakhetia against the rebels and . . . demonstrated through action against the conspirators the most excellent example of courage and their sincere loyalty to Your Imperial Majesty.”¹⁷⁶

Armenian volunteers provided intelligence to local Russian authorities during their struggle to quell the Georgian insurrection. These Armenian collaborators “readily accepted” Russian tasks and “repeatedly paid with their lives” for the benefit of the regional administration. Armenian merchants of Tiflis, additionally, sold supplies to Russian officials at discounted rates during a poor harvest, when food supplies to Tiflis nearly dried up. Finally, Rtishchev, having summarized the “great diligence, allegiance, and devotion to Your Majesty of the loyal Armenians” of the South Caucasus, expressed confidence that “any encouragement [*poshchrenie*] of them will deliver additional, highly significant benefits for the administration and the local region, increasing their diligence and sparking among Georgians competition with [Armenians].”¹⁷⁷ Thus Rtishchev continued to hold up Armenians to other regional natives, such as Georgians, as an example of proper conduct and devotion.

¹⁷⁶ *AKAK*, vol. V (1873), 221-22.

¹⁷⁷ *AKAK*, vol. V (1873), 221-22.

Tsar Alexander gratefully responded to this Armenian assistance. A month after the signing of the Treaty of Giulistan, he expressed to the Armenians of Georgia his “appreciation to this people for its exemplary loyalty to the Russian empire and for its many confirmations of its most zealous diligence toward the benefits of” the Russian state.¹⁷⁸ Alexander’s proclamation was read, in both Russian and Armenian, to a large Armenian crowd in the city’s main square on 22 November 1813. A jubilant ceremony in Tiflis’s main Armenian church, led by Archbishop Astvatsur, celebrated the community’s acceptance of this honor. Rtishchev’s summary of this fete to Foreign Minister Rumiantsev emphasized that the “sincere awe and tears of emotional tenderness, which at this event were visible on the faces of members of every Armenian estate, are the most genuine signs of their true feelings of gratitude and diligence [*userdie*] toward His Imperial Majesty.”

During a citywide Armenian celebration of the tsar’s acknowledgement, wealthy Tiflis Armenians hosted a lavish feast, inviting not only Russian officials but also several Georgian princes. Over 200 people, from the city’s Armenian, Russian, and Georgian communities, attended the banquet. Around the city, Armenians celebrated by decorating their neighborhoods and vending stalls. Rtishchev stressed that the Armenians displayed “unfeigned joy that accompanied sincere gratitude” to Russia.¹⁷⁹

Other manifestations of the Armenian embrace of the tsarist empire fortified the early Russo-Armenian bond. When a new port opened in Baku in August 1809, local Armenian traders were at the forefront of celebrating what they saw as the state’s “patronage” and “benevolence”

¹⁷⁸AKAK, vol. V (1873), 230.

¹⁷⁹Once the revelry subsided, Tiflis Armenian elites donated 4,000 rubles to the city’s poor, and also rewarded the tsar’s messenger, who had delivered the edict from St. Petersburg, with 1,000 rubles.

toward the Armenian nation. During the opening ceremony, one Armenian merchant, no doubt eager to secure personal approbation from local Russian officials, summarized the attitudes of the region's Armenians:

From ancient times the Armenian nation has awaited liberation from the yoke of its merciless former rulers. . . . Now behind the shield of His Imperial Majesty's power, we feel complete tranquility while freely exercising our faith and [also feel] the strong sign of the emperor's favor, which protects commerce with egalitarian laws and [allows us to] enjoy new happiness chiefly ahead of others.¹⁸⁰

Two aspects of this saccharine praise deserve examination. First, the explicit contrast between the socioeconomic life of Armenians under the tsar and under the shah underscored the Armenian preference for Russian patronage. The majority of Eastern Armenians at this time continued to exist under the rule of the shah, and the essential Armenian centers of Yerevan and Echmiadzin remained within the Persian empire. This exaltation of the ostensible benefits of Russian governance not only served to reinforce the feelings of Armenians already settled in Georgia and other Russian territories but also was intended to attract Armenians still living outside tsarist borders. The speech celebrated the economic freedom of local Armenians while praising the religious liberty they enjoyed under the aegis of the Christian tsar in order to juxtapose these rights with the life of Muslim-ruled Armenians in the neighboring states. Indeed, these not-so-subtle messages should be interpreted not just as a sign of Armenian gratitude toward Russians but also as an effort to recruit Armenians from the neighboring empires.

Second, the reference to the exclusive "happiness" (commercial and, by extension, social rights) enjoyed by Armenians within Russian society cannot be overlooked. Living alongside the tsar's Muslim subjects and also such Christians as Georgians, this reference almost certainly was intended to highlight the perception of Armenians as the tsar's most "reliable" subjects in the

¹⁸⁰AKAK, vol. IV (1870), 86.

South Caucasus. Addressing the tsar directly, Baku Armenians drove home these points by praising the “abundance and total happiness” (*izobilie i sovershenneishee schastie*) that they enjoyed under the direction of tsarist commerce officials, as well as the “complete tranquility and safety from our former abusers and hostile neighbors” afforded by the command of General Tormasov.¹⁸¹ With the strengthening political and economic bond between Russian officials and foreign-subject Armenians, the partnership between the Armenian Church and the tsarist state became the last major component of the growing Russo-Armenian alliance.

Patriarchal Patronage

The head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the patriarch or Catholicos, often doubled as the political leader of the stateless Armenians. From his See in Echmiadzin, within Persian territory until 1828, the Catholicos presided over Armenian ecclesiastical affairs in Russia, Turkey, Western Europe, and wherever else large Armenian communities established local eparchies. The combination of ecumenical and political influence over the Armenian diaspora granted the Catholicos unique leverage, rendering control over Echmiadzin essential for any neighboring empire that counted Armenians among its population. As early as 1800, a senior tsarist official in Tiflis emphasized that the Catholicos exercised authority over Armenians “spread across the entire face of the earth,” and that his “commitment to the faith and his flock’s devotion to him, which he can skillfully utilize, grant [him] a strong influence in his nation.”¹⁸²

The Echmiadzin Catholicos, representing a religious minority in Persia, had to negotiate a delicate balance between supporting the growth of Russia’s Armenian community and protecting the interests of the shah’s own Armenian subjects. Any perceived support of Russian goals, such

¹⁸¹AKAK, vol. IV (1870), 86.

¹⁸²AKAK, vol. I (1866), 119.

as encouraging the emigration of Persian Armenians into tsarist territory during the war, was certain to elicit opprobrium or worse from Persian authorities. Tsarist officials understood this. When Catholicos Luka died in 1799 after two decades of leading Echmiadzin, Russian officials reported to St. Petersburg that “the position of this monastery and of the politics of the entire Armenian nation demand from its church’s leader quite delicate politics, which the [previous Catholicoi] always employed, maintaining both their authority and their lifestyle despite all of the tyrannies and cruelties that surrounded them.”¹⁸³ When Catholicos Iosif, a longtime Russian subject whose rapport with tsarist authorities was no secret, succeeded Luka, one Russian agent from Tiflis warned St. Petersburg that “the Persians quite dislike Patriarch Iosif, owing to his famous devotion and diligence toward Russia, and this case can be a point of contention in their relations with Russia for a long time.”¹⁸⁴ Both concerns and hopes were allayed when Iosif died, in March 1801, en route to take up his post at Echmiadzin. To be sure, the Armenian Church played an important consideration in Russian diplomatic goals as soon as tsarist agents arrived in the South Caucasus. Knorring and Lazarev entered into close relations with Armenian ecclesiastical officials and kept a watchful eye over their treatment by Persian officials, beginning to portray their government as the patron of the Armenians in Persia. When reports reached Knorring that Persians had raided an Armenian monastery “inflicted many dishonors, abuses, and thefts,” the general rushed to notify the tsar.¹⁸⁵

Yet relations between the Armenian Church and Russian officials were often tense. Knorring assigned Armenian-heritage General Lazarev to facilitate ties between the newly

¹⁸³AKAK, vol. I (1866), 119.

¹⁸⁴AKAK, vol. I (1866), 119.

¹⁸⁵AKAK, vol. I (1866), 682. This monastery’s location is not clear.

formed Russian administration and the local Armenian ecclesiastical authorities. The young commander worked with Archbishop Efrem, the head of the Armenian eparchy in Georgia, to compile detailed information about the composition, legal and financial procedures, and other matters pertaining to the Armenian Church's activities in Georgia.¹⁸⁶ However, in April 1801, Efrem complained to Knorring that Lazarev interfered in the patriarchal election.

Before the selection of a new Catholicos after Iosif's sudden death, four senior Armenian archbishops from Persia arrived in Tiflis to pay their respects to the late church leader. According to Efrem, Lazarev inexplicably detained in Tiflis these four Armenian clergymen, preventing them from returning to Echmiadzin, where the election of a new Catholicos was set to take place soon. Although Lazarev denied these accusations, this incident is valuable for the emphasis Lazarev's superior, General Knorring, placed on the Russian facilitation of an unhindered patriarchal election. Knorring not only ordered Lazarev to release the priests and to provide an explanation for his actions, but also made clear that, "the selection of the patriarch depends upon the will of the Armenian people and its clergy, and [you] from here on must not engage in even the smallest interference; I prohibit this to you, for such an event can precipitate unpleasant consequences."¹⁸⁷ A patriarchal election crisis, however, was not to be avoided, and soon posed stark challenges for Russia.

Catholicos Iosif's death, while perhaps alleviating potential conflicts with Persia over his ostensible devotion to Russia, created a new difficulty. During the year he headed the Armenian Church and before his arrival in Echmiadzin, Iosif had named a successor, Archbishop David, the curator of the Echmiadzin monastery. Although the confirmation of a new Catholicos was

¹⁸⁶AKAK, vol. I (1866), 538-39.

¹⁸⁷AKAK, vol. I (1866), 542.

determined by the entire Armenian diaspora of the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman empires, as well as a few representatives from other states, Iosif's endorsement of David placed much cachet behind his candidacy. The ensuing drama over the new Catholicos's selection pressed Russia into defining its relationship with the Echmiadzin leader and helped solidify an official policy that remained intact for half a century.

In the spring of 1801, candidates for the Echmiadzin patriarchy were selected. Of the three archbishops, only two were seen as serious contenders: David, the Persian-subject curator of the Echmiadzin monastery, and Daniil, an Ottoman-subject archbishop of Constantinople.¹⁸⁸ With the death of Iosif, the tsarist empire reluctantly conceded that the next Catholicos would not be a Russian subject. However, owing to the death of Tsar Paul in March and the wresting of Kartli Kakhetia, along with its sizable Armenian community, the 1801 election of the Echmiadzin patriarch acquired new significance for Russian officials.

This affair was exacerbated when, on 28 April 1801, David, the late Catholicos's chosen candidate, was secretly "confirmed" as the new Echmiadzin patriarch. This unilateral decision of Persian Armenians, supported by the Persian khan of Yerevan but taken without the participation of Armenian delegates from Turkey or Russia, caused a tri-imperial crisis. Knorring immediately alerted freshly crowned Tsar Alexander I to this news. Ottoman Armenians and their government, in a rare display of parallel aims, protested this development. The Russian envoy in Constantinople, Vasilii Tomara, informed Knorring that "the Armenians around here, or, more specifically, local Armenian bankers, are attached [*prilepleny*] to Daniil," and wished to see no one but him confirmed Echmiadzin patriarch.¹⁸⁹ Tomara was adamant that Daniil's potential

¹⁸⁸ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 543.

¹⁸⁹ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 543.

replacement of David boded poorly for tsarist interests, cryptically labeling the Ottoman Armenian archbishop “devious” (*khitryi*).¹⁹⁰ The Russian diplomat emphasized that David’s election, while unpopular in Constantinople, was legitimate because it not only obeyed late Catholicos Iosif’s endorsement but also corresponded to the wishes of non-Ottoman Armenians. Tomara urged Knorring to help him ensure the confirmation of David and to prevent Constantinople Armenians and the Sublime Porte from replacing him with Daniil.

When, in June 1801, Ottoman Armenians dropped their opposition to David’s election, and the Porte signaled its consent, the matter appeared resolved. However, within months, Tsar Alexander wrote to his ambassador in Constantinople, Tomara, expressing concern at the number of petitions he had received from various Armenian communities that rallied for Daniil, not David, to be the Echmiadzin patriarch.¹⁹¹ The young tsar, convinced that this represented the wishes of the majority of Armenians, made clear that he supported Daniil.¹⁹² By April 1802, Knorring pressed the khan of Yerevan to allow the replacement of David with Daniil, a decision that he emphasized corresponded to the desires of “all” Russian and Ottoman Armenians and was affirmed by the respective monarchs. Knorring underscored that “according to ancient customs and privileges of the Armenian nation, the choice must be left to the complete and precise decision of this people, without the slightest external interference.”¹⁹³ The Yerevan khan, embroiled in tensions with the new shah and expressing interest in Russian protection, had little

¹⁹⁰ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 542-43.

¹⁹¹ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 544.

¹⁹² Alexander nonetheless assigned several officials to investigate whether Armenians in the South Caucasus really preferred Daniil to David. As late as the spring of 1803, Tsitsianov reported that local Armenians indeed supported Daniil over the “false-patriarch” David. See *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 274.

¹⁹³ *AKAK*, vol. I (1866), 545.

incentive to oppose this turn of events. On 19 May 1802, Constantinople Archbishop Daniil received the tsar's formal recognition as Catholicos and permission to travel through Russia.¹⁹⁴

The active involvement—and even interference—of Russian agents in the selection of the Catholicos signaled their acknowledgement of that person's geopolitical leverage. The tsar and his officials vacillated between supporting David and Daniil, ostensibly until the desire of the “majority” of Armenians was ascertained, suggesting that the individual's subjecthood was not as important to St. Petersburg as his popularity with Armenians. The David-Daniil saga also demonstrated the delicate balance that the Russian government maintained between pursuing its interests, such as ensuing the confirmation of a Catholicos sympathetic to Russian ambitions, while taking into account the wishes of the vast Armenian diaspora, within and outside of the tsar's realm. Russian officials knew little about Daniil's political leanings, but despite the objections of such tsarist agents as Ambassador Tomara, the affirmation of the candidate who appeared most appealing to the Armenians of the South Caucasus (in Russia and Persia) dictated the resolution of this affair. Finally, Lazarev's warning to the Yerevan khan about the need to demonstrate “due deference” and proper treatment toward the Echmiadzin monastery and its clergy evinced Russia's growing position as a patron of Christian Armenians living under Muslim rule. For the rest of the nineteenth century, this element of Russo-Armenian ties impacted not only the politics of the Caucasus but also informed the Eastern Question.

With Daniil's appointment, St. Petersburg continued to promote itself as the protector of Christians in neighboring Muslim empires. When Russia forced Turkey to sign the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardzhi in 1774, few contemporaries could have imagined the later implications of the accord's Article 7, which stipulated that the “Sublime Porte pledges to give the Christian

¹⁹⁴AKAK, vol. I (1866), 547.

faith and its churches firm protection and it grants the Ministers of the Russian Imperial Court [the right] to protect all interests” of churches and their congregations.¹⁹⁵ By the early nineteenth century, this notion of Russian protection for foreign-subject Christians had spread to include Persia. Indeed, Tsitsianov intimated this to Daniil in February 1803, pledging to “use to your benefit all those resources and methods, which I have at my disposal.”¹⁹⁶

Russian authorities confirmed their commitment to Daniil when, in April 1803, Tsitsianov learned that Daniil “received harassment and offenses, inflicted on him by the hate of various evil people, who are driven solely by greed.”¹⁹⁷ The offending villains were not Persian khans or bandits, but rather the shah’s Armenian subjects. A sizable group of Armenians in Yerevan, coalescing around a few wealthy patrons, mounted a vociferous campaign in support of David. Responding to the apparent harassment of Daniil by Persian Armenians, Tsitsianov vowed to uphold the tsar’s decision at all costs, if need be with the use of the “invincible and mighty” Russian army. The general threatened that if any more “offenses and disrespect” or “animal-like” abuses befell Daniil, the tsar’s “terrifying ire” would be unleashed upon the tormentors of the legitimate Armenian patriarch. He also appealed to the shared Christian faith of the Armenian and Russian peoples, and juxtaposed it to the Muslim rule of the shah and the Yerevan khan. “Come to your senses!” pleaded the general, “Compare the meekness [*krotost*] of Christian rule with the ferocity [*liutost*] of Muslim rule; measure the tyranny of the latter against

¹⁹⁵Basil Dmytryshyn, ed. *Imperial Russia: A Source Book, 1700-1917* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Publishers, 1990), 109.

¹⁹⁶*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 274.

¹⁹⁷*AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 275.

the tolerance of the former—you will see that ours reflects Christian laws inscribed in the Holy Gospel, while theirs [reflects] contrary laws. Think again and fear!”¹⁹⁸

Tsarist patronage of the Armenian Church leadership soon bore geopolitical fruit. After Tsitsianov’s failed assault on Yerevan in 1804, for example, Armenian clergy organized the relocation of Persian Armenians into Georgia, where they were granted generous tracts of land. In one case, Archbishop Hovannes oversaw the migration of some 11,100 Armenian families from Yerevan to Georgia, an act for which Tsitsianov praised him to the tsar.¹⁹⁹ Soon thereafter, in a sign of his approval of this emigration, Catholicos Daniil nominated Hovannes to oversee the Armenian eparchy of Georgia. In his support of this decision, Tsitsianov wrote to Tsar Alexander that Hovannes demonstrated “unlimited diligence toward Russian benefits and his loyalty to [the tsarist empire].”²⁰⁰ Tsar Alexander responded by confirming Hovannes as the archbishop of the Armenian eparchy in Georgia. The tsar also, as attestation of the Armenian priest’s “excellent diligence toward Russian benefits,” presented Hovannes with a “paean” to commemorate his contributions to Russia’s efforts in the resettlement of Persian Armenians.²⁰¹

At the onset of the First Russo-Persian War in 1804, the shah’s authorities removed Catholicos Daniil from Echmiadzin and prevented him from carrying out his duties. David, loyal as ever to Persia, temporarily took the reins of the Armenian Church.²⁰² In a sign that Persian

¹⁹⁸ *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 275.

¹⁹⁹ *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 276.

²⁰⁰ In line with Tsitsianov’s caution about Armenians, he also expressed concern that the recently relocated Armenians would wish to return to their former lands when his army conquered Yerevan.

²⁰¹ *AKAK*, vol. II (1868), 276.

²⁰² The details of this development are unclear, but it is doubtful that the broader Armenian diaspora recognized David’s authority.

officials understood the degree to which many senior Armenian clergymen, and Daniil in particular, sympathized with Russian political aims, the Persian government imprisoned the Catholicos for nearly four years. Only in September 1807, after General Gudovich made Daniil's release and reinstatement a core demand of negotiations with Persian Crown Prince Abbas Mirza, did the Armenian patriarch return to Echmiadzin.²⁰³

Despite, or perhaps owing to, this experience, Daniil continued to correspond with senior tsarist officials, not only in the Caucasus but also in St. Petersburg. In 1808, not long before Gudovich's renewed assault, Daniil wrote to Minister of Education Count Petr Zavadovskii, thanking him for Russia's patronage of Armenians and asking Zavadovskii to continue cooperating with Russia's Armenian elites, such as the Lazarev family.²⁰⁴ Persian authorities did not overlook the Armenian patriarch's close rapport with the shah's foe. When the tsar's army reentered Yerevan khanate in October 1808, Persian officials again removed Daniil from Echmiadzin to Yerevan, where the patriarch died—apparently of natural causes—not long after the siege. With a new patriarchal election looming, the Russian empire solidified its policy toward this important event.

As Iosif had done in 1799, before his death in February 1809 Daniil endorsed a candidate to succeed him. The chosen priest, Archbishop Efrem, was a Russian subject who was reputed to sympathize with St. Petersburg's political goals, especially with regard to relocating Persian Armenians into Russian territory. The tsar and his ministers did not object to Efrem's confirmation, and ensured that the frail patriarch's wishes were widely publicized throughout

²⁰³ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 80.

²⁰⁴ *RGIA*, f. 733, op. 86, d. 174, ll. 2-3.

Russia proper and the Caucasus.²⁰⁵ When, in January 1809, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Saltykov asked General Gudovich to provide his assessment of Efrem's candidacy, the state's geopolitical imperatives were on full display. "It goes without saying," emphasized Saltykov, "that the Russian Court must give its backing to that candidate, who, invited by the voice of the people, is well known for his commitment and diligence toward the benefits of the Russian empire." Indeed, so crucial was the placement of a Russian-backed candidate, such as Efrem, at the apex of the Armenian Church, that Saltykov ordered Gudovich to do everything in his power to prevent the Persian government from installing its own candidate, such as David. The potential implications of this decision compelled Saltykov to grant Gudovich the authority to confirm, without waiting for the tsar's consent, any Armenian-chosen candidate whom Gudovich deemed to be "a person loyal to Russia and pleasant to the Armenian people."²⁰⁶

In a display of *realpolitik*, the tsar's court pursued a goal of ensuring the election of a Catholicos who was first and foremost sympathetic to Russian politics. Yet at the same time the Russian government sought to merge its interests with Armenian desires. True, so paramount were state interests in the patriarchal election matter, that Saltykov conceded that even in the unlikely event of Persian-backed David's election—which Russia opposed—the tsarist court could still affirm this selection as long as David could be used to pursue Russian goals, such as securing a peace treaty with Persia.²⁰⁷ But these issues were left to Gudovich's discretion, with Saltykov emphasizing that the "most important wish of the Tsar Emperor is that in the selection of the patriarch combine the benefits [*pol'zy*] for the Russian Court with the desires of the

²⁰⁵ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 81.

²⁰⁶ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 81.

²⁰⁷ *AKAK*, vol. III (1869), 82.

Armenian people, leaving everything else to your discretion.”²⁰⁸ After Daniil’s death in February 1809, several senior Armenian clergymen from Echmiadzin endorsed Efrem, as did many lay Armenians in Georgia and the rest of the South Caucasus. Despite the opposition of some Persian Armenians, the Armenians of Turkey and Russia elected Efrem to become the next Catholicos. Gudovich rushed to affirm this selection in the name of the Russian empire, expressing to St. Petersburg confidence in the new patriarch’s political reliability. Efrem’s “long term residence in Russia and the immense generosities displayed to him by His Imperial Majesty,” stressed the general, “can be firm guarantees that he, of course, will remain forever loyal and diligent to Russia, [which is why] I consider that his royal confirmation as the Armenian patriarch will both correspond to Russia’s interests and also be pleasant to the local Armenian people and clergy.”²⁰⁹ Tsar Alexander’s confirmation of Efrem’s election in September 1809 praised the new Catholicos for his “sincere diligence and loyalty to my imperial throne, as demonstrated through many exploits.”²¹⁰

Despite frequent conflict, Persian authorities at times courted Echmiadzin as actively as their Russian rivals. Whereas as recently as 1807 the then pro-Russian Catholicos, Daniil, was arrested and forcefully removed from Echmiadzin to Yerevan, the reception that the new, openly pro-Russian Catholicos Efrem received in 1809 illustrated important developments. General Tormasov, Gudovich’s successor, reported to Foreign Minister Rumiantsev that Persian Crown Prince Abbas Mirza had personally greeted the Catholicos upon his arrival in the Persian realm. But the crown prince forced Efrem and his retinue to take an oath of allegiance to the shah and

²⁰⁸AKAK, vol. III (1869), 82.

²⁰⁹AKAK, vol. III (1869), 83.

²¹⁰AKAK, vol. IV (1870), 173.

also forbade him from wearing the tsar's medals without *also* wearing the awards that Abbas Mirza had presented to Efrem.²¹¹ At the same time, Abbas Mirza—to Tormasov's surprise—decreed for Efrem an annual payment equivalent to 4,000 rubles, a sum that exceeded the salaries of any preceding Armenian patriarch. These Persian overtures toward the Echmiadzin leader appeared at least partially successful, because soon after his arrival in Echmiadzin Efrem requested the venerable Armenian monastery's treasures, which Tsitsianov had removed in 1804 “for safekeeping” in Tiflis, to be returned to the monastery in Persian territory. Despite Tormasov's resistance, the tsar approved this request in late October 1810. For the next several decades, this Russo-Persian rivalry for influence over the Echmiadzin Catholicos, and also the role of Ottoman Armenians and their government's interests, defined the dynamics of the tri-imperial feuding in which Russo-Armenian ties evolved.

Conclusion

The Russo-Armenian encounter of the early nineteenth century represented a two-way dynamic. Armenians invited tsarist patronage and made tangible contributions to the fortification of the Romanov, and then Soviet, empires as the overlord of the South Caucasus for nearly two centuries. During these formative years of the Russo-Armenian partnership, Armenians began to enter tsarist service and to achieve prominence within Russia's social and bureaucratic hierarchy. To cite one example from this era, the son of Armenian-heritage tsarist General Iosif Bebutov, Vasilii, who had been raised in Tiflis during his father's posting in the South Caucasus, returned to the region in 1810 to serve under the command of General Tormasov after becoming the first

²¹¹AKAK, vol. IV (1870), 174-75. These were symbolic honors and commendations provided by each empire's royal court to the Armenian patriarch.

Armenian to graduate from the elite Cadet Corps in St. Petersburg.²¹² Given the insurgency of North Caucasian highlanders and the passive resistance of some Georgian elites, it is no exaggeration to claim that, among the native peoples of the Caucasus in the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, Russia had no closer ally than the Armenian nation.

For its part, the tsarist state looked to advance its geopolitical objectives through the direct and indirect participation of the Armenian nation and church. To this end, it played a pivotal role in the election of the Echmiadzin Catholicos and strove to merge its priorities with the desires of the Armenian nation in this regard. Russia annexed the South Caucasus mainly out of political reasons, including a desire to maintain parity with the expanding French and British empires, but also remained eager to take advantage of the economic opportunities provided by interstate and international trade in the Near East.

With all of Georgia and several Persian khanates annexed and thousands of new subjects absorbed into the tsar's realm, the Romanov state between 1801 and 1816 made key advancements on its way to claiming the Caucasus. However, with such formidable Persian citadels as Yerevan—the capture of which had eluded two tsarist generals—still maintaining the shah's grip on parts of the region, tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I (1825-55) set their sights on consolidating their imperial possessions by completing the Russian conquest of Eastern Armenia. New challenges and opportunities between 1816 and 1828, when St. Petersburg finally seized Yerevan and Echmiadzin, would shape and reshape the evolution of Russo-Armenian relations.

The estate-based Russian social system of the early nineteenth century granted not individual rights characteristic of modern citizenship but collective rights and obligations that

²¹²B. T. Ovanesov and N. D. Sudavtsov, *Voенно-административная деятельность армян в российской империи на Кавказе* (Stavropol': Nairi, 2008), 34.

allowed it to respond to the growth of the empire.²¹³ To be sure, some ethnic or national communities received preferential status based on their immediate or future contributions to the vitality of the empire. Alexander Morrison has argued that in the 1860s, Russia “saw the creation of legal and administrative differences that offer some parallels to the division between metropole and colony seen in the British and French empires.”²¹⁴ But as this and the next chapters demonstrate, such differences existed in the early decades of the nineteenth century, as St. Petersburg privileged Armenians and other groups in a manner that challenged narratives of European hegemony over non-Europeans. While the Russo-Armenian bond was grounded in religious kinship, Armeno-Georgian and Russo-Georgian ties show that the autocracy considered not just religious affiliation when picking its allies.

²¹³Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

²¹⁴Alexander Morrison, “Metropole, Colony, and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire,” in *Kritika* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 330-31.

CHAPTER 2: ARMENIANS IN THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL IMAGINATION, 1815-1830

“The question will always remain: in Russia, do Armenians possess more rights than Russians?”

-Finance Minister Egor Kankrin, 1827

“We rather eat Russian grass than Persian bread.”

-Armenian refugees, 1828

In 1816, Admiral Count Nikolai Mordvinov, Russia’s first naval minister and one of its most eminent political thinkers, envisioned his empire’s future engagement with, and domination of, the Orient. He suggested that through adroit diplomacy and economic incentives, more than artillery and bayonets, Russia could ensure a peaceful and profitable future in the Caucasus and beyond. “Europe is antiquated [*ustarela*] and requires little of our surplus,” he argued, “Asia is young, immature, can connect with Russia more closely, and all [our] superiority in enlightenment and labor will serve to grow Russia’s might over this vast and most important part of the world.”²¹⁵ Buoyed by recent triumphs over the French emperor, the Persian shah, and the Ottoman sultan, the tsarist political elite set its sights on claiming the still-unconquered parts of the Caucasus. To do so, as Mordvinov and other influential liberals proposed, required flexible politics that drew on the participation of Caucasus natives in the Russian imperial project.

²¹⁵ *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoiu Arkheograficheskoiu Kommissieiu* (hereafter *AKAK*) (Tiflis: Glavnoe upravlenie namestnika kavkazskogo, 1873, vol. V), 951-53. Mordvinov argued that Russia and the natives of the Caucasus had parallel economic priorities, which had to be privileged over the tactics of armed conquest and military occupation. Only then could peace and prosperity characterize the Russian-native encounter in the Caucasus.

This Russian imperial project drives this chapter. To demonstrate that tsarist imperial objectives were as contingent as complex, I examine the state's policies toward three distinct communities of the Armenian diaspora: impoverished immigrants from other empires, established merchants in southern Russia, and an elite family aspiring to social and political prominence in Moscow. Because they were all tsarist subjects, the government needed tailored responses to their needs. Through shifting but complementary Russian perceptions of Armenians in the 1820s, the autocracy recruited and distrusted Armenians from abroad while concurrently promoting and restraining the commerce of Armenians already settled in southern Russian cities. These circumstances illustrate the evolution of a multifaceted project that resists traditional labels of "colonial expansion" or "economic exploitation." Russia's encounter with Armenians in 1815-1830 shows that Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan's concept of "imperial formations" is a more appropriate description of the tsarist nationalities policy under Alexander I (1801-25) and the early reign of Nicholas I (1825-55). Unlike the imperial powers of Victorian Western Europe, imperial formations "are not, as we once imagined them, based on fixed forms and secure relations of inequity: they produce unstable relationships of colonizer and colonized, of citizen to subject, and unequal struggles over the forms of inclusion and the principles of differentiation."²¹⁶ Elsewhere Stoler has emphasized that "blurred genres of rule are not empires in distress but imperial polities in active realignment and reformation."²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 12.

²¹⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, "On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty," *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006): 138.

I echo these arguments by exploring the contested discourses and symbolic practices by which Russians attempted to reconcile their often-divergent perceptions of Armenians. To do so, I contrast the Armenian resettlement into Russia with the acrimony resulting from Armenians' growing economic position in imperial society. This episode reveals that the state's nationalities policies were less contradictory than conditional. Moreover, the emphasis on Armenian sociopolitical ambitions, in the form of lay and ecclesiastical community leaders' dialogue with tsarist political elites, undercuts a historiographical tendency to overlook the political leverage exercised by the tsars' non-Russian subjects in the Caucasus.²¹⁸ At the broadest level, this chapter contributes to our understanding of how the Russian empire was "organized and structured, and how imperial rule was established and maintained."²¹⁹

I focus on several groups within the Armenian diaspora, and the role Armenians played in the discourse of such statesmen as Mordvinov, to highlight the complexity of the Russo-Armenian encounter. From starving refugees on the outskirts of Tiflis to powerful philanthropists in central St. Petersburg, Armenians experienced Russian nationalities policy differently. Social and economic status, geography, acculturation, and other factors shaped the autocracy's perceptions of its Armenian subjects. The Lazarev family of Russified Armenian magnates, through economic success and social integration, attained the status of mediators between the tsarist government and the external Armenian diaspora. In establishing the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, the Lazarevs responded to the political demands of the expansionist state. When the tsar battled the shah in the Second Russo-Persian War (1826-28), foreign Armenians

²¹⁸For one recent example, see Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²¹⁹Andreas Kappeler, "Spaces of Entanglement," in *Kritika* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 477-87.

cooperated with Russians, precipitating a policy of transplanting Persian and Ottoman-subject Armenians into newly annexed territories in the South Caucasus. At the same time, long-settled Armenians in several southern Russian cities experienced a gradual waning of economic privileges, as senior tsarist officials debated and disagreed over the socioeconomic role that Armenians were playing, and should play, in Russia. To be sure, Russian politics evolved as rapidly as Russian policies. The rule of Tsar Nicholas I marked a departure from his brother's more progressive nationalities laws, when the state granted foreigners incentives to resettle in the Russian empire.

The Lazarev Dynasty

It is difficult to overstate the impact of the Lazarev family on facilitating the Russo-Armenian engagement in the nineteenth century. The Lazarevs were entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, philanthropists, generals, and educators. They allied with the Armenian Church, established a renowned academy, oversaw the resettlement of Persian and Ottoman Armenians into Russia, and acted as intermediaries between the tsarist state and the Armenian nation and church. In many ways, the history of their family is one of acculturation, resistance, cooptation, and interethnic discourse between Russian and non-Russian elites under the old regime. The Lazarev family contributed to this dialogue most clearly by establishing the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. Not simply coinciding with Russia's absorption of foreign-subject Armenians and other "Orientals" into the empire but a direct response to these imperial demands of the state, the Institute represented a broader Russian objective of understanding its new imperial possessions, their inhabitants, and their cultures.

The Lazarev genealogy in Russia began in the 1720s, when twenty-something Eleasar Nazar'ian Lazariants emigrated from Persia.²²⁰ The young man Russified his name to Lazar Nazarovich Lazarev and entered state service as a translator of Russo-Persian correspondence. In 1758 he purchased a silk mill on the outskirts of Moscow. The factory proved a profitable venture for the growing Lazarev family. By the mid-eighteenth century, Lazar and his wife, Anna Ekimova, had three sons: Ivan, Christopher, and Ekim. The family expanded its commercial activities beyond the silk trade of Moscow, entering the jewelry business in St. Petersburg, purchasing factories and manufacturers in several towns of European Russia and Siberia, and maintaining trade with Persia. Reflecting the family's economic position, in 1774 the Lazarevs were admitted into the noble estate (*dvorianskoe soslovie*), receiving the right to own serfs and fortifying the economic foundation on which their social and political clout would be based in the following century.

The death of Ivan Lazarev, the eldest son of the clan's original patriarch, precipitated the rise of what later became the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. As one of Catherinian Russia's wealthiest tycoons, Ivan not only benefitted from his father's wealth but also amassed his own fortune. Ivan engaged in the tsarist capital's jewelry trade and accumulated land, factories, and mines from other prominent industrialists and aristocrats, including the Stroganov, Orlov, Demidov, Golitsyn, and Shakhovskoi families.²²¹ His purchase of the Stroganov family's

²²⁰This discussion is drawn from the introduction to Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 880 (*Lazarevy*), op. 1.

²²¹Roger Bartlett, "Ropsha, An Imperial Palace," in Simon Dixon, ed., *Personality and Place in Russian Culture: Essays in Memory of Lindsey Hughes* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2010), 171-72.

Perm estate in 1778, sized at nearly 800,000 hectares with over 7,000 serfs, was one of the largest transactions of the era.

Ivan Lazarev's greatest contribution to Russo-Armenian engagement came after his death in October 1801, in the form of 200,000 rubles in the Moscow Trustee Council (*opekunskii sovet*) reserved for the establishment of "an academic institution for Armenians" in Moscow.²²² While Ivan left few instructions about his envisioned school's curriculum and mission, it focused on the education of both poor and wealthy Armenian boys. Ivan appointed his younger brother, Ekim, agent and custodian of this will. Ekim shared his late brother's vision but without a home for the school or permission from tsarist authorities, more than a decade passed before the realization of Ivan Lazarev's dream. By 1823, Ekim Lazarev had contributed 300,000 rubles to his brother's original deposit; at least a third of this amount financed the construction of a stone schoolhouse in central Moscow.²²³

From the moment the school opened in 1815, the Lazarevs fashioned it as a vehicle for Armenians to attain higher social status. Initially known as the Armenian Lazarev Academy (ALA), its name reflected the institution's focus on the education of the Armenian diaspora's youth. By 1819, the first year for which statistical data is available, the academy enrolled thirty-one pupils. Twenty-five of them came from penurious Armenian families and paid no tuition, while the remaining six, including an unspecified number of Russians, paid full tuition.²²⁴ Yet the academy attracted fewer pupils, wealthy or poor, than the Lazarevs had hoped. As a result, the family petitioned local education officials as well as Tsar Alexander I—often invoking the

²²²Central Historical Archive of Moscow (TsIAM), f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-3.

²²³TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 74.

²²⁴TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 6.

“Christian brotherhood” between Russians and Armenians—to grant more advanced accreditation to the academy.²²⁵ Ekim Lazarev sought to have the Armenian Lazarev Academy be designated a *gimnaziia*, or secondary school, akin to similar privately funded lyceums, the graduates of which automatically entered the lowest, fourteenth, rung of the Russian table of ranks. The early debate over the mission of the new institution allowed the Lazarev family to engage with officials at a time when important changes in the system of secondary education in Russia transformed social, economic, and political ties of the Russian aristocracy.

The government, keen to standardize the education of nobles by nudging them away from private tutors and into universities, supported the formation of several lyceums in the early nineteenth century. These privately conceived but state backed institutions became intermediate points for elites who aspired to continue their education at universities, or to join the civil service. After the formation of the preparatory academy (*pansion*) alongside Moscow University in 1779, several more lyceums arose between 1803 and 1820, including the Demidov *uchilishche* in Yaroslavl (1803), the Imperial Tsarskoe Selo Lycée near St. Petersburg (1811), the Richelieu lyceum in Odessa (1817), the Volynskii lyceum in Kremenets (1819), and the Bezbordko lyceum in Nezhin (1820). These academies recruited both Russians and non-Russians, and all but Tsarskoe Selo admitted limited numbers of non-nobles.²²⁶ Although regulations fluctuated throughout the first quarter of the century, the graduates of some of these elite institutions were often admitted into higher rungs of the Table of Ranks than university graduates. The Lazarev

²²⁵TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-3.

²²⁶Julia Disson, “Privileged Noble High Schools and the Formation of Russian National Elites in the First Part of the 19th Century,” *Historical Social Research* 33, no. 2 (2008): 176.

family wished to create an analogous institution for Armenians and non-Armenians in Moscow, distinguishing their academy by a broad curriculum that included Oriental studies.

The Lazarevs imagined that their lyceum would fill an important niche in the Russian educational system. It would become only the second preparatory academy in Moscow, and only the eighth such institution in the empire, and also would reflect a growing interest and demand for Oriental studies in Russia, anticipating the rise of professional Orientalology in the empire's universities and at the Academy of Sciences. As David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye has emphasized, orientology in this era attracted Russian elites not only because of its potential political benefits, but also because Russians, "conscious of their own Asian heritage," sought to understand their hybrid East-West identity through the study of the Near East and Asia.²²⁷

Although emperors Peter and Catherine had promoted the study of the Orient in the eighteenth century, the first serious steps toward the professionalization of this endeavor occurred with the formation of chairs of Eastern languages and literatures at three Russian universities in 1804.²²⁸

In 1810, Sergei Uvarov, who would later become the longest-serving minister of education and president of the Academy of Sciences, urged the government to establish a scholarly Asian Academy in St. Petersburg, where diplomats, teachers, translators, and administrators could be trained in thirty-one languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Hebrew, and, in the future, Armenian and Georgian.²²⁹ Although distinct motives and goals drove Uvarov and

²²⁷David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), quote on 9.

²²⁸Cynthia H. Whittaker, *The Origins of Modern Russian Education: An Intellectual Biography of Count Sergei Uvarov, 1786-1855* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), 20-21. The institutions included Moscow University and the new universities of Kazan and Kharkov.

²²⁹Whittaker, *The Origins of Modern Russian Education*, 23.

Lazarev, they were part of a growing Russian elite that stressed the political, social, and cultural value of orientology.

The government had its own ideas for the Lazarev institution. In response to Ekim Lazarev's petitions, the *Glavnoe pravlenie uchilishch* (GPU) formulated several suggestions for reimagining the fledgling academy. In June 1819, the GPU discouraged Lazarev from turning the Armenian Lazarev Academy into a general-purpose lyceum, warning him of the stiff competition for students and faculty that it was likely to face from its more established and prestigious counterparts. Instead, the GPU proposed a narrow curriculum focused on the vocational training of future businessmen, "since they [Armenians] mostly engage in trading, and various industry."²³⁰ The GPU argued that such an institution would "have its own purposeful goal, distinct from others, making it quite commendable and useful in this regard."²³¹ To attain this vision, the GPU suggested converting the ALA to an exclusively Armenian institution with only Armenian-heritage pupils.

An incensed Ekim Lazarev resisted the state's meddling in his vision. The philanthropist insisted that his family's academy must admit non-Armenian students alongside Armenians in order to increase its "general benefit" to the Russian state as well as the Armenian nation, and thereby attain the prestige enjoyed by comparable institutions.²³² Ekim believed that the school's reputation would suffer if it became an exclusively Armenian establishment, rejecting the GPU's recommendation for a vocational curriculum based on commercial training. He envisioned the graduates of his academy advancing not only to bazaars and trade posts, but also to universities

²³⁰TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 4.

²³¹TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 4.

²³²TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 7.

and bureaucratic offices. For these goals to succeed, Armenian pupils had to be trained in a diverse environment that fostered Armenian and non-Armenian interaction. At the same time, Ekim worked within the system, citing the government's interests in his appeal and emphasizing the state benefits of agents versed in Armenian and other Oriental languages, cadres "in whom, it is known, the Department of Foreign Affairs has a need."²³³

Although Ekim rejected the GPU's recommendations, and state officials rejected Ekim's petitions for granting his institution the status of a *gimnaziia*, the two sides compromised and the academy grew rapidly. By the fall of 1821, the ALA's 70 students enjoyed a wide range of classes: Armenian Apostolic and Russian Orthodox doctrines; Armenian, Russian, Persian, Latin, French, and German grammar and literature; rhetoric and ethics; physics and natural history; macroeconomics; "general commercial science"; "general and particularly Russian history"; law; geography and statistics; and calligraphy, drawing, and dancing.²³⁴

This curriculum mirrored the "encyclopedic" programs of other prestigious lyceums,²³⁵ but only the Lazarev academy offered training in Armenian, Persian, and other Eastern cultures. Yet at least one other analogous institution in the Russian empire—the Volynskii lyceum in Kremenets—emphasized the national education of a non-Russian group. The Volynskii lyceum, in modern Ukraine, catered to the Polish nobility, used Polish as the language of instruction, employed almost exclusively Polish faculty, and had just one Russian teacher, responsible for language, literature, and history courses.²³⁶ The Lazarev academy differed from this model not

²³³TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 8.

²³⁴TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 31.

²³⁵Disson, "Privileged Noble High Schools," 176.

²³⁶Disson, "Privileged Noble High Schools," 180.

only because Russian was its primary language of instruction, but also because the institution was located not in the imperial periphery but in Moscow. The Lazarevs sought social and political integration, not the fortification of insular national identities.

By the early 1820s, the ALA's status began to stabilize. In 1821, among the academy's seventy Armenian, Russian, and foreign pupils, thirty paid no tuition or boarding fees.²³⁷ The majority of these subsidized pupils were promising orphans or the children of destitute Armenian families in the Caucasus. The institution's trustee (*popechitel'*), usually in conjunction with the *Uchilishchnoe pravlenie*, made admissions decisions, without regard to the applicants' subjecthood. The faculty, "certified and capable bureaucrats," lived nearby in housing provided by Ekim Lazarev. Full-time boarders paid 700 rubles per year and part-time boarders paid half of that amount; however, by one estimate from the early 1820s, the academy's annual tuition income amounted to just 8,000 rubles.²³⁸ Aside from this source of revenue the academy reaped the annual interest payments of Ivan Lazarev's 200,000-ruble investment, and also benefited from the leasing of buildings that Ekim Lazarev purchased or commissioned specifically for the financial support of the ALA.²³⁹ Finally, students benefited from a 3,000-volume library. Thus, by 1823, the academy's expanded curriculum, larger enrollment, and improved financial situation added punch to Ekim Lazarev's appeals for elevating the status of his institution.

The petitions succeeded. On 13 May 1823, Tsar Alexander I approved the first charter of the rebranded Armenian Lazarev Gymnasium of Advanced Studies and Oriental Languages

²³⁷TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 32.

²³⁸TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 40.

²³⁹TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 32-40. The interest income amounted to about 10,000 rubles per year, tuition income was about 8,000, and the rent of buildings contributed about 5,000. Occasionally, the ALA received donations from individuals and from Moscow and St. Petersburg Armenian churches.

(*Armianskaia Lazareva Gimnaziia Vysshikh nauk i Vostochnykh iazykov*).²⁴⁰ The charter emphasized that the *gimnaziia* catered to all Armenians and non-Armenians, irrespective of subjecthood or financial status. Merit, not social status, determined admission. In theory, “anyone” demonstrating academic promise and interest in Oriental languages and cultures could seek admission. Into the ranks of subsidized students, the *gimnaziia* admitted “preferably children of the poorest families and orphans of the Armenian confession, not excluding children of other nations [as long as funds permit].”²⁴¹ The charter envisioned up to 70 paying pupils and between 20 and 30 subsidized students.

The Lazarevs emphasized the potential political and economic benefits to the tsarist state of such an institution—the first lyceum with a focus on Oriental studies. “The importance of these goals in terms of Russia’s commercial as well as political relations is so obvious, that it requires no explanation,” confidently declared the charter.²⁴² The first institution of its kind in Russia, the Lazarev academy preceded the introduction of Arabic, Persian, and Turko-Tatar courses at the famed First Kazan Gymnasium in 1836.²⁴³

The Lazarev *gimnaziia* focused on producing graduates for state (mainly civil) service and commerce. At its broadest level, it sought not only to provide “much-needed” teachers, translators, and bureaucrats versed in Oriental languages—limited to Armenian, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic—but also to educate the public about the culture and history of these

²⁴⁰TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 39-50.

²⁴¹TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 44-45.

²⁴²TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 39-40.

²⁴³Whittaker, *The Origins of Modern Russian Education*, 210. On the rise of Kazan as an important center of orientology, see Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 93-121.

Oriental peoples.²⁴⁴ With Russia's increasingly close political and economic ties to its southern imperial neighbors, the Lazarevs argued that their institution would fill an important void in the empire's professional and academic spheres by producing dedicated cadres of well-educated and ambitious young men. Upon graduation, foreign-subject Armenians were promised "complete freedom" between becoming Russian subjects and returning to their original state of residence.²⁴⁵

The confirmed charter delivered the prestige that Ekim Lazarev had long solicited but fell short of granting the rights and privileges the Armenian magnate sought. In addition to the economic exemptions granted to the empire's elite lyceums, Ekim Lazarev hoped that a formal representative of the monarch would be assigned as a benefactor (*pokrovitel'*) of the institution, thus removing the need for the Education Ministry's oversight by streamlining the decision-making process at the top. The Lazarevs' pursuit of eminent statesmen for this post showed their political sagacity in recruiting members of the tsar's inner circle.

Lazarev seized his chance in November 1823, when former War Minister Count Aleksei Arakcheev visited the school on the six-month anniversary of the charter's confirmation.²⁴⁶ A vicious martinet despised by his colleagues and subordinates for his sternness and, later, for his draconian enforcement of the ill-fated military colonies project, Arakcheev enjoyed the tsar's trust, making him attractive to the Lazarevs.²⁴⁷ Soon after Arakcheev's visit, and with his

²⁴⁴TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 40.

²⁴⁵TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 40. In 1824 the course of study was reduced to six years, then to five, but later increased to eight years.

²⁴⁶TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 92.

²⁴⁷Historian Marc Raeff characterized Arakcheev as "an opportunist, loyal to an almost fanatical degree to Alexander, whose orders he obeyed without question. His brusque manner and limited vision repelled most cultivated people, indeed everyone who possessed the slightest spark of idealism, patriotism, and concern for the public good." See Marc Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 128.

consent, a broad effort by prominent Armenians, including Ekim Lazarev and senior clergy of the Armenian Church, petitioned the tsar for Arakcheev to become “*pokrovitel*” of the Lazarev *Gimnaziia*.²⁴⁸ Lazarev hoped that the appointment of a prominent political leader as patron would yield the institution additional privileges, such as those granted to the Demidov and Bezborodko *gimnazii*. In his appeal to the tsar, Ekim Lazarev emphasized that “the aim of this *gimnaziia* is to facilitate the education of youth toward state service and toward the classical study of Oriental languages, which are so necessary for the political relations of Russia, which still has no Oriental institute.”²⁴⁹ An explicit focus on oriental studies began to overshadow the earlier emphases on general education and commercial training. Within a year of the original charter’s confirmation, Ekim and his assistants drew up a revised charter that revealed this evolution of their institution.

Reflecting the institution’s growing prominence, the tsar tasked the Council of Ministers with examining Lazarev’s new petition. Importantly, among the primary supporters of the Armenians’ appeal was Minister of Education and President of the Bible Society Alexander Golitsyn, who told his colleagues that the Lazarev *Gimnaziia* “without any violation of the general rules can be freed from the oversight of the education ministry, and, as a special kind of institution, which mainly educates Armenian children, be placed under a special Supreme Leadership.”²⁵⁰ The Council of Ministers agreed with this opinion on 8 November 1824, a decision that the tsar soon confirmed, approving the Lazarev *Gimnaziia*’s second charter.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 98-101.

²⁴⁹TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 101.

²⁵⁰TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 292.

²⁵¹TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 89.

Count Arakcheev became the school's principle (*nachal'nik*), making him the official representative of the government in all matters pertaining to the institution. After nearly a decade as a small private academy, the Lazarev *Gimnaziia* of Oriental Languages gained the formal backing of the Russian state.

Several privileges accompanied this support. First, the *gimnaziia* was allowed to establish its own printing press and to use the state seal. Second, the school's main building on Armenian lane in central Moscow, as well as "all" other structures owned by the Lazarev family for the explicit benefit of the *gimnaziia*, were "freed forever from all billeting and all rural and city duties."²⁵² Moreover, the *gimnaziia*'s professors and teachers were classified as "serving in active state service, enjoying all rights and privileges in the promotion of rank and eligibility for the receipt of [royal] graces for excellence in service."²⁵³ Finally, LG faculty were permitted to wear the state-issued uniforms of the Moscow Educational District.

Radical transformations in the Lazarev *Gimnaziia*'s mission and identity continued in the 1820s. The tsar's unexpected death in late 1825, the subsequent Decembrist uprising, the Second Russo-Persian War (1826-28), and the death of the institution's founder, Ekim Lazarev, in 1826, contributed to the school's reorientation. By 1827, Arakcheev had left his role as *popechitel'* of the institution, a position that during his tenure had amounted to little more than a sinecure, according to one historian.²⁵⁴ Before another eminent statesman replaced Arakcheev in 1828, the tsarist state refocused its attention on the institution.

²⁵²TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 50.

²⁵³TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 50.

²⁵⁴A. P. Baziiants, "Iz istorii Lazarevskogo instituta," in *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk Armiianskoi SSR*, no. 2 (1964): 13-20, especially 15.

The Committee for the Establishment of Academic Institutions, an ancillary of the Education Ministry, tasked distinguished orientologist Christian Martin Frähn, economist G. F. Shtrokh, and linguist F. Adelung with composing a new charter for the institution. Frähn's inclusion was particularly noteworthy owing to his role in the development of Russian orientology: after a frustrating stint as the first chair of Oriental letters at Kazan University, the German numismatist became the first director of the Asian Museum at the Academy of Sciences.²⁵⁵ As a result of these scholars' proposals and the petitions of a new Lazarev, Ivan Ekimovich, the institution's famous iteration was established. On 26 December 1827, the committee approved the newly reimagined Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages.

The state's elevation of the Lazarev institution from a "*gimnaziia*" to an "institute" reflected two important developments. First, tsarist agents recognized the school's success in producing cadres of professional clerks versed in Oriental languages and cultures. By the latter 1820s, little doubt already existed that the lyceum "opened up broad prospects for staffing the Russian diplomatic agency."²⁵⁶ As the Lazarev Institute's reputation expanded beyond Russia's Armenian diaspora, growing numbers of the institution's early graduates joined the ranks of state translators, junior bureaucrats, and language teachers. Second, this promotion acknowledged the state's need for such bureaucrats and diplomats. The institute's establishment and the increased attention it received from the state coincided with the empire's expansion into Persian domains in the South Caucasus. In the context of Russia's annexation of new territory and peoples on its

²⁵⁵Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 97-98 and 159.

²⁵⁶Mikhail Kalishevskii, "Lazarevskii institut – pervoe spetsializirovannoe diplomaticheskoe uchilishche." Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) website, accessed 28 November 2014, <http://www.mgimo.ru/study/dean/docs/6420/6624/document145668.phtml>

southern periphery, the need for such an institution had never been more acute. The selection of a new patron confirmed these priorities.

With Arakcheev's departure, the Lazarevs and their allies in the Armenian Church launched a campaign for a new patron. The target of their efforts became diplomat and general Konstantin von Benkendorf.²⁵⁷ Another member of the tsar's inner circle and former envoy in Baden and Stuttgart, Benkendorf had recently earned Armenians' respect for his military prowess during the second Russo-Persian conflict, where his forces captured Echmiadzin and routed Persian troops near Yerevan. By March 1828, just weeks after the signing of the Turkmenchai Treaty that ended the Second Russo-Persian War and secured Yerevan and Echmiadzin for the tsar, Ivan Lazarev and Archbishop Hovannes appealed to Nicholas I for Benkendorf to become the institute's *pokrovitel'*.

Yet the post-Decembrist political climate resulted in distinctions between the successive tenures of Arakcheev and Benkendorf. Per the monarch's decree of 19 August 1827, reflecting the new tsar's conservatism and also the LI's redefined identity, the institution's royally appointed patron now fell under the jurisdiction and oversight of the Education Ministry. Under the leadership of the conservative Aleksandr Shishkov, who distrusted prominent academics and sought to replace them with bureaucrats, the ministry scrutinized the activities of the empire's academies with reinvigorated zeal.²⁵⁸ To assuage the potential concerns of this "emblematic

²⁵⁷TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 163-64.

²⁵⁸Brian James Baer, "Literary Translation in the Age of the Decembrists," in Denise Merkle, ed., *The Power of the Pen: Translation and Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 218.

figure of the emerging Russian nationalism,”²⁵⁹ Benkendorf assured Shishkov, in April 1828, that he was

prepared to contribute to the prospering of this broadly beneficent [*obshchepoleznogo*] Oriental nest [*rassadnik*], especially because the institute’s overall aim is to provide that education to the youth, which is necessary for military and civil service. Moreover, the Armenian youth living under Russian protection, who have demonstrated zealous devotion to their new homeland . . . will unite [*soedinitsia*] with native Russians with greater ease.²⁶⁰

Moreover, Benkendorf not only reassured Shishkov that the Lazarev Institute remained financially solvent, an ostensible early concern of the minister, but also that the institution derived financial profit from “the entire Armenian people,” whose “devoted cooperation” continued to grow.²⁶¹ Finally, Benkendorf summarized his stance by arguing that the Lazarev Institute “deserves special attention because it was founded by private individuals, without any [state] encouragement and without any assistance from the treasury, to the substantive benefit of the government and to the benefit of an entire nation.”²⁶²

Despite a broad campaign that benefited from Benkendorf’s support, the Lazarevs struggled to secure for their private academy the privileges granted to state-owned institutions. Throughout 1828, Shishkov and his ministry rejected several drafts of a new charter that sought the granting to the Lazarev Institute of rights reserved for state-sponsored educational institutions (*kazennye uchebnye zavedeniia*).²⁶³ In rejecting the family’s appeals, the Education Ministry in

²⁵⁹ Alexander Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762-1855* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 184.

²⁶⁰ TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 167.

²⁶¹ TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 168.

²⁶² TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 168.

²⁶³ TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 178-79.

May 1828 called into doubt the institute's financial situation. In particular, it argued that the Lazarevs failed to provide definitive proof of their academy's annual profits.²⁶⁴ Even after Karl von Lieven replaced Shishkov at the helm of the Education Ministry in late 1828, the Lazarevs' petitions encountered resistance from the state.

By February 1829, the Lazarev brothers offered to place their personal properties, including large estates with many serfs and recently acquired stone buildings in Moscow, as collateral of their institute's financial stability and solvency. Additionally, the brothers emphasized that leaving their academy strictly private, without attributing to it the privileges of *kazennye uchebnye zavedeniia*, would curb its contributions to state interests.²⁶⁵ Despite such assurances and arguments, Lieven for some time insisted on leaving the Lazarev institution "at its current good position, at the general rules for private institutions, [where it can] deliver benefits for public enlightenment commensurate with its resources."²⁶⁶ The Education Ministry relented only in 1830, approving the institute's new charter.

Beyond their institute's mission, dialogue between the Lazarev family and the Education Ministry in 1829 focused on the broader growth of Armenian studies in the tsarist empire. By the fall of 1829, reports reached Lieven from the Moscow education officials that the Lazarevs sought to finance the establishment of a "department of Armenian language and literature" at the prestigious Moscow University.²⁶⁷ The Armenian philanthropists offered not only to finance the

²⁶⁴TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 178-79.

²⁶⁵TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 185-86.

²⁶⁶TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 187-90.

²⁶⁷TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 205.

initial efforts but also to assist in recruiting an experienced scholar of Armenian studies and, if need be, to provide “whatever academic assistance.”

Lieven rejected this proposal in November 1829, assuring Ivan Lazarev that the Education Ministry “has already turned its attention to the necessity of studying in our country of Oriental languages, including Armenian,” but the resources of the imperial capital made St. Petersburg a more appropriate site for the initiation of these efforts than Moscow. Lieven argued that the Academy of Sciences and the Imperial Public Library, in conjunction with the city’s generally larger scholarly community from which instructors could be recruited, facilitated the study of various Oriental languages in St. Petersburg.²⁶⁸ Ivan Lazarev countered that Moscow’s Armenian population far exceeded that of St. Petersburg, providing the future center of Armenian studies with more support, demand, and objects of study. Although the first chair of Armenian studies was not established at Kazan University until 1842,²⁶⁹ the Lazarevs set the foundation on which Armenology came to be accepted in Russian academia. From 1844, Armenian became part of the curriculum at St. Petersburg University.²⁷⁰

By the start of the 1830s, the Lazarev dynasty had not only established an increasingly esteemed center of Orientology, but also had taken the first steps toward the creation of Armenian studies departments in the empire’s premier universities. The institution’s reputation spread beyond Russia’s Armenian diaspora to attract Armenian and non-Armenian students from India and Western Europe, and facilitated its engagement with kindred foreign scholarly bodies,

²⁶⁸TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 205.

²⁶⁹Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 160. Poor enrollment forced the Armenian chair to be closed in 1851.

²⁷⁰Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 168.

such as the Royal Asiatic Society in London.²⁷¹ From 1829 to 1831 alone, the institute's enrollment grew from 73 to 93 pupils.²⁷² Among the 73 pupils in 1829, 40 received full financial support from the academy and the total cohort's national composition included 52 Armenians, 11 Russians, and 2 Germans.²⁷³ The academy's growing ranks of teachers ensured eight daily hours of class time; the institute's faculty grew from 12-14 instructors in 1823 to 26 in 1829.

Thanks to merit-based admissions, a rigorous curriculum, qualified faculty, and comfortable facilities, the Lazarev Institute began to produce young men who eventually advanced to senior positions in the tsarist political hierarchy. Even early disciplinary issues did not prevent former students from achieving success. To cite one example, when Mikhail, a young Armenian pupil, smothered his teacher's chair with enough glue that the educator required his colleagues' rescue after sitting down, the institute's administration not only expelled the troublemaker but also sought to exile him to his parents in the South Caucasus. The future looked bleak for young Mikhail, and probably few could have imagined then that within four decades the mischievous Armenian teenager would become the second-most powerful man in the empire, Interior Minister Count Mikhail Loris-Melikov.²⁷⁴

The Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages played a key role in the evolution of Russo-Armenian relations. From its inception, the academy and its patron family found allies among the tsarist political elite and broader Russian public. For example, on 28 February 1817, the

²⁷¹TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 223.

²⁷²TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 227.

²⁷³TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 5, l. 184. The nationalities of the remaining eight students in 1829 are unclear.

²⁷⁴B. T. Ovanesov and N. D. Sudavtsov, *Voенно-administrativnaia deiatel'nost' armian v rossiiskoi imperii na kavkaze* (Stavropol': Nairi, 2008), 145. Only by chance was Loris-Melikov allowed to continue his studies in St. Petersburg. It is unclear when exactly he was expelled from the Lazarev Institute, but it appears to have been in the mid-1830s.

newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti* (Moscow Herald) hailed the new institution as an affirmation of the “Christian brotherhood” between Russians and Armenians.²⁷⁵ The newspaper predicted that the Lazarev Academy would yield “a new holy union, tightly binding two people of the same faith.” In a particularly melodramatic rhapsody where Russia was likened to a “progeny-loving mother” and Armenians to “her orphaned offspring,” the article highlighted Russia’s patronage of the stateless Armenians:

Armenians, lacking a political existence [and] impoverished for so many centuries, find in Russia a compassionate mother who cares for them and stimulates their minds. [The Armenians] will utilize all their efforts to strengthen their position and will demonstrate new examples of gratitude and reverent filial dedication, [more] evidence of that unwavering loyalty and diligence toward the All-Russian throne with which they have been animated for a long time.²⁷⁶

The article insisted that “an alliance forged on this solid foundation with a nation that is distinguished by its exemplary internal communication, a broad trade in a large part of the Orient, and especially [one that] maintains the closest and most direct relations with India and Persia, provides . . . a vast field of flattering [*lestnye*] benefits for Russia.”²⁷⁷

Among the tsarist political elite, too, Russian support for the Lazarev Institute, if not constant, assured the institution’s expansion. The tsar appointed two *pokroviteli*, eminent statesmen selected by the Lazarevs, demonstrating the status and implications that the Romanov state associated with this institution. Even when the Lazarevs encountered the resistance of senior officials, such as Shishkov and Lieven, their academy enjoyed the backing of other officials, such as Benkendorf, permitting the advancement of their vision.

²⁷⁵TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 141-43.

²⁷⁶TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 143.

²⁷⁷TsIAM, f. 213, op. 1, d. 1, l. 143.

The key to understanding the reasons for this shifting progress lies in the fact that the Lazarev academy was never intended to be, nor did it become, a center of Armenian education along national, or nationalist, ideologies. It focused primarily on the schooling of Armenian-heritage pupils not to awaken or fortify their Armenianness, or to counteract perceived and real Russification of the tsar's Armenian subjects, but to prepare Armenians and non-Armenians for membership in professional Russian society. The institute sought to train graduates for private and state careers that required knowledge of Oriental languages and cultures alongside general education. The state's gradual patronage of this institution affirmed the Russian political elite's acceptance of the Lazarevs' stated mission toward the political and economic benefit of the tsarist empire.

The rise of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages represented a response to the demands of Russian imperialism. The academy's establishment and its gradual backing by the state corresponded with the lull between the two Russo-Persian clashes, when Russian ministers, generals, administrators, and the broader public turned their attention to the empire's expansion into the South Caucasus. At the same time, as large numbers of Persian and Ottoman-subject Armenians immigrated into the Romanov empire, its population of Armenians grew suddenly, necessitating a closer understanding of their culture(s). To examine the processes through which foreign-subject Armenians came under St. Petersburg's control, an analysis of the tsar's clashes with the shah and the sultan in the late 1820s is necessary.



Figure 2. The original building of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. Today it houses the Armenian Embassy to Russia.
Photo property of the author.

Old Foes, New Friends

The Second Russo-Persian War of 1826-28 and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29 pitted Russia against its two imperial neighbors in the Caucasus. One of the key results of the former clash was Russia's annexation of Yerevan and Echmiadzin in 1828. The tsars had pursued these historic Armenian centers since 1804, enticed by the strategic advantage of the Yerevan fortress and the political sway of the Echmiadzin monastery, to whose authority submitted the entire dispersed Armenian diaspora. While capture of Yerevan, the region's second city after Tiflis, spelled full Russian dominion over the South Caucasus, control of Echmiadzin

promised extensive political and economic sway into those countries, such as Turkey, Persia, and even India, where Russian diplomats struggled for influence while local Armenian bishops enjoyed social prominence. Thus geopolitical incentives, more than economic goals, motivated Russia's conflict with Persia and Ottoman Turkey in the Caucasus in the late 1820s.

Persia's political elite lamented the result of the First Russo-Persian War of 1804-13, when Russia wrested control of six khanates and hundreds of thousands of the shah's subjects. In the words of historian Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "the danger of domination loomed large as imperial giants cast their sinister shadows over the Iranian lands and nibbled away at its fringes."²⁷⁸ The terms of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 had confirmed the superiority of Russian weapons, but Fath-Ali Shah and Crown Prince Abbas Mirza remained convinced that good timing, more than good tactics, had brought victory to their northern neighbor. Persian leaders recognized the fact that, having both expelled Napoleon's *Grande Armée* and defeated the Ottomans in 1812, Russia was free to devote a larger proportion of resources to the Caucasus campaign in 1813. Determined to regain lost territories and reestablish its imperial grip on the South Caucasus, the Persian political and spiritual elite vowed to wage *jihad* against the northern infidels, a fateful policy that would precipitate the decline of the entire Qajar monarchy.²⁷⁹ For the tsarist state, too, the Russo-Persian border redrawn at Gulistan fell short of its goals, because, after two failed Russian attempts at their conquest, Yerevan and Echmiadzin stayed within the shah's domain. With the death of Tsar Alexander I in late 1825 and the subsequent

²⁷⁸Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 30.

²⁷⁹Abbas Amanat, "'Russian Intrusion into the Guarded Domain': Reflections of a Qajar Statesman on European Expansion," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 1 (1993): 35-56.

Decembrist revolt, Persia seized the chance to catch the tsarist bureaucracy and military off guard.

On 16 July 1826, the *sardar*, or military governor, of Yerevan attacked Russian outposts along the boundary of Russian-held Georgia and Persian-held Yerevan. Almost simultaneously, the main Persian army, led by Crown Prince Abbas Mirza, crossed the Arax River from Persia proper into the Russian-occupied khanates of Karabakh and Talysh. The Persian force advanced easily, driving back small Russian garrisons and welcoming the defections of local khans to the Persian side.²⁸⁰ Within days of the attack, the shah's army had expelled or encircled all of the Russian troops stationed in Karabakh, a success that the supreme Russian commander, General Aleksei Petrovich Ermolov,²⁸¹ attributed to the collusion of local Muslims. As one small Russian contingent became encircled in the Shusha fortress, Ermolov vented to the tsar that locals had blocked narrow mountain passages to prevent the retreat of Russian troops.²⁸²

Like many of the aristocratic officers in the tsar's army, Ermolov was an intellectual as much as a soldier, belonging to a distant age of enlightened imperialists. He was a man of "wide culture and a fluent linguist, greatly influenced by the ideas of the Encyclopedistes; a writer of philosophical verse, a skilled Latinist who always kept his Livy close at hand, and who named his two sons Severus and Claudius."²⁸³ Pushkin, who met Ermolov after his retirement,

²⁸⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 28. The Persian army numbered about 35,000 men.

²⁸¹A veteran of the Napoleonic War of 1812 who distinguished himself at Borodino and Paris, Ermolov assumed the command of tsarist forces in the Caucasus in 1816.

²⁸²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 39.

²⁸³Michael Whittock, "Ermolov – Proconsul of the Caucasus," in *Russian Review* 18, no. 1 (1959): 56.

immortalized him in his poetry.²⁸⁴ At the same time, the general was a “quintessential frontier conqueror,” who sought to subjugate the region through relentless violence and harsh policies.²⁸⁵ His command of the Caucasus ensured that the highlanders feared, respected, and hated “Yarmul,” as they called him.²⁸⁶

From the first fusillade of the Second Russo-Persian War, the theme of a clash of religions informed the perspective of senior tsarist commanders in the Caucasus. Ermolov deflected blame for the debacle from himself to the supposed duplicitousness of the region’s Muslim residents. Shaken by the powerful incursion, the Russian general reported to the tsar within days of the Persian attack that “a war aroused by religion and fanaticism has mobilized against us all Muslims and we have nothing left but Georgia.”²⁸⁷ Warning of the perilous situation, Ermolov pleaded for heavy reinforcements, vowing to punish the Persians by “bringing the war into their own land!”²⁸⁸ In an appeal for assistance to the Imperial General Staff, Ermolov emphasized that “this war promises to be more severe than could have been expected, for it is aroused by religion.”²⁸⁹

The tsar not only disagreed with Ermolov’s plans for a defensive war but also pressed him to conquer new territory. Soon after the Persian invasion, the chief of the General Staff,

²⁸⁴Pushkin’s *Prisoner of the Caucasus* provides the best example of this. Pushkin also mentioned Ermolov in his *Journey to Erzurum*, but, written after the poet’s audience with the retired general, paints a less romanticized picture of Ermolov.

²⁸⁵Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45.

²⁸⁶Whittock, “Ermolov – Proconsul of the Caucasus,” 55.

²⁸⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 28.

²⁸⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 4.

²⁸⁹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 38.

Hans Karl von Diebitsch, ordered Ermolov to take “decisive” action against the shah’s army using the Independent Caucasus Corps, a formidable force of 30,000 men. Diebitsch and Tsar Nicholas were so confident of this army’s superiority that they instructed Ermolov not only to repulse the Persian attack but also to capture the elusive Yerevan fortress, which had repelled Russian attacks in 1804 and 1808.²⁹⁰ By mid-August 1826, Tsar Nicholas’s terse messages revealed the monarch’s waning confidence in Ermolov.²⁹¹ Although Nicholas relented by sending an additional division to the Caucasus, at the head of the reinforcements he sent General Ivan Paskevich, ostensibly to provide Ermolov with “a detailed explanation of my intentions.”²⁹²

The complex interethnic climate of the region impacted the course of the conflict. Throughout the first months of the war, Ermolov continued to warn St. Petersburg of the local Muslims’ security risk, roused not simply by religious solidarity with the invading army but also by the financial “gifts” and incentives promised by Abbas Mirza in return for cooperation.²⁹³ Ermolov also claimed that the *sardar* of Yerevan had sent propagandistic pamphlets to village elders in tsarist territory, urging their assistance in Persia’s struggle against the infidels. To “punish” the local Muslims for their collaboration with the enemy, Ermolov planned to billet his troops on their lands and in their villages until the start of a winter campaign against Karabakh. Some of Ermolov’s concerns were confirmed in September 1826, when local Muslims in

²⁹⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 24. Should the shah fail to sue for peace at that time, Ermolov was instructed to cross the Arax River into Persia proper to capture the major northern Persian city of Tavriz.

²⁹¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 43.

²⁹²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 43.

²⁹³RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, ll. 53-54.

Elisavetpol joined with the invading Persians to drive out the Russian garrison.²⁹⁴ Yet Ermolov again found himself on the wrong side of the predominant view. Despite the mass insurrection at Elisavetpol, the tsar instructed Ermolov to announce a blanket amnesty to local Muslims for their cooperation with the Persians. Ermolov and his commanders were to treat them with “mercy” and avoid any semblance of “vengeance.”²⁹⁵ According to Diebitsch, “His Majesty is convinced that mercy and justice sooner will instill in these people a sense of loyalty to Russia than persecution and harassment, which can fan the flames of a war birthed by religious fanaticism.”²⁹⁶

If in the perception of some tsarist elites, such as General Ermolov, local Muslims posed security risks to Russian interests in the South Caucasus, then other groups offered advantages. Tsarist officials found indigenous, religious-based support primarily among two national groups: Armenians and Georgians. As soon as hostilities flared, Russian officials had no doubt about which side the Armenians supported. When Abbas Mirza’s army overran Elisavetpol in September 1826 and mobilized local Muslims against the Russian administration, the only good news Ermolov could report to the tsar was that “all Armenians living in the district are on our side.”²⁹⁷ When, a few weeks later, Paskevich’s forces entered Karabakh to break the siege of the Shusha fortress, the general reported to the tsar that local Armenians had facilitated his advancement by providing intelligence on the location of Persian troops.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 85.

²⁹⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, ll. 96-97.

²⁹⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, ll. 96-97.

²⁹⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 85.

²⁹⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 106.

Indeed, Armenian cooperation contributed to turning the tide of the war. The first major Russian victory of the conflict took place near Elisavetpol on 13 September 1826.²⁹⁹ Two Armenians in the Persian service, one of whom tsarist sources identified as the personal Russian interpreter of Abbas Mirza, snuck into Paskevich's camp at night to warn the Russian general of an imminent attack by the Persian Crown Prince.³⁰⁰ This information, according to Paskevich's report to Tsar Nicholas, permitted him to launch a preemptive assault that helped drive the Persians from Karabakh.³⁰¹ Within days of this victory, Paskevich broke the Persian siege of Shusha and Abbas Mirza's army withdrew from Karabakh into Persia proper, tracked along the route by Armenian informants.³⁰²

If during the First Russo-Persian War Armenians were mainly tsarist spies and settlers, in the second clash they also assumed the role of soldiers. Upon entering the long-besieged Shusha fortress, Paskevich discovered that "up to 1,500 armed Armenians" had fought alongside Russian troops to withstand the Persian attack.³⁰³ The tsarist commander of the garrison, Colonel Reutt, confirmed to Paskevich that "brave Egerians and loyal Armenians" had played an active role in defending the citadel. Moreover, the colonel reported that, at the onset of hostilities, he had witnessed local "Tatars" slaughter "several" Armenians outside the fortress. The Russian officer interpreted this event as a sign of the Muslims' resistance to the arrival of a Christian force and

²⁹⁹ A detailed summary of this battle can be found at RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4302, ll. 1-3.

³⁰⁰ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 109.

³⁰¹ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4301, l. 1.

³⁰² RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 139.

³⁰³ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 145. Another source, less reliable for its unclear origin, gives the number of Armenian fighters inside the Shusha fortress at 3,000 men: RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, l. 3.

their displeasure with their Christian neighbors, whose sympathy for tsarist rule was no secret.³⁰⁴

With the turning tide of the war and growing danger of a Russian invasion of the Yerevan khanate, tsarist authorities learned that the Yerevan *sardar* intended to relocate Armenians in his territory beyond the Arax River “in order to deprive us [Russians] of any benefits from them.”³⁰⁵

Armenians mobilized both on their own and with Russian appeals. In some cases, Armenian ecclesiastical elders urged their followers to take up arms against the Persians. In late 1826, at the behest of the Echmiadzin Catholicos (still within the Persian domain) and the Armenian archbishop of Tiflis, Armenians in and near Nakhichevan assembled a large militia, estimated by some Armenian sources to have numbered as many as 6,000 mounted men.³⁰⁶ While this number is likely exaggerated, it is indicative of the role played by the Armenian Church in rallying its flock. During the Russian advance after Paskevich’s victory at Elisavetpol, several Armenian militias (*opolchentsy*), some numbering as few as 100 individuals, fought alongside the tsarist army.³⁰⁷ In some instances, junior tsarist commanders in the field issued certifications to individual Armenian militia leaders and other local supporters, acknowledging their assistance to the Russian army.³⁰⁸

Other natives of the region, both Muslim and Christian, joined Armenians in the tsarist war effort. Armenian and Georgian militias fought under the command of their co-national commanders but coordinated their actions with Russian forces. Georgian militias, some of them

³⁰⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, ll. 147-51.

³⁰⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 284.

³⁰⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, l. 25.

³⁰⁷RGVIA, f. 479, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 6, 8, and 10. More examples in RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4290, l. 232.

³⁰⁸National Archive of Armenia (NAA), f. 90, op. 1, d. 456, l. 1.

led by aristocratic young Georgians raised after the 1801 annexation of Kartli-Kakhetia, often battled alongside “Tatar” and Armenian units. The General Staff learned of these displays of loyalty early, directing Ermolov in the fall of 1826 to provide a report about local Armenians’ and Georgians’ cooperation with Russian war efforts.³⁰⁹ Moreover, always in search of additional reinforcements, in late August 1826 Ermolov recruited “up to 1,800” Georgian cavalymen, “among whom are many princes and nobles of the best names.”³¹⁰ Soon a formal declaration from Tsar Nicholas to the Georgian nobility acknowledged its contribution.³¹¹

After Paskevich expelled Abbas Mirza from Karabakh, the Russian army targeted Yerevan. In preparation for the assault in the spring of 1827, Paskevich recruited local Muslims, Georgians, and especially Armenians. In May 1827, he boasted to Diebitsch that, within a couple days of his initial announcement, over one hundred Armenian men volunteered for service.³¹² The terms of service for these mobilizing “Armenian battalions” were publicized widely. Armenian men aged eighteen to thirty were accepted on a temporary, voluntary basis for the duration of the war with Persia, at the conclusion of which they would be disbanded. During their service, together with their wives and children, the volunteers were excused from all taxes. They were armed and paid by the Russian army, to whose authority and command structure they submitted. However, efforts were made to assign tsarist officers of Armenian heritage to the Armenian battalions.³¹³ Such commanders were permitted to issue orders in Armenian.³¹⁴ The

³⁰⁹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, l. 9.

³¹⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4309, l. 1.

³¹¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4309, ll. 2-3.

³¹²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4336, l. 1.

³¹³RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4336, ll. 1-3.

supplies provided to the Armenian units, in theory, were to match the support given to ordinary Russian soldiers, and all Armenians wounded in battle were admitted into Russian field hospitals. The first of these units, a “*druzhina*” (squad) of 117 Armenians, was dispatched from Tiflis in mid-May 1827 to rendezvous with Russian forces near Echmiadzin. A few weeks later, another unit of 100 Armenians was sent from Tiflis to join the Russian siege of Yerevan, followed by a third, smaller unit of 67 men in August.³¹⁵ Learning of these developments from Diebitsch, Tsar Nicholas proposed that permanent Armenian military units be organized after the war.³¹⁶

Persian authorities recognized their Armenians’ solidarity with Russians. In the encircled Yerevan khanate, according to Armenian reports to Russian officials, which must be interpreted with particular caution given the stakes involved,³¹⁷ Persian officials took measures to check the potential collusion of local Armenians with the enemy. In one report from early October, Armenians in Tiflis, receiving information from their compatriots in Yerevan, reported to local Russian officials news from Yerevan. “As much as from its explicit suspicion of the Armenian people for its devotion to Russia,” summarized one Armenian report, “as much as from vengeance and evil, Yerevan authorities have begun the extreme harassment of the Armenian

³¹⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4336, l. 5.

³¹⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4336, ll. 9-14. A unit of 100 Georgian volunteers was also dispatched from Tiflis to Yerevan in July 1827.

³¹⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4336, l. 7.

³¹⁷In theory, it was in Armenians’ interest to exaggerate to Russians the abuse they experienced at the hands of Persians in order to encourage Russian intervention.

Echmiadzin Monastery. By order of the Persian chiefs, some of the monks have already been killed, others [tortured], and moreover they have begun plundering and destroying.”³¹⁸

In another district, the local Persian commander returned from the front to confiscate the goods of local Armenian traders and to seize valuables from the local Armenian churches. The Yerevan *sardar* ordered all Armenians within the city suspected of cooperating with the enemy hanged, and those living outside the city to “evacuate” beyond the Arax River. Their abandoned homes were razed, as well as some bridges across the river.³¹⁹ Beyond the Yerevan khanate, according to the complaints of Armenians in Tiflis to Russian authorities, tsarist-subject Armenian merchants travelling through Persia proper were detained, and their goods and money confiscated.³²⁰ However, other Armenians from Karabakh reported that Abbas Mirza had guaranteed the safe passage of Russian-subject Armenian merchants from Tavriz back to Tiflis, even providing them with an armed escort.³²¹

Back in the Russian camp, tensions between Ermolov and Paskevich came to a head, exasperated by Paskevich’s triumphs.³²² In early 1827, Nicholas sent Diebitsch to resolve the matter and to end the war. Soon Paskevich refused to continue under Ermolov’s command. On 28 March, following the tsar’s orders, Diebitsch relieved the veteran general from his duties, promoting Paskevich to lead the Independent Caucasus Corps.

³¹⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, ll. 6-7.

³¹⁹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, ll. 11-12 and also 31.

³²⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, l. 3. Ermolov retaliated by ordering the seizure of goods belonging to Persian merchants as “collateral” for the confiscated items of Russian-subject merchants.

³²¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 894, l. 43.

³²²Based on the correspondence between Tsar Nicholas, Diebitsch, and Ermolov, it appears that the greatest sources of frustration for the court were Ermolov’s recurring pleas for heavy reinforcements, and his hesitation to engage the main Persian army until their arrival.

General Paskevich justified his promotion quickly. By mid-June 1827, the tsarist army had advanced within 25 kilometers of the Yerevan fortress.³²³ Russian troops under the command of General Benkendorf, meantime, captured Echmiadzin and drove the local Persian troops into Yerevan, taking care to “save Armenian villages from the expulsion of residents.”³²⁴ Paskevich bragged in his journal that upon his army’s entrance into Armenian villages in Persian territory, they were met with “the most festive greeting, in all churches liturgies were read for the welfare of the Emperor and the entire august [royal] house.”³²⁵

On 1 October 1827, Paskevich’s army stormed the Yerevan citadel, capturing the city and much of its Persian garrison, including *Sardar* Hassan Khan.³²⁶ Soon tsarist troops occupied Tavriz, well inside Persia proper, without a fight. Fearing the advancement of the tsar’s army deeper into his realm, the shah sued for peace. On 10 February 1828, General Paskevich and Abbas Mirza signed the Treaty of Turkmenchai in the eponymous Persian village.

The terms of the treaty, much as they were at the end of the previous Russo-Persian war, were generous to the victor. The shah ceded to the tsar the Yerevan and Nakhichevan khanates, along with the remainder of Talysh khanate.³²⁷ Persia affirmed the previous concessions of the Treaty of Giulistan and forever surrendered claims to territory north of the Arax River, which became the formal boundary between the Russian and Persian states. Persia also agreed to pay

³²³RGVIA, f. 479, op. 1, d. 14, l. 7.

³²⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4326, l. 137.

³²⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4329, l. 193.

³²⁶RGVIA, f. 479, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 14-15. Russian losses included 3 officers and 52 rank and file soldiers.

³²⁷RGVIA, f. 479, op. 1, d. 14, l. 15.

reparations of 20 million silver rubles, and to withdraw its naval fleet from the Caspian Sea.³²⁸ In return, Russian forces pledged to return occupied Tavriz and to support Abbas Mirza as the heir to Fath Ali Shah. An important stipulation of the Treaty of Turkmenchai granted a yearlong window for all Persian subjects living along the new border to relocate into tsarist territory.

Even before the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchai, Russian officials in the Caucasus turned their attention to the stirring of the Ottoman pashas across the other imperial border. Sparked in the Balkans by the Greek War of Independence and Turkey's closing of the Dardanelles to Russian ships in retaliation for Russia's participation in an anti-Ottoman coalition, the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29 reverberated in the Caucasus.³²⁹ By December 1827, Paskevich reported that Ottoman officials in districts adjacent to the Russian border had begun preparations for war. As evidence of these developments, tsarist officials in the Caucasus notified St. Petersburg that Ottoman Armenians, "more committed to us than to their government," were placed under surveillance and relocated away from the Russian border.³³⁰ Paskevich received multiple reports about new restrictions affecting Ottoman Armenians in Anatolia, such as a prohibition on sending letters and the summons of two elders from each Armenian village to Constantinople for unclear purposes.³³¹ This suggests that Ottoman officials,

³²⁸When the shah sent only half of the agreed amount, expecting an imminent Russo-Ottoman break, Paskevich made preparations to march from Tavriz to the Persian capital of Tehran, which compelled the shah to deliver the rest of the indemnity. See RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4329, ll. 75-87.

³²⁹In his war declaration, Nicholas I's grievances against Turkey included not only the closing of the Bosphorus to Russian shipping, but also alleged Ottoman attempts to form a broad Muslim anti-Russian movement (including the *gortsy* of the North Caucasus), the harassment of tsarist-subject merchants within Ottoman territory, and interference in the Russo-Persian peace negotiations. Nicholas also referenced the Ottoman mistreatment of their Christian minorities, Greeks and Serbs in particular, but did not mention Armenians. The full text of the manifesto is available at RGVIA, f. 477, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 3-6.

³³⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4329, l. 43.

³³¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4329, l. 89.

like their Persian counterparts, recognized that their Armenian subjects sought Russian patronage.

Tsarist agents sought to capitalize on these circumstances. The governor-general of Tiflis, Nikolai Sipiagin, proposed to Diebitsch in March 1828 that “with a quick foray into Turkish borders we will prevent them from relocating Armenians into internal provinces, and will take advantage of the grain stocks in Kars and Akhaltsykh districts; while our good treatment of the locals will compel them to remain in their villages and provide us with means for the successful execution of the war.”³³² Another tsarist commander, General Afanasii Krasovskii, echoed this sentiment, arguing that Ottoman Armenians will support a Russian invasion of eastern Anatolia. Once the Armenians see that tsarist forces treat them well, pay for supplies received from the locals, and respect their properties, the Armenians, “having noticed such a dramatic contrast with the actions of their current overlords, will rush to join us; for the Turkish government has sowed so much hatred and loathing toward itself that they will eagerly facilitate a change that is beneficial to themselves.”³³³ Prior to Paskevich’s invasion of Ottoman territory on 14 June 1828, he sought to reassure the local Ottoman subjects, both Christian and Muslim, through pamphlets. The tsarist general vowed that his army “will not disturb your tranquility; no Russian soldier will touch your property, [and] will not hinder the security of Muslims.”³³⁴ Despite such assurances,

³³²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4329, l. 233.

³³³RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4334, l. 10.

³³⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4643, l. 60.

the Russian army on its way to Kars found little more than abandoned plains: local Muslims had fled and the authorities had removed Christians, mostly Armenians, into the interior.³³⁵

It would be an exaggeration to claim that, in the military or political sense, Armenians played a pivotal role in the Russian expansion into the South Caucasus. According to Russian sources, Armenian and Georgian volunteer units represented only a fraction of the total forces under tsarist command. Yet, in a conflict that was often portrayed in terms of an ethnocultural clash between Christendom and Islam, the real and potential cooperation of Armenians, and other native Caucasian Christians, allowed Russia to establish itself as a new master of the South Caucasus. The Romanov state not only relied on the aid of Armenians to facilitate its advancement, but also planned its future engagements around the likelihood of Armenian collaboration. When Armenians also colonized the tsarist South Caucasus en masse, their centrality to St. Petersburg's imperial policy became solidified.

³³⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 4643, ll. 60-62. Paskevich targeted Kars because of its strategic location and political significance to the Porte, the ample provisions that could be bought and confiscated in the region, and to cut off Turkish forces at Erzurum.



154. Russian Reform in Transcaucasia, 1840–1845 (Courtesy G. Bournoutian)

Figure 3. Map of the South Caucasus after the Second Russo-Persian War.
 Source: Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 173.

Souls and Hearts: Russia Recruits Armenians from Abroad

The Treaty of Turkmenchai carried many political implications, but one of its most controversial stipulations reshaped the cultural, social, and economic climate of the South Caucasus. The Persian government allowed a yearlong period for its subjects living along the new Russo-Persian border to decide whether to stay within the shah’s domain or emigrate into the tsar’s empire. This accord resulted in the resettlement of thousands of the shah’s Armenian subjects into the tsar’s newly expanded realm. After the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828-29, more Armenians arrived from Anatolia. In what became state policy, Russia employed Armenians from abroad to fortify its hold on the South Caucasus.

Several factors prompted the strategy of using Armenians to colonize newly annexed lands. First, the ecumenical bond between Orthodox Russians and Apostolic Armenians, invoked by senior tsarist officials and Armenian peasants, fed the mutual belief that Armenians “belonged” under the suzerainty of their coreligionist emperor, rather than his neighboring Muslim counterparts. Armenians’ religious identity, in turn, represented to tsarist authorities guarantees of political devotion and security, and this is why Russian officials chose Armenians to “increase the [regional] population by using Christians as much as possible.”³³⁶ Second, imperial agents sought to tap Armenians’ romanticized economic adeptness to stimulate the development of newly conquered and underdeveloped regions. Overall, Armenians looked for social and economic stability under the Russian aegis, convinced that relative religious freedom and improved trade opportunities would ensure prosperity. The tsarist state eagerly settled incoming Armenians in regions of the South Caucasus that had been depopulated by years of warfare.

When Russian troops occupied Azerbaijan, or the northern provinces of Persia in the last stages of the war, local Armenians signaled to Paskevich their desire to relocate into tsarist territory. Just weeks after the signing of the peace treaty in 1828, the Russian general welcomed this initiative. “Realizing the benefits that we can receive,” argued Paskevich to Diebitsch, “from the settlement of untended lands by a people who are hardworking, accustomed to obedience, and loyal to us through religion,” he had taken initial steps to facilitate the large-scale immigration of Persian-subject Armenians into the South Caucasus.³³⁷

³³⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 4.

³³⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 1.

To oversee this formidable task, Paskevich assigned Colonel Lazar Ekimovich Lazarev, the youngest son of Ekim Lazarev. Paskevich had specifically requested Lazarev's transfer from St. Petersburg to Tiflis, recognizing not only the young officer's diligence, but also the fact that "his name alone served as a guarantee to Armenians of [Russia's] sincere disposition toward them," in the words of contemporaneous historian and writer Sergei Glinka.³³⁸ Paskevich, too, acknowledged that the colonel's family name "enjoys the general respect of the Armenian nation."³³⁹ To facilitate the mission, Paskevich appointed several officers and soldiers to serve under Lazarev and established in Tiflis the Committee for the Resettlement of Christians (*Komitet pereseleniia Khristian*, hereafter KPKh). Additionally, Paskevich set aside 50,000 silver rubles for this undertaking from the shah's reparations.

Lazarev received several specific instructions from Paskevich.³⁴⁰ Among the first of these, officers were to be dispatched to various Armenian villages to ascertain "the true intentions of the Christians and to confirm whether they really wish to cross into our regions."³⁴¹ Paskevich impressed upon Lazarev that he ought to "use no coercion, especially violent means, but only suggestions, presenting to them all the benefits of entering into the subjecthood of the most powerful Christian emperor in Europe, and the peaceful and happy life which they will

³³⁸Sergei Glinka, *Opisanie pereseleniia armiiian adderbidzhanskikh v predely Rossii* (Baku: Elm, 1990), 36. (Originally published in 1831 in Moscow by the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages.)

³³⁹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 13.

³⁴⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, ll. 1-2.

³⁴¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 3.

enjoy under the auspices of benevolent Russian laws.”³⁴² Lazarev also pledged to immigrating traders that they would receive “the same rights as local merchants” in their new homeland.

Moreover, all resettling Christians were promised “adequate amounts” of farmland and freed from “taxes [*podati*] for six years and from rural assessments [*zemskikie povinnosti*] for three years.” During the immigrants’ journey, accompanied by tsarist troops to prevent potential outbursts by their Muslim neighbors, the most destitute families were to receive a one-time allowance of 10 silver rubles; Paskevich provided Lazarev with a total of 25,000 silver rubles for this task.³⁴³ Persian Armenians were led mainly into the newly demarcated Armenian and Nakhichevan *oblasti*, where the local administration, in conjunction with the KPKh, distributed land and determined other details. Only Armenians living along the new border were to be moved into Karabakh.³⁴⁴

By late May 1828, Paskevich could report to St. Petersburg about tangible progress made in this endeavor by Lazarev and his officers. Already 948 Armenian families had been resettled into *Armianskaia oblast’*, and 279 into Karabakh.³⁴⁵ Colonel Lazarev, moreover, had assured the general that the total number of immigrants will “exceed 5,000 families.” Paskevich emphasized to Diebitsch’s successor at the head of the General Staff, Count Chernyshev, the strictly voluntary nature of the Armenian relocation, carried out by the tsarist army not only out of Russia’s economic and political interests but also out of Christian benevolence. He highlighted this aspect by crediting the “oppressive Persian rule, which burdens Christians with taxes and

³⁴²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 3.

³⁴³RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 5.

³⁴⁴RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 1 and 4.

³⁴⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, ll. 13-14.

injustices of all kinds,” for the smoothness of the population transfer,³⁴⁶ and also summarized the support he had received from Armenian ecclesiastical leaders, including Catholicos Nerses and the Armenian archbishop of Tiflis.³⁴⁷ Despite rising costs and diminishing grain supplies in the region, both Paskevich and Lazarev continued to stress the “obvious benefit that they can bring us” and that “any costs that the treasury will bear now for the support of the immigrating Armenians will always be reimbursed to it with excess; for in addition to their loyalty to Russians, which experience has shown, they are famous for their tireless work ethic.”³⁴⁸

Lazar Lazarev took advantage of his identity as an ethnic Armenian in the Russian service, declaring to his superiors, “to me, as a Russian officer, [this task] brings great honor, and as an Armenian, complete happiness.”³⁴⁹ Cognizant of his family’s position as an intermediary between the Armenian diaspora and the tsarist state, the young colonel advocated the benefits of the Armenian relocation to the two sides. When the Armenian immigrants’ financial problems impeded Lazarev’s mission, the colonel relied on the reputation of his family’s name to assuage their concerns. Indeed, when some Armenian communities hesitated to abandon their properties without financial compensation, it took little more than the promises of this Russified Armenian commander to sway them.³⁵⁰

According to Lazarev and other tsarist officials, such concerns among Persian Armenians stemmed from the tactics the Persian authorities employed to prevent the departure of their

³⁴⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 14.

³⁴⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 13.

³⁴⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, ll. 14-15.

³⁴⁹Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, ll. 4-4ob.

³⁵⁰RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 5.

Armenian subjects. Despite Armenians' petitions to Paskevich, Lazarev found that many communities initially hesitated to part with their immovable properties, such as homes, gardens, and family cemeteries, that for centuries had formed the cornerstones of their lives in the Persian domain. Moreover, Lazarev accused Persian officials and "English agents" of spreading rumors among Armenians about the economic and political difficulties that awaited them in Russian territory, including enserfment, high taxes, and onerous military service.³⁵¹

In an effort to prevent the exodus of Armenians, whose economic contribution to the shah's treasury Russian accountants estimated at 32 million assignation rubles,³⁵² Persian tactics ranged from warnings to threats to promises. Most important, Lazarev claimed that Persian officials secretly prohibited Persian subjects from purchasing land and homes from departing Armenians, thus exacerbating their financial situation and ensuring that capital remained in Persia.³⁵³ These efforts bore limited fruit when some Armenians demanded to be reimbursed by Lazarev for at least one-third of their abandoned properties' value.³⁵⁴ Moreover, according to Lazarev, Muslim Persian villagers hurled insults and rocks at the emigrating Armenians, demonstrating "tremendous hatred" and often necessitating the intervention of Russian and Cossack units to protect the refugees.³⁵⁵ Yet, despite such difficulties, Lazarev emphasized in his

³⁵¹RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 4ob and 8.

³⁵²RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 4. In the late 1830s, the exchange rate equaled 3.5 assignation rubles for 1 silver ruble, but it appears that a decade earlier, in the 1820s, it was closer to 4:1. See B. P. Motrevich, "Ministr finansov E. F. Kankrin i denezhnaia reforma 1839-1843 g.g. v Rossiiskoi imperii." http://bmpravo.ru/show_stat.php?stat=243. Accessed 5 March 2015.

³⁵³RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 6.

³⁵⁴Glinka, *Opisanie pereseleniia armiian*, 52-53.

³⁵⁵RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 7ob.

reports to St. Petersburg that Armenians relocated on their own accord without financial support beyond the 10 silver rubles per family that had been authorized by Paskevich.³⁵⁶

Seeing that, despite their efforts, numerous Armenian communities continued to abandon their homes, Crown Prince Abbas Mirza accused tsarist agents of coercing the Armenians.³⁵⁷ In a case made famous by Glinka's narrative,³⁵⁸ Persian officials in April 1828 alerted Lazarev that a group of 400 Armenian families had told the shah's representatives that tsarist agents had coerced them into leaving. Confident of this account's inaccuracy, Lazarev personally tracked down the Armenian party, accompanied by the son of a senior Persian minister, Asker Khan.³⁵⁹ The immigrants, according to Lazarev's report, "unanimously declared that they are relocating voluntarily. 'We rather eat Russian grass than Persian bread,' they said to the son of Asker Khan, from whom I took a written verification."³⁶⁰ Neither the Armenian motivations behind such supposed statements, nor the accuracy of their Russian recordings, can be ascertained from the available sources; however, their prominence in Russian narratives, both official and popular, are indicative of the Russian perception and sentiments surrounding this population transfer.

The number of Armenian immigrants from Persia into Russian territory in the South Caucasus after the Second Russo-Persian War is difficult to determine. The archival record is incomplete (in the federal archives of both Russia and Armenia), because contemporary sources provided specific numbers for individual migrant groups, villages, or regions, but almost never

³⁵⁶RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, ll. 4ob-5ob.

³⁵⁷RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, ll. 8ob-9.

³⁵⁸Glinka, *Opisanie pereseleniia armiian*, 66-74.

³⁵⁹RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 8ob.

³⁶⁰RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 9.

for entire administrative territories.³⁶¹ However, according to Lazar Lazarev, in the three and a half months between 26 February and 11 June 1828, he facilitated the relocation of 8,249 families.³⁶² It appears that at least 5,000 of these families, and perhaps as many as 6,000, were directed to the Armenian and Nakhichevan *oblasti*, with the rest of the refugees sent to Karabakh starting in May because of dwindling food supplies in the other regions of the South Caucasus.³⁶³ Glinka provides the same total number of about 8,000 families, estimating the overall number of Armenian immigrants at approximately 40,000 individuals.³⁶⁴

Russia continued to rely on foreign-subject Christians to settle newly annexed territories in the South Caucasus after it transplanted 40,000 Persian Armenians. Satisfied with the accomplishments of General Paskevich and Colonel Lazarev, Tsar Nicholas sought to absorb more Armenians into the borders of his realm after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29. In the wake of that conflict, tsarist agents justified this policy by emphasizing the collaboration of Ottoman Armenians with Russian forces during the war and the consequent abuse they did and would experience at the hands of their Muslims overlords and neighbors.

Soon after the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople in September 1829, Paskevich wrote to the tsar that among the peoples living on either side of the Russo-Ottoman border, only Ottoman

³⁶¹For example, the following file contains partial data about the population of 132 villages around Yerevan in the Armianskaia oblast': National Archive of Armenia (NAA), f. 90, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 2-8ob.

³⁶²RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, ll. 12-13.

³⁶³RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 9ob and also Glinka, *Opisanie pereseleniia armiian*, 87. This remains a controversial point. Today this relocation of Armenians into Karabakh arouses as much emotion as it did in the nineteenth century, because the "legitimate" claims of two rival ethnonational groups—Armenians and Azerbaijanis—hang in the balance. See Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: NYU Press, 2004).

³⁶⁴Glinka, *Opisanie pereseleniia armiian*, 92. If, on average, there were slightly fewer than five individuals in each Armenian family, then this estimate seems reasonable.

Armenians did not celebrate the armistice announcement, demonstrating instead “justified gloom” in anticipation of the “persecutions that threaten” them.³⁶⁵ Following the now well-established practice of emphasizing the ecumenical solidarity between Russians and Armenians vis-à-vis regional imperial policy, Paskevich stressed that “in these remote countries, where for so many centuries Christianity has been oppressed by an unjust yoke, [the Russian] army could fear no hostility from the Armenian and Greek populations.”³⁶⁶ The real and alleged mistreatment of these Ottoman Christian minorities had ensured that invading tsarist forces found among the locals “zealous allies and partners.” Indeed, Paskevich enumerated the ways in which Ottoman Armenians had directly assisted Russian forces against their Turkish foes: in Bayazet, 2,000 Armenians fought alongside Russian troops; in Kars an Armenian battalion of 800 mounted men protected the Russian flank; and in Erzurum “the majority” of the local Christians, mainly Armenians, welcomed the arriving Russian forces with open arms. “Do not let it happen,” the general implored the tsar, “that Ottoman despotism takes revenge on [Armenians] for the devotion they have demonstrated to Russia.”³⁶⁷

By mid-November 1829, Tsar Nicholas permitted Paskevich to resettle about 10,000 Armenian families, mainly from the Ottoman pashalik of Bayazet, to tsarist Georgia and *Armianskaia oblast*.³⁶⁸ Ottoman Armenians were so eager to emigrate, claimed Paskevich, that many of them did not request or wait for Russian financial assistance or military protection to

³⁶⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 3.

³⁶⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 3.

³⁶⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 3.

³⁶⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 4.

begin their movement into Russian territory.³⁶⁹ To determine the details of their settlement, including land distribution, Paskevich established a separate administrative body in Tiflis.³⁷⁰ Moreover, Paskevich was so confident of the political and economic advantages to Russia that Armenian relocation would bring, that he requested an unprecedented one million assignation rubles (over 250,000 silver rubles), about five times the amount he had expended on the relocation of Persian Armenians.³⁷¹ The general assured St. Petersburg that “although the initial settlement of these people will require fairly significant costs, there is no doubt that they will be amply reimbursed by those advantages, which one can expect from this commercial and hard-working” people.³⁷²

By late January 1830, about 2,500 Armenian families emigrated from Kars and its surrounding villages, settling in the vicinity of Mount Aragats.³⁷³ Based on Armenian requests, Russian officials anticipated the imminent arrival of an additional 2,100 families from Erzurum and 3,150 families from Bayazet pashalyk.³⁷⁴ Tsarist agents directed large groups—whose exact numbers remain unclear—to *Armiianskaia oblast*’, Georgia, and Karabakh. Yet by one Russian account from 1836, the number of Armenian immigrants from Turkey living in *Armiianskaia*

³⁶⁹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 12.

³⁷⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 13.

³⁷¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 3. Paskevich, for unknown reasons, proposed to provide a subsidy of 25 silver rubles per family to Ottoman Armenians, two and a half times as much as he had authorized Lazarev to pay each Persian Armenian family. Paskevich received 90,000 *chervontsy* for the relocation of Ottoman Armenians, which I assume equaled the 250,000 silver rubles he had requested.

³⁷²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 3.

³⁷³RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, ll. 12-12ob.

³⁷⁴It appears that these relocations did take place, but there is no confirmation of this in Russian sources.

oblast' was just 5,755 individuals.³⁷⁵ Unlike the experience of Persian Armenians, Russian authorities used a portion of the sultan's Armenian subjects to establish a buffer against the Ottoman empire, seeing that empire as a continued threat, whereas Persia's expansionist ambitions had waned. As early as November 1829, Tsar Nicholas, noting Paskevich's emphasis on Armenian cooperation with the Russian army, instructed the General Staff to settle some Ottoman Armenian immigrants in Akhaltsykh and other frontier towns, where "in the form of a battalion or another military unit they can be used to defend our new border."³⁷⁶ Soon, plans were drawn up to relocate over 2,000 Armenian families from Erzurum to Akhaltsykh.³⁷⁷

Tsarist officials strove to provide the immigrants with living conditions that would grant them "every opportunity to quickly reach a flourishing state and bring abundant benefits to Russia."³⁷⁸ The immigration committee formed in Tiflis by Paskevich distributed state-owned land (*kazennaia zemlia*) and communicated with Armenian leaders to ascertain details of their settlement. Moreover, in mid-February 1830, when the numbers of Ottoman Armenian immigrants exceeded Russian estimates, Paskevich granted to them state-owned land in Georgia that had been allocated for Ukrainian Cossack settlers.³⁷⁹ When the number of refugees from Bayazet proved to be nearly twice as much as Russians had estimated, Paskevich not only permitted them to enter Russian territory but also provided emergency food provisions from his

³⁷⁵NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 318, l. 145ob.

³⁷⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 4.

³⁷⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, ll. 12-12ob.

³⁷⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 13.

³⁷⁹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 15.

army's military depots.³⁸⁰ Within months, Russian commanders ensured that extra grain supplies had been delivered to the new immigrants from other regions of the Caucasus and beyond.³⁸¹

The absorption of new Armenians into the social and economic fabric of the South Caucasus progressed slowly. To a degree, their economic assimilation matched Russian expectations, and within a couple of years of their relocation, transplanted Armenian merchants owned numerous buildings and vending stalls in Yerevan.³⁸² Yet imperial agents struggled to prevent friction between the newcomers and the natives. Russian officials did not prevent the ethnic or national mixing of various communities, and the geographic coalescence of Persian Armenian, Ottoman Armenian, native Christian, and native Muslim groups was not uncommon. As some tsarist records demonstrate, the ostensible consent of all involved parties and the availability of land were the only prerequisites for the Russian facilitation of interethnic cohabitation.³⁸³ The Committee for the Resettlement of Christians (KPKh), headquartered in Tiflis and with affiliated offices in Yerevan, Nakhichevan, and Abaran, facilitated negotiations between neighbors in the South Caucasus, and worked with Russian military officials and Persian and Ottoman government representatives.³⁸⁴

The KPKh's struggled to mediate between Muslim and Christian residents. As the Nakhichevan bureau of the KPKh grumbled in September 1828, "not a day goes by without . . .

³⁸⁰RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 1019, l. 17.

³⁸¹NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 437, ll. 46-92.

³⁸²NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 443, ll. 1ob-2. In characteristically deficient record keeping, these sources provide the number of immigrant-owned buildings and stalls (14 and 11, respectively) in Yerevan in 1832, but do not specify the total numbers of such structures, which makes these statistics barely useful.

³⁸³NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 436, l. 7.

³⁸⁴NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 435, ll. 10-14.

the complaints of the immigrants about Tatars, and the latter's about the immigrants."³⁸⁵ In their objections to the influx of Christians, native Muslim residents decried that they had been "deprived of all means of farming, and thus of feeding their families in the future."³⁸⁶ In Nakhichevan and elsewhere, local Muslims protested at being pushed out—either through direct coercion or land redistribution—by the incoming Armenians.³⁸⁷ Russian officials intervened by reducing land allotment for Armenians and stipulating that only as much land could be granted to the immigrants as they could sow at the time of their arrival. In December 1828, housing restrictions were also implemented, with one home granted to every "three or four" refugee families.³⁸⁸ Overall, in theory if not in practice, senior tsarist officials in the Caucasus and St. Petersburg demanded that the KPKh "maintain the strictest supervision [to ensure that] the settlers do not inflict the slightest abuse upon the indigenous residents [and] that the property of each remains inviolable," while the leaders of local native groups, "without exception," were expected to ensure that no "injustice" or "harm" befell the newcomers.³⁸⁹

The changing South Caucasian society posed ethnic, cultural, and economic challenges for the tsarist bureaucracy. As a result, policy disagreements plagued much of the regional administration. Not only is it doubtful that St. Petersburg's stability-seeking instructions to the KPKh were fully implemented, but internal discord among Russian officials in the South Caucasus revealed deeper schisms. One example should suffice here.

³⁸⁵NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 435, l. 49.

³⁸⁶NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 435, l. 50.

³⁸⁷NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 435, ll. 50-50ob.

³⁸⁸NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 435, l. 51. It appears that building supplies were provided for the immigrants to construct their own homes, but, in theory, they did not receive ownership of existing homes.

³⁸⁹NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 435, l. 51ob.

The influx of Christians into the tsar's territory precipitated a concurrent exit of native Muslims into the domains of the shah and the sultan. Many departing Muslims, especially from the Nakhichevan and Ordubad regions, left behind their homes and fields.³⁹⁰ According to the provisions of the Treaty of Turkmenchai, these vacant properties could be leased by the Russian state for its benefit, but only their owners had the right to sell them. Yet their dilapidated conditions prevented the state from finding willing renters. Consequently, in late 1828, the KPKh petitioned the regional government of *Armianskaia oblast'* (*Armiianskoe Oblastnoe Pravlenie*, AOP) for permission to transfer ownership of the vacant, untended homes to the "poorest" of the relocated Armenians. However, citing the Turkmenchai Treaty, the AOP rejected this request, arguing that absent Muslim owners retained rights to their abandoned properties. The KPKh repeated its appeal a year later, when no Muslims returned to claim their properties. Yet, again, officials refused to grant to immigrant Armenians properties abandoned by native Muslims.³⁹¹

To be sure, Russian authorities faced a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, the absorption of foreign-subject Armenians had become a staple of tsarist policy in the South Caucasus. Eager to populate newly annexed lands with ecumenically kindred and politically reliable subjects, the state attracted Armenians through various incentives. On the other hand, St. Petersburg had to avoid the conflagration of ethnoreligious violence between the Christian immigrants and the Muslim natives. While they took no meaningful efforts to discourage Muslim emigration, Russian officials remained wary of antagonizing the indigenous population. The AOP's rejection of the KPKh's recurrent petitions is but one example of this point.

³⁹⁰NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 448, ll. 7-7ob.

³⁹¹NAA, f. 90, op. 1, d. 448, ll. 7-7ob.

In the first third of the nineteenth century, the Russian elite came to see foreign-subject Armenians as reliable colonizers. Not only significant resources were expended to consolidate Armenian communities in the South Caucasus, but also relations with domestic and foreign Muslims were jeopardized through the preferential treatment granted to the incoming Christians. Despite nominal attempts to blunt the harm this policy had on the region's native Muslims, tsarist officials from the regional to the imperial capital prioritized the absorption of Armenians. Even land allotted to Russia's traditional colonists, Cossacks, was reassigned to Armenians.

To some Russian political and cultural leaders, this undertaking represented a singular development. In his embellished account, Sergei Glinka hailed the relocation of Persian Armenians into Russian territory as a "hitherto unique event in the annals of the world. It was not a simple resettlement of individual people, *but a resettlement of souls and hearts.*"³⁹² Glinka's exaggerated narrative underscored his and the state's acceptance of Armenians as *Rossiiskie*—Russia's own subjects. In their private and official correspondence, Paskevich, Lazarev, and other tsarist statesmen agreed that they had "opened for the state a new source of wealth," in more than the economic sense.³⁹³ Indeed, no evidence suggests that senior tsarist officials resisted these developments, and the influx of Armenians into the South Caucasus aroused resistance mainly from the region's Muslim residents. However, the autocracy viewed another section of the Armenian diaspora, the long-settled Armenian merchants of southern Russia, not as a "new source of wealth" but as a liability that threatened the social and economic hierarchy of imperial society. The experiences of Armenians in Russia proper often challenged the expectations and hopes of the Christian refugees from Muslim empires.

³⁹²Glinka, *Opisanie pereseleniia armiian*, 49. Italics in the original.

³⁹³RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 539, l. 11.

The Evolution of Armenian Tax Obligations

A look at Armenian tax obligations in the Caucasus and other southern Russian territories reveals the internal disagreements among the tsarist political elite, and the inconsistent and ambiguous economic rules governing the commerce of Russian-subject Armenians. The ramifications of these debates influenced the highest levels of the imperial government, where Finance Minister Egor Kankrin cautioned in 1827: “The question will always remain: in Russia, do Armenians possess more rights than Russians?”³⁹⁴

Armenians in Russia had received exclusive economic rights since the early modern era. Frequent visitors to Russian bazaars and trade posts, foreign-subject Armenians’ actual and mythologized economic success, and the value of the rare goods they carried from the Orient, earned them special status already by the second half of the seventeenth century. In April 1667, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, eager to take advantage of Persian Armenians’ silk imports, included Armenians among ethnic groups permitted to trade at advantageous rates, often duty-free, in major Russian commercial centers, such as Astrakhan and Moscow.³⁹⁵ Soon Armenian merchants received the right to sell silk and other raw materials in Novgorod and the northern port city of Archangelsk. From 1676, Armenian merchants sent their goods to foreign markets from Archangelsk, and from 1686 they began trading with Sweden through Novgorod.³⁹⁶

This pattern continued in the eighteenth century. In March 1711, the Governing Senate recommended that the empire “increase Persian trade and court (*prilaskat*) Armenians as much

³⁹⁴RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 177.

³⁹⁵*Sobranie aktov, otnosiashchikhsia k obozreniiu istorii Armianskogo naroda*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages Press, 1833), 3-4.

³⁹⁶*Sobranie aktov*, vol. 2, 288-89.

as possible and ease their lot, in order to encourage them to arrive [in Russia] in large numbers.”³⁹⁷ In December 1712 the Senate took another step in encouraging Armenian economic activity in Russia by removing restrictions and mandatory inspections from Armenian merchants traveling within the tsar’s domain.

Peter the Great granted Armenians exemptions from military service and other exclusive rights in 1724, leading to the growth of an Armenian community in the southern Russian city of Kizliar. Armenian immigrants from Karabakh and Zangezur rushed to establish vineyards, orchards, and to engage in other agrarian commerce.³⁹⁸ Peter’s successors continued to grant economic privileges to Armenians in Russia. In 1746, Armenian merchants in Astrakhan were allowed to trade tax-free and to establish their own court; in 1769, Astrakhan Armenians received the exclusive right to build seagoing vessels for trade in the Caspian Sea.³⁹⁹ Moreover, Armenian immigrants from Crimea, whom Catherine the Great settled in the new city of Nakhichevan on the Don River, in 1779 received the right not to enlist in the merchant guild (*kupecheskoe gildeiskoe sostoianie*), which freed them from that estate’s taxes. Catherine’s decree became a source of much headache for both Armenians and Russian bureaucrats later: “[The Armenians] may enjoy free trade forever and hereditarily, inside and outside of the Russian state,” announced the empress.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷*Sobranie aktov*, vol. 1, 7 and 290.

³⁹⁸V. B. Barkhudarian, “Armianskie kolonisty v Rossii i ikh rol’ v armiano-russkikh otnosheniiakh,” in M. G. Nersisian, ed., *Iz istorii vekovoi druzhby* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Armianskoi SSR, 1983), 124-25. By 1800, the Kizliar Armenian community numbered 4,000 individuals.

³⁹⁹*Sobranie aktov*, vol. 1, 27, and Barkhudarian, “Armianskie kolonisty v Rossii,” 126.

⁴⁰⁰RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 117.

Catherine's successor, Paul, extended his mother's 1779 exemptions for the Armenians of Nakhichevan-on-Don to three other southern cities. In October 1799, seeking to animate the commerce of southern provinces and to grow the populations of the strategically important Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok, Tsar Paul allowed tax-free trade for local Armenian merchants, excusing them from enrolling in merchant guilds and their attendant taxes.⁴⁰¹ This fiat not only did not apply to non-Armenian merchants in those three cities, but also omitted all Armenian traders outside Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok. By the turn of the nineteenth century, over four thousand Armenian dealers in Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok paid no taxes (*podati*) whatsoever.⁴⁰² Paul's successor, Alexander, initially affirmed his father's decision; however, in January 1807, Alexander cancelled the exclusive rights granted to the Armenian dealers of those three cities, requiring them to enlist in merchant guilds and pay corresponding taxes within six months.⁴⁰³ The tsar's motivations are unclear, but likely he believed that, after nearly eight years, local Armenians had enjoyed sufficiently long privileges to ensure their prosperity, and the time had come to enforce uniform tax laws.

The new regulations sent shockwaves through the Armenian merchant communities of southern Russia. According to tsarist summaries of Armenian complaints, their businesses ebbed and their foreign counterparts saw fewer financial advantages to trading with Russian-subject Armenians.⁴⁰⁴ An outbreak of the plague (*chuma*) in 1807 further diminished regional commerce

⁴⁰¹Summaries of the 1799, 1802, and 1807 laws regarding Armenian tax obligations can be found at RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 152-54.

⁴⁰²AKAK, 1866, vol. I, 765.

⁴⁰³RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 742, ll. 99-101; and also RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 386, ll. 5-8ob.

⁴⁰⁴RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 99-110ob.

of southern Russia and, compounded by the growing chorus of Armenian objections to the January 1807 decree, forced Alexander I in November 1808 to “postpone the enrollment of Armenians into guilds until the command of the Finance Minister.”⁴⁰⁵ To the detriment of broader Russo-Armenian ties, however, no decision regarding the tax obligations of Armenian merchants in Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok came for nearly two decades. Thus, the tsarist leadership’s receptiveness to Armenian petitions undermined the state’s efforts to implement uniform tax regulations and bring Armenian traders into line with general rules, resulting in unclear and temporary directives.

If the tsarist state demonstrated the first signs of rolling back the exclusive economic rights granted to various Armenian communities as early as 1807, the most salient manifestations of this trend appeared only in the 1820s. Yet conflicting initiatives from St. Petersburg and their partial implementation in the provinces yielded a multitude of ambiguous economic positions for Russia’s Armenian merchants.

Among the prominent opponents of the state’s policies vis-à-vis Armenian economic activity in the empire, General Aleksei Ermolov voiced concern about the government’s assignment of partial, temporary, and exclusive economic rights to separate Armenian communities. In a special report to the Senate in August 1820, Ermolov argued that no more “eternal” rights ought to be granted to new immigrants in the Caucasus, regardless of their national, ethnic, or religious ties to existing Russian-subject communities in the region.⁴⁰⁶ “It is [more] justified to give privileges,” contended the commander of the Caucasus, “not to an entire people, not to an entire society, but only to individuals whose immigration will bring benefits to

⁴⁰⁵RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 99-110ob.

⁴⁰⁶RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 742, ll. 99-101.

the government, whether through the introduction of some art or craft, or the circulation of large capital for the revitalization of trade and industry.”⁴⁰⁷ Referring to the partial exemptions of October 1799, the general asked, “What valid reason can there be for these exceptions, which are insulting to other Armenians living in Georgia and our Muslim provinces, and who are no less useful[?]”⁴⁰⁸ Ermolov accused Armenians of Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok of evading the decree of January 1807, which had canceled the rights granted to them in 1799. This disobedience of the tsar’s orders, according to Ermolov, had been made possible by the contradictory policies of former Interior Minister Alexei Kurakin, whom Ermolov accused of “shielding” Kizliar Armenians from the requirement of joining guilds and obtaining the necessary certifications for commerce.⁴⁰⁹ Soon, such dissension spread among other senior imperial agents and ministries.

Debates over the economic standing of Armenians in the Russian empire penetrated the highest levels of the government and elicited the involvement of Armenian lay and ecclesiastical leaders. By the summer of 1823, Ekim Lazarev—now the leading lay advocate of Russia’s Armenian diaspora—began to petition Finance Minister Egor Kankrin to continue Armenians’ exclusive economic privileges.⁴¹⁰ Specifically, the tax obligations of Armenian merchants in Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok had remained in abeyance since the conflicting mandates of 1807, with Armenians in Astrakhan and Mozdok no longer enjoying the exclusive tax breaks of

⁴⁰⁷RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 742, ll. 99ob-100.

⁴⁰⁸RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 742, l. 100.

⁴⁰⁹According to the governor of Astrakhan in 1825, the tax breaks cancelled in January 1807 were renewed in December 1807 due to the outbreak of the plague (*chuma*) in the region, which harmed the commercial activities of local traders and limited their ability to pay new taxes. See RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 16ob.

⁴¹⁰RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 386, ll. 5-8ob.

1799, but their counterparts in Kizliar continuing to engage in tax-free commerce. The situation, according to Lazarev, had “upset” those communities and harmed their economic activities.

In justifying extended economic benefits for Armenian merchants, Lazarev argued that Russia traded with Persia and Turkey mainly through Armenians. At the local level, too, Armenians provided benefits to Russia’s provinces by paying all noncommercial taxes alongside their neighbors, billeting troops on their properties at their own expense, repairing roads and bridges without the financial support of local or regional authorities, and repeatedly demonstrated their “readiness to do everything in their powers for the general good.”⁴¹¹ To continue this trend, Lazarev asked Kankrin to excuse Armenian merchants in Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok from the requirement of enlisting in the merchant guild. He also requested that Armenians be excluded from rules governing the trade of “foreigners” in Russia, which, he argued, were intended for affluent western European merchants.

In return, Lazarev expressed confidence that prolonged economic privileges for Armenian dealers would attract new generations of foreign-subject Armenians into the empire, where they will “establish new cities and villages [and] multiply various beneficial institutions, which are particularly customary to the Armenian people. Oriental wealth will flow in abundance into the core of their new fatherland.”⁴¹² In addition to Lazarev’s missives, senior Armenian ecclesiastical leaders petitioned St. Petersburg on behalf of Armenian merchants in southern Russia. Hovannes, the prelate of all Armenians in Russia and highest-ranking member of the Armenian Church in the empire, wrote to Kankrin in June and August 1823, requesting that the

⁴¹¹RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 386, ll. 7ob-8.

⁴¹²RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 386, l. 8ob.

privileges of 1799 be extended indefinitely.⁴¹³ This dialogue continued even after the tsar addressed these issues with an empire-wide edict.

On 14 November 1824, Tsar Alexander I decreed that all merchants operating in his empire must join guilds and pay corresponding taxes.⁴¹⁴ Yet the vaguely worded law created loopholes into which Armenian traders in Astrakhan, Kizliar, Mozdok and elsewhere could potentially fall. First, the penalties for tax evasion stipulated by the new law did not apply to “Orientals, until for them special rules are reconsidered.”⁴¹⁵ Second, the fiat ordered that “All hitherto published laws concerning visiting foreign merchants and foreigners living in Russia remain active in all respects, unless affected by this regulation.” Third, the law applied to “all” merchants, “without exception,” not only in Russia, but also in Finland, the Polish Kingdom, Bessarabia, and Georgia; moreover, it explicitly identified Armenians (along with Tatars, Jews, Gypsies, Greeks, and other groups). However, most importantly, the law applied to “everyone in general, *as long as they do not possess specific privileges, entitling them to an exclusion from general rules, or royally granted prerogatives.*”⁴¹⁶

The result was destabilizing. Authorities in the Astrakhan Treasury Chamber hesitated at first but then enforced the new statute with alacrity, forcing local Armenian dealers into guilds and assessing new taxes. When Armenians resisted, citing the rights granted to them in 1799 and extended in 1808, the provincial authorities sought St. Petersburg’s clarification of the new law’s applicability to the Armenian merchants of Astrakhan. The finance ministry in February 1825

⁴¹³RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 386, ll. 9-13ob.

⁴¹⁴RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 107ob.

⁴¹⁵RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 107ob-108.

⁴¹⁶RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 108. Emphasis added.

sided with the Armenians and ordered Astrakhan authorities not to enforce the tsar's recent edict.⁴¹⁷ Nevertheless, provincial authorities in Astrakhan and other southern commercial centers applied the November 1824 law to local Armenian retailers, ignoring the decree's third stipulation and the finance ministry's orders. It appears that these Russian officials were either unaware of the preexisting regulations or believed them to be long expired. When Armenian businessmen in Astrakhan refused to enter into guilds and to pay new taxes, the police shut their stores and factories.⁴¹⁸

Russia's broader Armenian diaspora interpreted what it felt was the unjustified enforcement of the 1824 edict not as a problem limited to its merchant community, but as a threat to the status of the entire stateless nation. Lay individuals not affiliated with commerce, as well as senior members of the Armenian Church,⁴¹⁹ backed the struggle of the Armenian merchantry in Astrakhan and elsewhere. An empire-wide campaign in 1825 sought to halt provincial authorities' enforcement of the 1824 law, which Armenian representatives knew violated the directives of the finance ministry.⁴²⁰ The protests of Armenians from Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok were joined by their compatriots in several other southern regions, including the Ekaterinoslavskaiia, Khersonskaia, Tavricheskaia, and Caucasus provinces.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 108.

⁴¹⁸RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 108-108ob.

⁴¹⁹Even Catholicos Efrem, from Echmiadzin inside Persian territory, petitioned the Finance Minister in August 1825 to secure his assistance in stopping provincial authorities' enforcement of the 1824 decree. See RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 111-13.

⁴²⁰RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 109.

⁴²¹RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 109ob.

The Armenians argued that the privileges of the late eighteenth century had been granted to them “forever,”⁴²² that Tsar Alexander’s proclamation implicitly excluded their communities because they enjoyed long-established exemptions, and that the 1824 edict had been aimed primarily at representatives of wealthy western European trade companies. These European dealers conducted wholesale trade that benefited international firms and enriched European banks, the Armenians claimed, while Russia’s Armenian retailers struggled to support their small communities and had no surplus capital for the new tax requirements.⁴²³ Armenian petitions emphasized that their communities never had and did not object to the city and rural taxes paid by all tsarist subjects, but rather resisted enlisting in merchant guilds with their separate dues.

The Armenians of Nakhichevan-on-Don, for example, maintained that they had accomplished the tasks given to them by Catherine the Great in 1779, contributing to the region’s development by spreading factories, mills, stone and wooden buildings, and viticulture. These achievements justified the economic privileges granted to them, they asserted, by enriching the state treasury, whose coffers received over 120,000 rubles per year in taxes just from Nakhichevan Armenians’ viticulture and fruit-growing business.⁴²⁴ Moreover, individual Armenian traders ventured into countries and communities where few Russian dealers were willing or able to conduct business, especially in the backwaters of Persia and Turkey, and often

⁴²²Specifically, they cited not only the 1799 decree but also Catherine’s edict of 1779 for the Armenians of Nakhichevan-on-Don, and Paul’s decree of 1797 for Astrakhan Armenians. Catherine’s edict had, in fact, stipulated that Nakhichevan Armenians were entitled to “enjoy eternal and hereditary free trade, within and outside the Russian state.” See RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 117-120ob.

⁴²³RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 109.

⁴²⁴RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 117ob.

jeopardized their lives and finances in search of new trade networks and customers.⁴²⁵ Far from seeking an exclusive monopoly, only Armenians, they claimed, were willing to venture “with the smallest of capital into Oriental countries, to savage, obstinate, treacherous, independent peoples, subjected to all the difficulties and dangers, risked everything, and despite small profits, returned to their new peaceful fatherland contented.”⁴²⁶ At the same time, Nakhichevan Armenians, unlike their Russian counterparts in neighboring towns and provinces, maintained local roads, bridges, and postal horses at their own cost, provided their own police patrols, and paid all regular city and rural duties (*povinnosti*) to the provincial and state treasuries. As one petition from October 1825 stressed, road and bridge maintenance alone had cost Nakhichevan Armenians 37,360 rubles over the past four years.⁴²⁷

More than regional fiscal policy was at stake in these debates. The underlying question asked to what degree tsarist-subject Armenians had, or should, become socially, politically, and economically assimilated into Russia. From the perspective of some tsarist authorities, in St. Petersburg and the provinces, Armenian merchants by the 1820s had received ample economic privileges to compete on equal terms with their Russian counterparts. Officials in the Astrakhan Treasury Chamber and their colleagues in Nakhichevan-on-Don often interpreted local Armenian retailers’ refusal to enlist into guilds as a sign of Armenian resistance to social integration and reinforced stereotypes of cunning, parsimonious outsiders who looked for loopholes through which to escape collective responsibilities of all subjects. As the beginning of the “Jews of the Caucasus” trope, this essentialization would haunt Russia’s Armenians throughout the nineteenth

⁴²⁵RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 118.

⁴²⁶RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 118.

⁴²⁷RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 118-118ob.

century, yet they escaped much of the Jewish plight, such as the Pale of Settlement, owing to their Christianity and relatively small, and thus ostensibly less threatening, population. After all, Jews loomed large in the Russian political and cultural imagination in part thanks to the fact that they comprised the empire's largest non-Slavic and also non-Christian ethnic group.⁴²⁸

Armenians saw efforts to enforce universal fiscal policies and taxes as removing justified economic protections for minority traders, whose cultural and national identity placed them at a disadvantage against their Russian and west European competitors. As Nakhichevan Armenians bemoaned in 1825,

we are not able to stand on equal footing in commerce with native Russians: we are ignorant of the Russian language, laws, clerical rituals, customs of the people, of vast knowledge of European commercial practices . . . [we are] unknown to the capitalists who influence trade, we are more inclined toward Oriental trade based on simple rules; in this we are especially assisted by our knowledge of Oriental languages, customs, and rituals of these peoples, [as well as] our ties to our coreligionists, close relatives who inhabit Oriental countries.⁴²⁹

Whether or not these immigrants should or could have learned the Russian language and laws after over forty years of settlement on the Don River is not as important as their reliance on these ostensible reasons to justify their unique economic position in Russian society.

Essentially, such arguments show that some long-established Armenian communities in Russia felt decisively alien to their adoptive country. Not a different sense of home perpetuated this sentiment, however, because the diaspora did not have a single location to pinpoint as its collective cradle. Rather, a sense of Armenian unpreparedness for the economic changes of the modern era sowed fear among the still-unassimilated immigrant communities of the imperial

⁴²⁸Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 5.

⁴²⁹RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 120.

provinces, where they had fewer means and incentives for full integration than their compatriots in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Maintaining a culturally distinct life, the former Armenian refugees and their descendants engaged the world around them chiefly through the commercial enterprises that, in their view, became threatened by the state's new fiscal policies.

Ironically, in the contemporaneous socioeconomic discourse, it was this partially self-perpetuated image of Armenians as nonassimilated outsiders that buttressed some elite Russians' distrust of tsarist-subject Armenians. Thus, while few state officials resisted the policy of colonizing newly annexed territories with foreign-subject Armenians, certain members of Tsar Alexander's coterie opposed the state's domestic economic policies toward Armenians. In particular, senior tsarist agents feared the social and economic implications of promoting Armenian commerce by extending their former exclusive privileges. At stake, in essence, was the domination of the Great Russian nation within the Russian empire, where Armenian merchants by the third decade of the nineteenth century joined Jews and other elements supposedly threatening to alter the social hierarchy of the polyethnic empire.

In linking Armenians and Jews, Finance Minister Kankrin cited Ermolov's assessment from 1820, when the Caucasus commander argued against partial and exclusive economic privileges for Armenians.⁴³⁰ The state's "excessive patronage of these Orientals," cautioned Kankrin in January 1826, "can have negative consequences. The spirit of Oriental commerce, akin to the haggling of Jews, certainly will lead to the expulsion of Russian merchants, as General Ermolov has also noted."⁴³¹ From Kankrin's perspective, the incentives provided to Armenians in Russia's internal provinces damaged the status of Russian merchants, who faced

⁴³⁰RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 124-125ob.

⁴³¹RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 124ob-125.

being squeezed out by Armenians' supposed Oriental business prowess, potentially yielding Armenian-dominated commercial centers in the Russian heartland. "In any case, one can hardly expect anything useful from cities inhabited by Armenians, Jews, Bukhartsy, Persians, and Persian [nomads]," insisted Kankrin, emphasizing the recent drop in tax revenue from Astrakhan, as well as the alleged decline of "some Lithuanian cities, where Jews more and more push out the Christian population."⁴³² This collective stereotype became well-entrenched in Russian popular thought, with the ethnographer and writer Vladimir Dal' in 1861 lumping together Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Indians as "predominantly trading peoples."⁴³³

Despite Kankrin's stance on this matter, the finance ministry issued no definitive directive in the 1820s. The tumultuous transition from Tsar Alexander to Nicholas in December 1825, and the apparent belief that the new tsar might reverse his late brother's economic policies, delayed Kankrin's move. Meanwhile, frustrated provincial authorities inundated St. Petersburg with requests for clarification of Armenian tax obligations, complaining that local Armenian traders refused to obey the 1824 requirements under the protection of previous royal decrees.⁴³⁴ Finally, in the spring of 1827, the Council of Ministers took up the issue. The diversity of senior tsarist officials' opinions regarding this matter is important for understanding the economic and social role Armenians played in contemporaneous Russia.

Kankrin insisted to the Council of Ministers in March 1827 that the relevant decrees issued by Catherine, Paul, and Alexander had either long expired or no longer could be justified. Kankrin focused particularly on the supposedly detrimental impact of Armenian merchants in

⁴³²RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 125.

⁴³³Vladimir Dal', *Sochineniia Vladimira Dalia: Novoe polnoe izdanie* (Petersburg, 1861), vol. 2, 262-69.

⁴³⁴RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 132-33. More examples on ll. 146-49.

Astrakhan on their Russian counterparts.⁴³⁵ “Cunning” Armenian dealers, the finance minister testified, feigned ignorance of the Russian language and laws to circumvent tax dues and thereby gained an unfair edge over their Russian competitors. The imminent consequence, he warned, will be that these “foreigners” will “crush” the Russians.⁴³⁶ Armenians already owned more property in the city than all of the local non-Russian groups combined: from a total real estate value of 2.5 million rubles owned by non-Russian residents, Armenians held over 1.8 million rubles worth of real estate.⁴³⁷ In a word, Kankrin argued that Armenian merchants in Astrakhan and other southern Russian regions, including the Caucasus, ought to be forced to enroll in guilds and pay corresponding taxes.

Kankrin’s colleagues in the Council of Ministers acknowledged the extensive and diverse prerogatives Armenians had enjoyed for decades. They also agreed with the finance minister and some provincial governors that these privileges had often allowed local Armenian merchants to marginalize other, including Russian, traders.⁴³⁸ However, the committee ruled that Alexander’s empire-wide fiscal laws excluded Armenians, citing the tsar’s 1808 exemption of Armenians from his 1807 requirements, and also the guilds law of 1824, which omitted those Orientals, such as Armenians, whose commerce was regulated by special guidelines. Consequently, the committee found that Armenian merchants of southern Russia must remain under the pre-1807 laws governing their transactions, and that provincial authorities cannot force them into guilds. Finally, in acknowledging the confusion and contradiction that defined the state’s introduction of

⁴³⁵RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 161.

⁴³⁶RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 161.

⁴³⁷RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 14.

⁴³⁸RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 174ob.

the guilds law in 1824, the Council of Ministers emphasized that the new Tsar Nicholas I in November 1826 instructed Finance Minister Kankrin to undertake a revision of the previous tsar's ill-fated guilds law.⁴³⁹

An irritated Kankrin countered the committee's decision by arguing that the matter at hand had "not the slightest relation to the revision of the guilds regulation, for no matter what, the question will always remain: in Russia, do Armenians have more rights than Russians?"⁴⁴⁰ He urged, thus, that the state enforce the requirements of 1807 and 1824 to prevent the "squeezing out" (*vytesnenie*) of Russian merchants from southern provinces.⁴⁴¹ "If in former times it was necessary to provide privileges for Armenians to increase Oriental trade," the finance minister stressed, "then now [such privileges] can only become burdensome for indigenous subjects, while time has already rooted many Orientals in Russia."⁴⁴² While Kankrin's views on Armenians and Jews often smacked of racism, his economic vision held that Armenians had been overly privileged, leading to social inequalities that hurt regional dynamics.

His colleagues disagreed. The Chairman of the Department of Economy of the State Council maintained that Armenian arguments were justified, that they had followed proper procedure in submitting their petitions (unlike other, unspecified groups), and cited the examples of other small groups, such as "Evangelical brotherly societies," that enjoyed exclusive economic privileges in southern Russia without broader detrimental impacts.⁴⁴³ He also asserted that

⁴³⁹RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 176ob.

⁴⁴⁰RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 177.

⁴⁴¹In a compromise, Kankrin suggested that these requirements be implemented from 1830.

⁴⁴²RGIA, f. 1152, op. 1, d. 77, l. 20ob.

⁴⁴³RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 177ob-178.

renewing Armenian privileges would have “incomparably” more “calming” effects on southern Russia’s Armenians than the implementation of the requirements urged by Kankrin. With this view agreed the chairmen of the Council of Ministers, the Department of Civil and Religious Affairs, and the Department of Laws. Only the Director (*Upravliaiushchii*) of the Interior Ministry sided with Kankrin, who countered that the State Council alone, not the Council of Ministers, had the authority to determine whether and how a royal decree should be enforced.⁴⁴⁴ Tsar Nicholas I concurred, ordering that the matter be forwarded to the State Council to determine, as the monarch jotted, “whether it is fair to give immigrants *eternal* advantages over native Russians.”⁴⁴⁵ The tone of the tsar’s note left little doubt as to his view on this issue.⁴⁴⁶

After years of wrangling among senior tsarist officials and consecutive bureaucracies’ passing on the question of Armenian tax obligations, the matter was finally resolved in late 1833. In October 1833, a decade after Ekim Lazarev and other Armenians had begun to petition the state to extend Armenian merchants’ exemptions, the State Council formally rejected their appeals and ruled that all Armenian merchants in southern Russian provinces must abide by the general tax regulations governing the activities of all tsarist-subject traders.⁴⁴⁷ Kankrin triumphantly informed provincial governors that local Armenian businessmen were henceforth required to enroll in merchant guilds and pay corresponding taxes, for Tsar Nicholas had

⁴⁴⁴For a thorough overview of the Council of Ministers debates and Kankrin’s arguments, see RGIA, f. 1152, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 1-38.

⁴⁴⁵RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 178ob-179. Emphasis in the original – underline.

⁴⁴⁶The State Council ruled in February 1828 that, although “no privileges can be eternal,” the Armenian question ought to be resolved at the same time as a revised guilds law is implemented, thus indefinitely postponing a resolution. As a result, no definitive directive was passed until 1833.

⁴⁴⁷RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 198-99.

concluded with the State Council's proclamation that "[it is] inappropriate to provide advantages to Armenians over Russians."⁴⁴⁸

The tsarist political elite's debate over the economic fate of the Armenian merchantry in Russia demonstrated competing visions of that small nation's role in tsarist society. Influential officials presented cogent arguments for extending or cancelling economic privileges that decades earlier had been implemented to entice foreign-subject Armenians to arrive in Russia. By the 1820s, Armenians assumed two seemingly contradictory identities in the Russian political imagination. On the one hand, tsarist authorities actively recruited foreign-subject Armenians in Persia and Turkey to colonize the Caucasus. On the other hand, the economic success of long-settled Armenians in southern Russia—an objective of Catherine the Great and her successor—unnerved some tsarist officials, such as Ermolov and Kankrin, and threatened the social superiority of ethnic Russian elements in the provinces. Equally important, Armenian lay and ecclesiastical representatives ensured that Armenian voices reached the inner cabinets of the tsarist political establishment.

Conclusion

Russia's political elite viewed Armenians as simultaneously advantageous to Russia's imperial goals and also threatening to the social hierarchy of southern provinces. The state's cancellation of exclusive commercial rights granted by previous tsars to Armenian merchant communities demonstrated the degree to which immigrant Armenians had succeeded in establishing deep roots in their new homeland, and the unnerving impact this had on some Russian statesmen. Yet Armenians were not simply a part of the imperial discourse; the nature of Russian political structures was in flux during this period. The tension between the old models—

⁴⁴⁸RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 198ob.

the cumbersome empires of eighteenth-century Spain and England—and the modern, post-Napoleonic powers that strove to govern their multiethnic domains with the efficiency of a nation-state is palpable in the standardizing fiscal policies of Finance Minister Egor Kankrin.

While the state transplanted foreign-subject Armenians into the South Caucasus and provided them with economic incentives, it confronted what it believed was a threat to Russian social dominance in other southern provinces from successful Armenian merchants. Ironically, Armenians' economic privileges turned their proverbial mercantile prowess into reality, prompting fears that Armenian commerce was bound to “crush” its Russian competition. Thus St. Petersburg pursued two contradictory policies vis-à-vis Armenians in the empire: it supported fledgling Armenian communities in the Caucasus but cancelled tax exemptions for more-established Armenian groups elsewhere in Russia.

This fact evinces the complex process by which Russians came to “know” Armenians in the first third of the nineteenth century. Tsarist political elites essentialized Armenians into two broad, often complementary, categories: diligent but avaricious minorities, and politically loyal but culturally insular subjects. From the government's efforts to convert the Lazarev Academy into a vocational school for merchants to Paskevich's insistence on Armenians' imminent economic rejuvenation of the South Caucasus, Russian statesmen constructed an image of a national group that could be used toward tsarist advantages. The state needed to portray the groups it recruited in a constructive manner to justify the human and financial resources expended upon their absorption. And essentializing a relatively small and still alien population permitted the state to govern and manipulate it more efficiently. The attendant stereotype of cunning businessmen was a product of Russian cultural tropes that relegated commerce to

foreign—European, Jewish, “Oriental”—peoples and professed to disdain work for the sake of financial profit.

In reality Armenian immigrants from Persia and Turkey were no more or less diligent or successful than their Russian, Georgian, and Muslim neighbors, but portraying them as such was in the government’s interest. The same objectives prompted the Russian characterization of Armenians as political and military allies who distinguished themselves by maintaining solidarity with Russians in the face of Muslim repression. A generation after their arrival in the tsar’s domain, however, Armenians in the strategically important southern Russian cities outside of the Caucasus gained a degree of economic and social prominence that concerned regional and imperial officials. But exclusive economic privileges, not inherent mercantile acumen, had granted Armenians advantage over their indigenous neighbors. Armenians of the southern cities resisted relinquishing this status not simply out of financial reasons but also because they were slow to integrate into Russia’s cultural fabric, employing motifs of Oriental distinction when it suited them to justify their refusal to comply with uniform fiscal policies. As the next chapter shows, the autocracy continued to struggle to incorporate different sections of its internal Armenian diaspora during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55), when the state sought to standardize the tax and ecumenical laws governing its Armenian subjects.

CHAPTER 3: ARMENIAN ECCLESIASTICS AND ECONOMICS UNDER TSAR NICHOLAS I, 1831-1854

“Privileges, at times given to foreigners settling in Russia, are necessarily reasoned with the needs and circumstances of the localities where they settle, which is why such benefits cannot and must not be the same for everyone.”

-State Council, 1848

“Armenians undeniably occupy a very important place among the residents of the Transcaucasus, according to their abilities, enterprise, and pursuit of education. They have always been considered the most active toilers of the Orient.”

-Caucasus Calendar, 1846

At mid-century, Russian statesmen proffered competing visions for the social and economic role that Armenians should play in the tsarist empire. By 1830, when Russia emerged from wars with Persia and Turkey as the new master of the Caucasus, the foundation of Russo-Armenian relations rested on two core spheres: religious and economic. This chapter examines these dynamics in the context of the Russian state’s absorption of the Armenian nation into the empire. I argue that the autocracy relinquished some economic and cultural control over its Armenian subjects in expectation of reciprocal political benefit. Yet in the midst of governmental reform, St. Petersburg struggled to integrate Armenians. Contradictory fiscal statutes, arguments among senior statesmen, and competition, as well as cooperation, between the Orthodox and Armenian churches, marked the state’s search for effective Armenian policies. Overall, Tsar

Nicholas I (1825-55) sought standardized tax and ecumenical laws for his Armenian and other subjects as part of a broader pursuit of his own vision of a modern *Rechtsstaat*.

As historian Marc Raeff has shown, “Nicholas was narrowly conservative and afraid of bringing any radically new elements into Russia’s political organization.”⁴⁴⁹ The tsar sought small adjustments to the “machinery of government,” and wished to lubricate its gears for smooth functioning but opposed fundamental changes. To this end, the emperor tasked Mikhail Speransky with codifying Russian law to clarify the legal relations and procedures for state bureaucrats. “It was as far as he was willing to go,” according to Raeff, “such a clarification would be sufficient in bringing to the imperial administration consistency, uniformity, and order—the supreme virtues to the military and technological mind of Nicholas I.” Raeff is correct to emphasize that the emperor and Speransky “obviously aimed at uniformity and simplicity of legal relationships and categories. . . . Minor exceptions and special cases had to be eliminated to bring about uniformity and a streamlining of legal relations that would pave the way for bureaucratic orderliness and military efficiency.”⁴⁵⁰ But in confronting the loopholes into which Armenian communities in Russia fell, the tsarist regime often prioritized not only legal and fiscal uniformity but also geopolitical aims beyond Russia’s frontiers.

Under Tsar Nicholas I, the state also codified the activities of Orthodox and non-Orthodox groups in what historian Laura Engelstein has called a “project of administrative modernization.”⁴⁵¹ The government included the Armenian Church in this endeavor,

⁴⁴⁹Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 324.

⁴⁵⁰Raeff, *Michael Speransky*, 337.

⁴⁵¹Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 50-51.

guaranteeing, restricting, and defining the rights and obligations of tsarist-subject Armenians. Aimed at standardizing and legalizing the relationship between the tsarist state and Echmiadzin, the *Polozhenie* of 1836 and its attendant policies constituted part of an empire-wide reform initiative that affected most of Russia's non-Orthodox faiths. Thus, under Nicholas, the Muslims of Crimea, Protestants, Jews, and Karaites received royal fiats that defined their ecumenical, social, and political position in imperial Russia.⁴⁵²

But even during efforts to streamline the bureaucratic and legal systems of governance, state policy toward the non-Orthodox often reflected Nicholas's conservatism. Indeed, new statutes and reformed administrative practices produced as many restrictions as opportunities. Historian John Klier has insisted that, under Nicholas I, the government targeted Jews for full-scale conversion more than at any other time in the nineteenth century, subjecting them to the conscription system and the education policies of Sergei Uvarov, the architect of the Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality doctrine.⁴⁵³

Yet the Armenian experience, distinguished by the political implications of its transregional diaspora, suggests that Nicholas's government at times pursued more important objectives than acculturation and political tranquility on the periphery. In seeking to reconcile the demands of a well-regulated country with the circumstances of such imperial minorities as Armenians, the autocracy's foreign affairs imperatives often shaped its domestic policies. The Armenian Church represented a key factor in this equation. While in 1836 the state solidified the

⁴⁵²Paul Werth, "Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos at Home and Abroad," in *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds*, ed. Osamu Ieda and Tomohiko Uyama (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2006), 209.

⁴⁵³John Klier, "State Policies and the Conversion of Jews in Imperial Russia," in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 92-112.

legal status of Echmiadzin and its tsarist followers, it went no farther in exerting control over Armenian religious life. Unlike Nicholas's Jewish, Georgian, and Muslim subjects, Armenians escaped the first half of the nineteenth century without experiencing the same level of government interference in their material and political culture.

Imperial Policy and Context

After the end of the Second Russo-Persian War in 1828, Russia consolidated its annexed lands by establishing new administrative spaces. Most of Eastern Armenia, comprising the former Persian khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan, became known as *Armianskaia oblast* (Armenian province), with its center at Yerevan. Ronald G. Suny has argued that Tsar Nicholas I rejected Armenian calls for the establishment of an autonomous Armenia, insisting instead on the designation of an *oblast* for Eastern Armenia.⁴⁵⁴ Yet, in a likely concession, the tsar appointed Armenian-heritage Major-General Vasilii Bebutov commander of the territory. The province was disbanded twelve years later and then resurrected in a more significant way in 1850 as *Erivanskaia guberniia* (Yerevan governorate). Pleased by his Caucasus commander's accomplishments, Nicholas bestowed on General Ivan Paskevich the title *Graf Erivanskii* (Count of Yerevan) and reassigned him to Warsaw.

In October 1831, Paskevich's successor arrived in Tiflis. Of Estonian-German heritage, General Baron Grigorii Vladimirovich Rozen (Georg von Rosen) had distinguished himself during the Napoleonic Wars and the recent Polish campaigns. His six years at the head of the Caucasus administration (1831-37) focused on combating North Caucasian highlanders led by

⁴⁵⁴Ronald G. Suny, "Eastern Armenia under Tsarist Rule," in Richard Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, volume 2. (New York: St. Martin's, 2004), 113.

the adroit Avar warlord Imam Shamil.⁴⁵⁵ Rozen also worked to integrate the economy and society of the South Caucasus with the rest of the country. In the mostly Muslim-populated North Caucasus, the spread of Muridism, a Sufist-political movement, challenged the tsarist hold on the region as soon as Russia emerged from wars with Persia and Turkey in 1829.

Muridism “did not recognize any worldly laws other than those laid down by the prophet Muhammed in the Shari’ia.”⁴⁵⁶ Rejecting the Russian subjugation of their lands, the followers of Muridism waged a protracted *jihad* against the northern infidels. By the spring of 1832, Rozen stressed to War Minister Alexander Chernyshev that the “weak and unreliable condition of the [Caucasus] Line strikes everyone who visits it.”⁴⁵⁷ The Muridist movement’s most famous and deft leader, Shamil, rose to prominence in 1836, when Russian agents warily noted his success in preaching Shari’ia law to the residents of Dagestan and Chechnya.⁴⁵⁸ By the late 1830s, tsarist troops pursued Shamil throughout the region, leaving in their wake destruction and enraging previously docile Muslims. The warlord’s power reached its apex in 1842-43, when his joint Dagestani-Chechen force of 10,000 men scored a series of unprecedented victories against Russian outposts, killing in one skirmish in May 1842 nearly 500 tsarist soldiers.⁴⁵⁹ Between

⁴⁵⁵For an overview of the North Caucasus insurgency, see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (New York: Routledge, 2003). For a more thorough overview, see V. A. Potto, *Kavkazskaia voina v otdel’nykh ocherkakh, epizodakh, legendakh i biografiakh*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo V. A. Berezovskago, 1887-1889).

⁴⁵⁶Firouzeh Mostashari, “Colonial Dilemmas: Russian Policies in the Muslim Caucasus,” in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 234.

⁴⁵⁷*AKAK*, VIII (1881), 342.

⁴⁵⁸*AKAK*, VIII (1881), 356.

⁴⁵⁹*AKAK*, IX (1884), x.

August and December 1843 alone, Shamil's guerillas killed or wounded 76 tsarist officers and over 2,300 soldiers.⁴⁶⁰

Rozen's initial policies relied on force to pacify the insurgency, but the unfamiliar terrain and hostile locals impeded tsarist military success. More generally, Rozen's plan, vetted by the tsar and war minister, called for the construction of a network of fortified positions throughout the region, crisscrossing it with new roads and dotting it with redoubts.⁴⁶¹ Rozen also sought to confiscate lands used by the *gortsy* (highlanders) for agriculture and cattle rearing and to provide it to Cossack colonists. Finally, he proposed using special border guards to cut off the highlanders' "connections" [*snoshenie*] with Ottoman Turks along the Black Sea coast.⁴⁶²

In a reflection of senior officials' divergent perspectives on Russia's mission in the Caucasus, Paskevich criticized Rozen's proposal. In March 1834, Paskevich judged his successor's program to be "difficult in its overall execution and insufficient in its particular details."⁴⁶³ The Count of Yerevan rejected the idea of settling Cossacks in regions outside tsarist control, emphasizing both safety concerns and the myriad of potential economic difficulties. Paskevich also questioned whether the state treasury could bear the estimated three to four million rubles for Rozen's new fortifications and roads, and whether the establishment of more isolated garrisons made tactical sense.⁴⁶⁴ Instead, Paskevich echoed Rozen's calls for lines of fortified garrisons, but reduced their number and rearranged their positioning. He also

⁴⁶⁰ *AKAK*, IX (1884), xiii.

⁴⁶¹ Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA), f. 846, op. 16, d. 6293, ll. 1-7.

⁴⁶² RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6293, ll. 15-15ob.

⁴⁶³ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6293, l. 15.

⁴⁶⁴ RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6293, ll. 16-16ob.

recommended settling Cossacks on the vast unoccupied lands of the North Caucasus, rather than wresting currently used land in punitive measures. Most importantly, Paskevich recommended that waves of “settlers from Russia” be used to “constrain the highlanders” in hopes of “forcing them to submit [*smirit’sia*], seeing from one side the terrifying punishment for insubordination, and from the other side the welfare enjoyed by peaceful and obedient tribes.”⁴⁶⁵ Owing to Paskevich’s accomplishments against Persia and in quelling the Polish rebellion, he received Tsar Nicholas’s full attention. At a time when two indigenous insurgencies—in Poland and the North Caucasus—challenged Russian imperial rule, the policies enacted in St. Petersburg often relied on heavy-handed tactics.

The revolt of aristocratic Poles in 1830-31 threatened Russia’s grip on the western borderlands, which it had annexed in the late eighteenth century. In sending Paskevich and a large army to suppress the rebellion in Warsaw, Nicholas—who crowned himself King of Poland in May 1829—made clear that he intended to crush challenges to his authority. Yet Nicholas’s response to the Polish insurrection evinced the degree to which he fused personal emotions with the politics of governance, a circumstance described by historian Richard Wortman.⁴⁶⁶ Distrustful of military elites after the Decembrist rebellion and suspicious that the republican cries of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* had infected his aristocratic subjects in the peripheries, Nicholas viewed Poland, the Caucasus, and other imperial territories as integral components of his empire, and saw any challenge to this arrangement as a personal affront. After his army suppressed the rebels, the tsar berated the defeated Poles:

⁴⁶⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6293, ll. 35-35ob.

⁴⁶⁶Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 120-66.

You never knew how to be content with the benefits granted to you, and yourself destroyed your own welfare; you trampled on your laws—I speak the truth to you, in order to convince you once and for all of our mutual ties. . . . I will believe not your words but your actions; repentance must come from here [the tsar pointed to his heart], you see that I speak dispassionately [*khladnokrovno*], that I am calm, not angry at you, I have long forgotten your insults to me and my family.⁴⁶⁷

The emperor threatened to annihilate Poland as a political entity if the nobility continued to seek independence: “If you stubbornly maintain your dreams of an imaginary utopia, of a separate nationality, of an independent Poland, of all these pipe dreams [*nezbytochnye mechty*], you can do nothing but incur grave disaster . . . for at the slightest disturbance, I will crush your city, destroy Warsaw, and of course I will not rebuild it.”⁴⁶⁸

Nicholas took a similar approach to the Georgian elites of the South Caucasus, among whom the Russian administration uncovered a conspiracy in 1832.⁴⁶⁹ Chernyshev directed Rozen to arrest “several Georgian princes and noblemen,” citing evidence of a “quite serious . . . plot” that sought Georgian independence from St. Petersburg.⁴⁷⁰ Despite this development, Tsar Nicholas and Chernyshev remained confident that “there is no doubt that the sensible part of the [Georgian] nobility does not wish any changes in its political status and even is sincerely committed to Russia.”⁴⁷¹ Nevertheless, in the summer of 1833, under the pretext that heirs of deposed Georgian royals continued to use their formal court titles in correspondence, Nicholas

⁴⁶⁷State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. 672, op. 1, d. 301, l. 1.

⁴⁶⁸GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 301, l. 2.

⁴⁶⁹*AKAK*, VIII (1881), ii.

⁴⁷⁰*AKAK*, VIII (1881), 391-92. Even Georgian-heritage tsarist officials, such as Major-General Chavchavadze, and Prince Okropirom from Moscow were implicated in the investigation.

⁴⁷¹*AKAK*, VIII (1881), 393.

instructed Rozen's administration to intercept and burn their mail.⁴⁷² At the same time, the tsar worked to smooth the government's relationship with the Georgian aristocracy, sending a special envoy to Tiflis to avert a major schism. In a sanguine speech to the Georgian elite, the ambassador *extraordinaire* opined: "Having become acquainted with Georgians during the battles of the last Persian war, I have come to consider them as brothers, and believe that a Russian [*Russkii*] who is devoted to his Emperor must be a good Georgian, just as a loyal Georgian must be a good Russian [*Rossiianin*]." ⁴⁷³ Yet the South Caucasus's administrative and economic incorporation into the Russian empire posed as many challenges for Rozen as the political resistance of Georgian elites.

Reflective of the regional and policy inconsistencies that characterized the entire imperial taxation system,⁴⁷⁴ the deficiencies of Russian fiscal policies in the South Caucasus frustrated the locals. In early 1833, a survey of the population of *Armianskaia oblast* revealed the residents' discontent with the local administration.⁴⁷⁵ Armenians, Kurds, and "Tatars" alike complained of the slow bureaucratic processes and disparate regulations that delayed and complicated their daily lives. For example, in the first quarter-century of Russian rule in the South Caucasus, tsarist overlords, wary of rattling the locals, left Georgian provinces under former Persian tax rates and allowed the regional administration to use all of the tax revenue for the benefit of the region, a

⁴⁷² *AKAK*, VIII (1881), 218.

⁴⁷³ *AKAK*, VIII (1881), 394.

⁴⁷⁴ Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and Early Soviet Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 34.

⁴⁷⁵ *AKAK*, VIII (1881), 504-05. Rozen commissioned the survey, which was carried out by State Counselor Palavandov in the fall of 1832 and spring of 1833.

deviation from standard policy in other region.⁴⁷⁶ In 1824 confusion ensued when officials in the South Caucasus, unlike their colleagues in neighboring districts, abandoned the household tax in favor of the poll tax. Another discrepancy had Muslim residents of the Caucasus, distrusted by the imperial authorities, pay a special military tax instead of taking part in conscription.⁴⁷⁷

Referring to the residents of *Armianskaia oblast*, one Russian report from 1833 complained that, “most of them can be called semi-wild [*poludikimi*], who interpret the slowness of resolving their matters as oppression on the part of the Russian government.”⁴⁷⁸ Such tsarist sentiments, common among the administrators of the South Caucasus, consistently delineated a cultural separation between the ostensibly civilized, and European, Russians on the one hand, and the “semi-wild” Caucasian natives on the other. From the emperor to the rank-and-file soldier, Russians labeled the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus, both Christians and Muslims, as *Aziatsy* (Asiatics). At the same time that Russian imperial agents engaged in cultural “othering,” they remained aware of the region’s delicate political situation vis-à-vis the neighboring Muslim empires. Indeed, the same report cautioned that such circumstances “give our government no positive influence upon the residents of the neighboring powers, who consider [such bureaucratic deficiencies] to be measures that are oppressive for Muslims.”⁴⁷⁹

Economic concerns also plagued the administration of *Armianskaia oblast*. By early 1834, Rozen turned his attention to the province’s “insignificant [tax] revenue” of 120,000 rubles

⁴⁷⁶Ekaterina Pravilova, *Finansy imperii: Den’gi i vlast’ v politike Rossii na natsional’nykh okrainakh, 1801-1917* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel’stvo, 2006), 249.

⁴⁷⁷Pravilova, *Finansy imperii*, 264.

⁴⁷⁸*AKAK*, VIII (1881), 505.

⁴⁷⁹*AKAK*, VIII (1881), 505.

per year.⁴⁸⁰ He blamed the situation on the continuation of former Persian tax practices, including the collection of agricultural taxes by the hated *sarkars*. Inconsistent regional taxation policies also vexed the locals, who demanded a simplified system. Rozen collaborated with General Vasilii Bebutov, the commander of *Armianskaia oblast*, to abolish the *sarkar* system and compile more accurate data about local agriculture and trade. They also introduced taxes for the mostly Armenian farmers who had settled in the region four to seven years earlier and still enjoyed tax-free farming.⁴⁸¹ The changes “exceeded expectations,” and by 1835 the province yielded 215,000 rubles in tax revenue, compared to the 120,000 collected the previous year.⁴⁸² Improved fiscal policies in the South Caucasus, however, did not relieve the deteriorating security situation in the North Caucasus and belied deeper problems with Rozen’s administration.

In mid-1837, responding to a crescendo of rumors, “Baron Gan arrived in Tiflis to uncover a network of vast corruption and abuse at the center of which was the emperor’s aide-de-camp and Baron Rosen’s son-in-law, Colonel Prince Alexander Dadiani.”⁴⁸³ The crisis required the emperor’s personal attention. In the fall of 1837, Nicholas became the second tsar since Peter the Great to visit the Caucasus.⁴⁸⁴ Nicholas was eager to signal to Europe that Russia’s claims to the region remained firm, despite the native insurgency and the growing

⁴⁸⁰ *AKAK*, VIII (1881), 515.

⁴⁸¹ *AKAK*, VIII (1881), 515. This point remains unclear from the available sources, and appears to contradict the ten-year tax exemptions promised to Persian and Ottoman-subject Armenians by Paskevich in 1828.

⁴⁸² *AKAK*, VIII (1881), 515.

⁴⁸³ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 122.

⁴⁸⁴ Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices*, 120.

commercial rivalry with British marine merchants, and to address the unresolved security situation and Gan's reports of the local administration's incompetence and corruption.

Nicholas visited Yerevan, Tiflis, Vladikavkaz, and several other important cities. In Tiflis, the regional administration's headquarters, the tsar publicly dismissed several senior officials, including Dadiani. The emperor also replaced Rozen with General Evgenii Golovin, reprimanding the former for his failure to quell the North Caucasus uprising and his administration's bureaucratic shortfalls. Nicholas instructed Golovin: "Do not start anything [hoping] for luck, it is better to delay until success is certain; in a word, carry out matters in such a way that, having taken a step forward, no steps are taken back."⁴⁸⁵ However, the change of officials did not impact policy. Nicholas, his ministers, and Golovin continued to pursue a military solution to Shamil's rebellion, and the region's fiscal, criminal, and civil statutes remained inconsistent, partial, and often contradictory.

This climate reflected the government's struggle to define its mission in the Caucasus. In December 1839 tsarist ministers convened to debate whether the South Caucasus "should be seen as a colony or a part of Russia."⁴⁸⁶ Finance Minister Egor Kankrin (Georg von Cancrin) argued that the region's social composition rendered it a colony, with only the Georgian nobility approaching the cultural pedigree of their Russian counterparts. Rozen disagreed with him, emphasizing instead the local population's vast trade networks, something the government could not risk losing through the type of colonial marginalization that the British displayed in India. Minister of Foreign Affairs Karl Nesselrode also highlighted the delicate politics required to take full advantage of the region's economic offerings, but believed that Armenians and Georgians

⁴⁸⁵ *AKAK*, IX (1884), iv-v.

⁴⁸⁶ V. G. Tunian, *Vostochnaia Armeniia v sostave Rossii, 1828-1853 gg.* (Erevan: Aiastan, 1989), 41.

could be “civilized” through the expansion of modern regional commerce.⁴⁸⁷ Siding with Rozen and Nesselrode, the majority of statesmen concurred that the South Caucasus had to be incorporated into Russia’s social and political orbit.

Reflecting these efforts to integrate the Caucasus into the country, in 1840 the regional administration underwent major reshuffling. *Armianskaia oblast* was abolished and its territory subsumed into the new *Gruzino-Imeretinskaia guberniia* (Georgian-Imeretian governorate); the eastern portion of the Caucasus became *Kaspiiskaia oblast* (Caspian province).⁴⁸⁸ The former was divided into eleven *uezdy* (districts), including the Yerevan and Tiflis districts, and the latter into seven *uezdy*. Initial steps were taken to replace *adat* and Shari’ia with Russian laws, but a backlash by some local communities prevented the full implementation of new statutes for some time.⁴⁸⁹ Criminal cases were tried in civil rather than military courts, and the jurisdiction of civil administrators grew at the expense of their military counterparts.⁴⁹⁰ Nevertheless, a St. Petersburg commission determined in 1842 that the state’s administrative reforms had failed.

What prompted the changes of the 1840s? The location and symbolic nomenclature of *Armianskaia oblast* rendered it the de facto homeland of the Armenian people. Although little evidence survives to illustrate the reaction of contemporaneous Armenians to the 1840 reorganization, some modern Armenian historians have interpreted the province’s dissolution as a Russian attack on Armenian nationalist dreams. Writing during the Soviet decline, V. G.

⁴⁸⁷Suny, “Eastern Armenia under Tsarist Rule,” 113-14.

⁴⁸⁸According to Russian statistics, in 1843 in the South Caucasus there were 1,483,392 residents, of whom over 979,000 lived in the Georgian-Imeretian *guberniia*. See *AKAK*, IX (1884), 604.

⁴⁸⁹Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices*, 122.

⁴⁹⁰Tunian, *Vostochnaia Armenia*, 43.

Tunian, for example, argued that the tsarist state's "political decision was deliberately aimed at suppressing the autonomous aspirations of the Armenian people."⁴⁹¹ But economic concerns, not perceived national-political threats, guided the government's administrative reshuffling.

Realizing that the reorganization of 1840 was insufficient, in late 1842 Tsar Nicholas recalled Rozen to St. Petersburg. His replacement, General Alexander Neidgardt, assumed command of the Independent Caucasus Corps at the time of Shamil's zenith and Russian authority's nadir. Neidgardt had one paramount task. "I want no conquests and [even] the thought of them consider criminal," the tsar dictated when dispatching the general to the Caucasus.⁴⁹² The pacification of the *gortsy* was the state's primary objective, followed by the improvement of the region's broader administration and bureaucracy. Contemporaries pronounced Neidgardt a "pedantic . . . drill-master." Dr. Moritz Wagner, a German explorer and biologist who met Neidgardt in the 1840s, described the tsarist official as "a worthy, honest man, of unsophisticated character, just and severe; endowed with sound practical sense, but without superior talent, political penetration, or knowledge of mankind—no magnanimous character, such as Yermoloff, yet an improvement on his predecessors, Rosen and Golowin."⁴⁹³

Despite's Neidgardt's mission to suppress Shamil's rebellion, the government began to express openness to "political," nonmilitary solutions to the North Caucasus crisis. The region's "conquest should not be achieved only through weapons, but instead [you] must act carefully,

⁴⁹¹Tunian, *Vostochnaia Armeniia*, 44-45.

⁴⁹²GARF, 672, op. 1, d. 84, l. 1.

⁴⁹³Moritz Wagner, *Travels in Persia, Georgia and Koordistan; with sketches of the Cossacks and the Caucasus* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1856), 120.

patiently,” the tsar emphasized to Neidgardt.⁴⁹⁴ Indeed, months before Golovin’s demotion, a secret government report recommended offering rewards and agricultural assistance to the *gortsy*.⁴⁹⁵ The proposal argued that through economic incentives and improved relations with the natives, the government could achieve more lasting results than through perennial campaigns, stressing that Russian agents must not “offend” native sensibilities and customs.⁴⁹⁶ But the plan also called for a divide-and-conquer strategy, using money to fan discord among Shamil’s commanders, “and even to give rise to a bloody feud, forcing them to fight among each other and thus weakening them.”⁴⁹⁷ This scheme found support from such senior tsarist statesmen as War Minister Chernyshev, who argued that “the British were able to secure their sovereignty in India through political means. That way they conserved their troops and saved time in conquering the region. Should we not try this system?”⁴⁹⁸

By the mid-1840s, Tsar Nicholas recognized that more than a new commander was needed. Less than two years after Neidgardt’s promotion, and disappointed in the general’s failure to check the spread of Shamil’s insurgency,⁴⁹⁹ Nicholas turned to Count General Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov. Educated in London during his father’s tenure as Catherine the Great’s ambassador to England, the nobleman had served in his youth in the Caucasus under

⁴⁹⁴GARF, 672, op. 1, d. 84, l. 1.

⁴⁹⁵RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6482, l. 2.

⁴⁹⁶RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6482, l. 3.

⁴⁹⁷RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6482, l. 3.

⁴⁹⁸RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6482, l. 8. Golovin agreed with Chernyshev’s points but emphasized the religious “fanaticism” of Muridist rebels.

⁴⁹⁹See the tsar’s increasingly concerned messages to Neidgardt at GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 530, ll. 8-10.

Tsitsianov.⁵⁰⁰ The general's credentials included military distinctions in wars against the French and Turks and an impressive record as the governor of New Russia and viceroy of Bessarabia. In late 1844, a frustrated Tsar Nicholas, expressing his "respect and dedication" to Vorontsov, asked the general to become the first viceroy of the Caucasus.⁵⁰¹

Vorontsov (1845-54) made a real difference, because he received "enormous and extraordinary" powers to make major decisions without consulting the ministers in St. Petersburg.⁵⁰² Not since Grigorii Potemkin in Catherine's era did a Russian imperial administrator receive such *carte blanche* from the monarch.⁵⁰³ Respected by his army and enjoying the support of War Minister Chernyshev, Vorontsov justified the tsar's trust by turning the tide against Shamil (despite some notable early disasters) and reforming the regional bureaucracy.⁵⁰⁴ Vorontsov embraced diplomacy and economic incentives to win over disenchanted Dagestani villagers to his side, eroding Shamil's influence to such degree that the rebels posed little practical threat to Russian interests in the Caucasus when the Crimean War erupted in 1853.

To the south of the mountains, the viceroy divided the territory into new *gubernii*, including the Yerevan, Tiflis, and Baku governorates. Unlike his predecessors, Vorontsov co-

⁵⁰⁰ Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2002), 63.

⁵⁰¹ *AKAK*, X (1885), i.

⁵⁰² Anthony Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov: Viceroy to the Tsar* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1990), 143. The details of Vorontsov's appointment, including the tsar's decree, can be found at RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6588, l. 2.

⁵⁰³ Tunian, *Vostochnaia Armeniia*, 52-53. For an overview of the tsarist administrators of southern provinces from Catherine to Alexander I, see John LeDonne, "Frontier Governors General 1772-1825 II. The Southern Frontier," in *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, no. 2 (2000): 161-83.

⁵⁰⁴ Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov*, 144-49.

opted local national elites into the political structure of the new administration, recruiting Georgian, Armenian, and other aristocrats and community leaders.⁵⁰⁵ He also invested in the development of the region's cultural life, establishing schools, libraries, scholarly societies, and a theater in Tiflis.⁵⁰⁶ As a result, according to historian Ronald G. Suny, the "Georgian nobility, which fifteen years earlier had plotted to murder Russian officials and separate Georgia from the empire, made its peace with the tsarist autocracy during the viceroyalty of Vorontsov."⁵⁰⁷ For middle-class Armenians of Tiflis and Yerevan, too, Vorontsov's changes promised a brighter future, helped by the viceroy's simplification of trade regulations, support for local students' study in St. Petersburg and Moscow (including at the Lazarev Institute), and similar enlightened policies. The viceroy's popularity among the natives of the South Caucasus, especially aristocratic Georgians, resulted in a statue erected to him in Tiflis, where, according to one scholar, locals "presented him as a father figure, placed him in an otherworldly environment, linked him to the forces of nature and the majesty of the highest mountains, and turned him into some kind of *Übermensch*."⁵⁰⁸ In ill health, the viceroy resigned in 1854 and died in Odessa two years later.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁵ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 86.

⁵⁰⁶ Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire*, 64.

⁵⁰⁷ Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1989), 75.

⁵⁰⁸ Hubertus Jahn, "The Bronze Viceroy: Mikhail Vorontsov's Statue and Russian Imperial Representation in the South Caucasus in the mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Russian History* 41, no. 2 (2014): 163-80. [Quote from p. 22 of this article's online version on Jahn's website.]

⁵⁰⁹ To the end, he remained well regarded by the tsar, who promoted him to field marshal just months before his death. See *AKAK*, X (1885), xvii.

Vorontsov trusted Armenians. He facilitated the education of Armenian youths in the empire's best academies and universities, supported the construction of new Armenian churches, and listened to the requests and suggestions of the Tiflis Armenian merchants.⁵¹⁰ More than his predecessors, Vorontsov stressed that “throughout the region, the Armenians are entirely devoted to us.”⁵¹¹ At the end of his tenure, the viceroy lauded the “unquestionable loyalty and even affection toward us of all Armenians.”⁵¹² In particular, he praised tsarist-subject Armenians’ willingness to “serve against our enemies.” Among the Armenian elites who volunteered for Russian service, many had performed “excellent exploits . . . [and] acquired glory and general trust.” Among middle-class Armenians, too, the viceroy highlighted their mercantile successes. Unlike such predecessors as Tsitsianov and Ermolov, who faulted Armenian entrepreneurs for their perceived avarice, Vorontsov praised the broader social and economic benefits of their business acumen. “Armenians also are the government’s main instrument for leases and contracts here;” he summarized, “competition among them reduces prices to our advantage.”⁵¹³

Vorontsov’s perception of Armenians reflected the autocracy’s generally Janus-like view of these subjects. Positive assessments of Armenians accompanied concerns about the social marginalization produced by middle-class Armenians’ economic successes. For all his praise, Vorontsov noted that Tiflis Armenians “hold almost all [commerce] in their hands; for the

⁵¹⁰For evidence of his support of the construction of new Armenian churches, see RGIA, f. 1268, op. 2, d. 687, ll. 1-3.

⁵¹¹*AKAK*, X (1885), 96.

⁵¹²*AKAK*, X (1885), 96.

⁵¹³*AKAK*, X (1885), 97. However, Vorontsov also warned that the administration had to maintain vigilance against Armenian and other creditors’ efforts to defraud customers.

Georgians, based on an ancient militant spirit and general disposition, are not capable of it.”⁵¹⁴

Yet the Caucasus administration’s facilitation of social, economic, and cultural advancement of Armenians and other natives, in line with the broader reform effort that increasingly prioritized diplomacy and economic development, represented the government’s transition away from the punitive policies employed by previous regional commanders, including Ermolov and Paskevich. Armenians became core allies of the Russian administration, which relied on the local businesses of their middle class and the military service of their elites.

In early 1855, General Nikolai Muravev arrived in Tiflis to replace Vorontsov, taking command during a particularly dangerous time for Russian imperial aims, when Turkey, Britain, and France allied against what they saw as St. Petersburg’s menacing foreign policy. While the majority of combat revolved around the Crimean peninsula, the war’s reverberations reached the Caucasus. As early as the summer of 1853, Shamil’s rebels and Ottoman officials discussed a coordinated campaign in the Caucasus.⁵¹⁵ Soon Ottoman forces attacked Russia on sea and land, targeting the Black Sea coast and attempting to invade western Georgia. Shamil, meanwhile, set his sights on Tiflis. Despite these efforts, according to David Goldfrank, “Anglo-Turkish attempts to support Shamil and some of the Caucasus peoples against Russia flopped.”⁵¹⁶ Tsarist forces repelled both Ottoman and highlander threats and pursued the attackers beyond Russian lines. In November 1855, the tsar’s army captured Kars.

⁵¹⁴AKAK, X (1885), 97.

⁵¹⁵King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 89. Moreover, Moshe Gammer has emphasized the multivalent association between Shamil and the powerful *pasha* of Egypt. See Moshe Gammer, “The Imam and the Pasha: A Note on Shamil and Muhammad Ali,” in *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 4 (1996): 336-42.

⁵¹⁶David Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 294.

The Crimean War marked the first major Russian engagement in which well-educated and trained Russified Armenians became renowned members of the regular army. Not as much a product of state-engineered Russification as an organic result of select Armenians' melding into elite Russian circles, this phenomenon affected small numbers of Armenians. Yet the fact that these individuals attained personal distinction within the tsarist hierarchy signaled the gradual Russian acceptance of Armenians. While thousands of Armenian peasants and middle-class laborers in Russia proper and the Caucasus continued to experience social marginalization, a select cadre of their compatriots gained prominence. For example, General Vasilii Bebutov, the former head of the disbanded *Armianskaia oblast*, earned the Order of St. George (second degree) in December 1853. Another Armenian-heritage commander, Guards Colonel Mikhail Loris-Melikov, led Armenian and Tatar cavalry units against Turkish troops,⁵¹⁷ a small accomplishment in a career that would culminate in his promotion to interior minister in 1880.

In sum, for much of the 1830s and 1840s, imperial Russian policy in the Caucasus revolved around the reform of the regional bureaucracy and the suppression of the North Caucasus insurgency. The shuffling of generals in Tiflis yielded few results until the creation of the Caucasian viceroyalty and the arrival of Vorontsov, whose enlightened policies effected real change. In its relations with the restive Muslims of Dagestan and Chechnya, the tsarist state employed heavy-handed tactics, until the combination of Vorontsov's diplomacy, his military persistence, and the Ottoman collapse in the Caucasus weakened Shamil's power, resulting in his capture in 1859.

Although Russia decisively lost the Crimean War, thanks mainly to the Franco-British alliance, it achieved important results in its southern domains. Tsarist troops captured the

⁵¹⁷GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 126, ll. 16-16ob and 52.

sultan's prized Kars fortress, a Pyrrhic victory quickly nullified by European diplomatic intervention. Moreover, after more than two decades of bloody resistance, Shamil surrendered, dying years later in comfortable exile in Medina.⁵¹⁸ Finally, Russia maintained its claim as protector of Christians under Ottoman suzerainty, a position underscored by Tsar Nicholas during his declaration of war in April 1854: "We did not and do not search for conquests, nor for a dominating influence in Turkey," but rather the "restoration of the violated rights of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Porte."⁵¹⁹ To be sure, throughout the reign of Nicholas I, the status of Christian confessions, Orthodox and heterodox, was simultaneously an opportunity and a liability for domestic and foreign policy. Few dynamics illustrate this as thoroughly as the government's dialogue with the Armenian Church, whose links to a vast diaspora presented unique considerations for St. Petersburg.

⁵¹⁸On the fascinating story of Shamil's restful retirement, see Thomas Barrett, "The Remaking of the Lion of Dagestan: Shamil in Captivity," in *The Russian Review* 53, no. 3 (1994): 353-66.

⁵¹⁹GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 126, l. 19.



Figure 4. Echmiadzin in 2014.
Photo property of the author.

Church-State Relations

In the 1830s, the encounter between the tsarist state and the Armenian Church underwent major transformations. In 1836, eight years after the annexation of Echmiadzin, the state codified the rights and obligations of the Armenian Church and its followers in Russia. While the *Polozhenie* (Statute) of 1836 simultaneously granted powers and placed restrictions on the Catholicos or patriarch, it also carried implications beyond the Armenian ecclesiastical sphere. In particular, the autocracy employed Echmiadzin to facilitate its foreign policy in Turkey and elsewhere. Moreover, in the interests of domestic stability and out of a sense of shared ecumenical culture, the Orthodox and Armenian churches cooperated against threats to the

integrity of the Armenian confession, as long as such collaboration did not encroach upon the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church.

More than a monastic institution, Echmiadzin represented the epicenter of political initiatives for the stateless Armenians. Enjoying the recognition of the vast Armenian diaspora, albeit challenged by rivals in Jerusalem and Constantinople, the Echmiadzin Catholicos or patriarch exercised authority over Armenian communities from Western Europe to southern Asia. The political implications of this circumstance rendered control over Echmiadzin a key objective of the tsar, the shah, and the sultan. When Russia seized the complex from Persia in 1828, it gained a new tool for projecting its foreign policy. While tsarist diplomats struggled for influence in Constantinople and Tehran, with the absorption of Echmiadzin Russia maneuvered to advance its interests through the leverage of local Armenian bishops, who, in contrast to their oft-mistreated lay compatriots, enjoyed social and political clout in Turkey and Persia.

Nerses of Ashtarak, an ambitious and nimble Armenian clergyman, played a key role in the autocracy's interaction with the Armenian Church in much of the Nicholaevan era. Nerses first gained prominence as the archbishop of the important diocese of Georgia, where he served between 1811 and 1830. Russian officials noted the prelate's administrative efficiency during his tenure in Tiflis and often relied on his connections to Persian officials, especially during the Second Russo-Persian War.⁵²⁰ Harboring dreams of a self-governing Armenia, Nerses cooperated with Paskevich and Lazarev during the war, and at its conclusion facilitated the resettlement of Persian Armenians into Russian territory.⁵²¹ Yet Nerses's zealous advocacy for a

⁵²⁰George Bournoutian, *The Khanate of Erevan Under Qajar Rule, 1795-1828* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1992), 84-86.

⁵²¹RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 978, l. 13.

vaguely autonomous Armenia conflicted with the tsarist state's decision to create *Armianskaia oblast*.⁵²² As a result, in 1830 the state effectively exiled Nerses to Kishinev, where he became the first archbishop of the Bessarabian Armenian diocese.⁵²³ The “benign” Efrem, whom Persians had removed from Echmiadzin during the war, returned to lead the Armenian Church.

Despite Nerses's clash with tsarist policy, he enjoyed the support of the most prominent Russian-Armenian family, the Lazarevs. Shortly after Nerses's departure from Tiflis, Khristofor Ekimovich Lazarev, the family's patriarch, corresponded with Count Alexander von Benkendorf, the architect and head of the Third Section of the Imperial Chancellery, the secret police established after the Decembrist revolt.⁵²⁴ A close confidant of the tsar, Alexander Benkendorf was the brother of tsarist general and Lazarev ally Konstantin von Benkendorf.

Lazarev lobbied Benkendorf to have Nerses transferred from Bessarabia to St. Petersburg, insisting that “it is necessary for the benefit of Russia—for the good of the Armenian people.”⁵²⁵ The Armenian magnate argued that “no one else is capable of successfully executing all-beneficial [*obshchepoleznykh*] intentions,” and wished to see Nerses play an active role in molding the state's policy toward the newly annexed regions of the South Caucasus. In extolling Nerses, Lazarev claimed that “his personal influence, his talent, his trust, his knowledge, and

⁵²²Bournoutian, *The Khanate of Erevan*, 89.

⁵²³Paul Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos at Home and Abroad,” in

Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds, ed. Osamu Ieda and Tomohiko Uyama (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2006), 211.

⁵²⁴RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 21, ll. 16-31.

⁵²⁵RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 21, l. 17.

reasoning, dependent upon the cooperation of the local—and well-disposed—civilian leadership, can contribute quite a lot in all-beneficial matters.”⁵²⁶

When the incumbent patriarch, Efrem, died in early 1830, Lazarev lobbied Benkendorf to facilitate Nerses’s ascension to the apex of the Armenian Church, claiming that the selection of Nerses as patriarch represented the “unified, general request of the Armenian people and the entire clergy.”⁵²⁷ The prelate even petitioned the tsar to return to the South Caucasus: “I have served Russia for 30 years,” Nerses insisted, “[I] have demonstrated in many ways and in important matters loyalty to the [Russian] emperors, to the benefit of the government and nation, have entirely justified trust, especially in wartime, [and I am] filled with the direct spirit of devotion to Russia, which is blissfully united with Armenia.”⁵²⁸

Nerses thus signaled his acquiescence to Armenia’s political status and abandonment of his former dreams of autonomy. Yet, despite his appeals and Lazarev’s advocacy, Nerses spent thirteen years in Bessarabia waiting to become patriarch, ascending to the post only in 1843. In his stead, the tsarist state “insisted” on the election in 1831 of a candidate more suitable to its political goals, Hovannes.⁵²⁹ This episode confirmed the tsar’s influence on ecclesiastical developments of the Armenian Church. Even Lazarev’s intervention proved futile, suggesting that Nicholas and his advisors took Nerses’s earlier political aspirations seriously and responded by (temporarily) blocking his career. However, at the same time that it protected its domestic

⁵²⁶RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 21, l. 17.

⁵²⁷RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 21, l. 31.

⁵²⁸RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 21, l. 39.

⁵²⁹Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 209. It appears that both Nerses and Hovannes were tsarist subjects.

interests by intervening in the affairs of the Armenian Church, the tsarist state also deployed Echmiadzin's broad authority to advance its foreign policy.

Russia utilized Echmiadzin to exert influence in the Ottoman empire and beyond. As historian Paul Werth has demonstrated, the autocracy's considerations of the Armenian patriarch's influence abroad necessitated a "policy of indulgence" that privileged Echmiadzin's external prestige over its internal control.⁵³⁰ This policy had to be balanced between, on the one hand, amplifying the patriarch's authority over non-Russian subject Armenians and, on the other hand, enforcing the domestic legal and administrative obligations of that tsarist subject. For much of the nineteenth century, the state chose to augment Echmiadzin's standing abroad in expectation of reaping benefits within the Ottoman empire.

St. Petersburg hastened to reestablish Echmiadzin's influence among diaspora Armenians soon after absorbing the monastery in 1828. To be sure, some distant Armenian communities celebrated the change of Echmiadzin's imperial master. From as far away as Madras, India, local Armenians declared to Khristofor Ekimovich Lazarev their readiness to financially support the church and even to emigrate to *Armianskaia oblast*.⁵³¹ The wars with Persia and Turkey in 1826-29, however, had weakened the links between the Echmiadzin Catholicos and his followers in the neighboring Muslim empires, who were wary of affirming the pro-Russian prelate's authority. Ecclesiastical matters between Russian- and Ottoman-subject Armenians became further strained when Patriarch Hovannes was elected in 1831 without the participation of Ottoman Armenian delegates.⁵³² Moreover, two rival Armenian patriarchs in Turkey, at

⁵³⁰Werth, "Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos," 203-35.

⁵³¹RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 21, ll. 15-15ob.

⁵³²Werth, "Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos," 207.

Constantinople and Sis, sought to assume more prominent roles in Armenian religious life and eclipse Echmiadzin's perennial authority. In Jerusalem, too, an Armenian patriarch awaited an opportunity to outshine his rival in the South Caucasus.

Hovannes supported the integration of the Armenian nation into Russian society. The limited evidence suggests that the Catholicos envisioned the social and political melding of Armenians into Russian everyday life, while maintaining the markers of cultural distinction, such as religious rites, that formed the cornerstones of Armenian national identity. Hovannes viewed Armenians learning Russian and observing Russian laws not as a threat to Armenian ethnocultural identity but as a means toward social, economic, and political prominence within the empire. In backing a proposed seminary at the Lazarev Institute, Hovannes asserted that "the young Armenian clergy, having been educated in the [Armenian] national Lazarev Institute of Moscow, quickly will connect morally with native Russians and consequently will adopt [*srodnitsia*] the customs and laws of their new fatherland."⁵³³ Yet foreign policy matters often overshadowed the domestic dimensions of the Russo-Armenian ecclesiastical encounter.

To boost Echmiadzin's prestige abroad, Baron Rozen, the tsarist commander-in-chief of the Caucasus (1831-37), reported to Tsar Nicholas that Hovannes "deserves particular attention because the spread of Echmiadzin's influence upon Armenians in Turkey is quite beneficial not only for him personally but also for our government politically."⁵³⁴ From his election in 1831, Hovannes and Rozen cooperated to regain the prelate's standing among Ottoman Armenians. To this end, Rozen corresponded with the tsarist foreign, internal, and war ministries to achieve such

⁵³³RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 174, l. 1ob.

⁵³⁴RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 55, l. 1. The date of this report is unknown, but it appears to be in 1837.

goals as the Ottoman acceptance of an Echmiadzin nuncio in Constantinople.⁵³⁵ The Russian government also tasked its ambassador in Constantinople, Apollinariii Butenev, with negotiating with the Armenian patriarchs of Sis and Jerusalem and urging them to endorse Hovannes's spiritual superiority and pronounce his name during liturgy, requests that the rival patriarchs rejected.⁵³⁶ "This is a very important matter," emphasized Rozen to the tsar, because the foreign patriarchs' refusal to recognize Hovannes could precipitate a chain reaction among other, particularly Persian, Armenian communities. Hostile powers could co-opt such ostensibly ecclesiastical schisms for political purposes, Rozen warned.⁵³⁷

To be sure, not just Persia and Turkey, but also Russia's European rivals, cautiously watched the tsar's growing influence over the Armenian Church in the 1830s and 1840s. Robert Curzon, the private secretary to the British ambassador to Turkey, stressed:

[The tsar] will not fail to pull the strings which hang loosely in the hands of the Armenian Patriarch. If he pulls them evenly and well, he will advance his interests far and wide, even in the dominions of other princes, who may hardly be aware of the influence exercised in their states from a source so distant and unobtrusive. The danger in his case is, that he may use too great violence, and break the strings from too severe a tension, raising the storm against himself which he intended to direct against others.⁵³⁸

Curzon echoed the sentiments of many European statesmen when he emphasized the potential political ramifications of Russia's patronage of Echmiadzin: "the power of which he [the tsar] holds the reins is one which may be used for the advancement of the greatest or the most ignoble

⁵³⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 55, ll. 1-1ob.

⁵³⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 55, ll. 1ob-2.

⁵³⁷ RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 55, l. 2.

⁵³⁸Robert Curzon, *Armenia: A Year at Erzeroom, and on the Frontiers of Russia, Turkey, and Persia* (London: John Murray, 1854), 209.

ends.” Given such far-reaching implications, by the mid-1830s the autocracy recognized the need for a clear state policy toward the Armenian Church.

The state answered this need with the *Polozhenie* of 1836. The royal fiat codified Armenians’ freedom of worship, granted their church control over education, and acknowledged the institutional autonomy of the Armenian Church.⁵³⁹ The decree also formalized the church’s existing practice of owning land for income, and freed Armenian clergy from taxes.⁵⁴⁰ The new regulations took into consideration the teachings and traditions of Armenian ecumenical culture, seeking to reconcile them with the demands of the well-ordered *Rechtsstaat*. Indeed, Tsar Nicholas directed his aides to ensure that the law was based on the Armenian Church’s “own ancient ordinances” while also being “brought into conformity with the legal provisions of the Russian empire.”⁵⁴¹ In another sign of the autocracy’s acceptance of the Apostolic confession, in April 1836 Armenian religious doctrine and language courses were introduced for Armenian-heritage students at the elite Cadet Corps in St. Petersburg.⁵⁴²

While the 1836 statute placed restrictions on the Armenian faith, it formalized the ties between St. Petersburg and Echmiadzin, producing little resistance from Armenians. True, Echmiadzin became formally subordinated to the Russian emperor, despite receiving more

⁵³⁹Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 40.

⁵⁴⁰Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 123. And also Suny, “Eastern Armenia under Tsarist Rule,” 115.

⁵⁴¹Quoted in Paul Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62.

⁵⁴²RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 344, l. 89.

autonomy than other national churches, such as the Georgian Orthodox Church.⁵⁴³ Although ostensibly the state dropped its “insistence” on the election of a tsarist-subject patriarch,⁵⁴⁴ the *Polozhenie* required Armenian clergy and laymen from Russia *and abroad* to elect two final candidates, among whom the tsar would choose the patriarch.⁵⁴⁵ Moreover, the curriculum of church schools required the approval of the Holy Synod and the Interior Ministry. Finally, a state representative observed the Echmiadzin Synod to ensure the church’s compliance with these regulations.⁵⁴⁶ Despite such restrictions, most tsarist-subject Armenians reacted positively to the new regulations, and, as Suny has observed, “Rather than creating antagonism between church and state, the *Polozhenie* established a working relationship and cooperation.”⁵⁴⁷

For Armenians the *Polozhenie* surpassed the ad hoc policies of the previous decades, when the autocracy affirmed the importance of Armenians to its political aims by granting economic incentives and transplanting foreign-subject Armenians to Russia. By the mid-1830s, little doubt remained that Armenians held the key to Russia’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Turkey and Persia, and also to its internal tranquility in the Caucasus.⁵⁴⁸ This represented a two-way dynamic. While the tsarist state utilized Echmiadzin to advance its interests abroad, the Armenian Church relied on the imperial government to defend its domestic interests. For

⁵⁴³Suny, “Eastern Armenia under Tsarist Rule,” 115.

⁵⁴⁴Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 209.

⁵⁴⁵Suny, “Eastern Armenia under Tsarist Rule,” 115.

⁵⁴⁶With full Russian support, the Echmiadzin Synod was established in 1837 as part of the contemporaneous church reforms. See National Archive of Armenia (NAA), f. 90, op. 1, d. 353, ll. 1-4.

⁵⁴⁷Suny, “Eastern Armenia under Tsarist Rule,” 115.

⁵⁴⁸As Paul Werth has emphasized, the *Polozhenie* of 1836 was part of the state’s broader effort to codify the rights and obligations of its non-Orthodox confessions in the 1830s. See Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 209.

example, when in 1839 a renegade Orthodox monk, Ioann Malinovskii, published in Moscow a book, *An Addendum to the Proof of the Antiquity of the Tri-finger Service (Dopolnenie k dokazatel'stvu drevnosti trekh-perstnogo sluzheniia)*, Hovannes not only petitioned the tsar directly,⁵⁴⁹ but also convinced Interior Minister Lev Perovskii that the book contained “unfair and offensive expressions against the Armenian-Gregorian confession.”⁵⁵⁰ The patriarch sought the state’s help in preventing the publication of “books or articles related to [the Armenian faith] without first consulting the supreme ecclesiastical leadership of this confession and receiving from it precise information.”⁵⁵¹

The Orthodox Church supported Echmiadzin’s efforts to protect its interests. Reviewing Hovannes’s request, the Holy Synod agreed that Malinovskii’s book contained “unfair information” about the Armenian faith and directed the office of church censorship (*dukhovnaia tsenzura*) to ensure that similar items would not be published, and that reprints of Malinovskii’s book would be censored.⁵⁵² Additionally, in a curious development, the Holy Synod “saw with comfort” that Armenian doctrine aligned with Orthodox teachings in condemning the “heresies” of Aria, Macedonia, Nestorius, Eutyches, Severian, and the Monophysites. As a result, the Holy Synod requested from Echmiadzin a thorough explanation of Armenian dogma, promising to use

⁵⁴⁹RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, ll. 12-18ob.

⁵⁵⁰RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, l. 1. The exact reasons for Hovannes’s displeasure with the book’s content are not clear from the Russian sources.

⁵⁵¹RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, l. 1. In an analogous but more vague example, in 1831 the Armenian Church worked with tsarist officials to curb the activities of the (Swiss) Basel Evangelical Society in the Caucasus. See RGIA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 557, ll. 1-12ob.

⁵⁵²RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, ll. 1-1ob.

it to enforce stricter censorship of religious publications that, like Malinovskii's monograph, misrepresented Armenian canon.⁵⁵³ Tsar Nicholas approved these initiatives.

This episode evinced the state's imperative of supporting the integrity of its foreign faiths.⁵⁵⁴ As Werth maintains, imperial Russia's "multiconfessional establishment" provided "a series of significant collective rights to recognized religious groups and rendered the foreign confessions state religions entitled to certain forms of government patronage and protection."⁵⁵⁵ To be sure, as one official tsarist document summarized, "the dogmas and rites of the Armenian Church must be inviolable in all their fullness and purity—without deviation and without change."⁵⁵⁶ To protect the orthodoxy of the Armenian faith and educate state censors, the Armenian Church and Russian government cooperated to compile a "simple, direct, clear, and convenient" catechism of the Armenian doctrine in Russian.⁵⁵⁷ Even more importantly, this initiative sought to highlight the kinship of the Armenian and Orthodox confessions. The government report optimistically contended that "every well-meaning and enlightened" person, having read the Armenian catechism in Russian, will

understand and be convinced that the goal of Christianity is one and the same in all Christian denominations, . . . that the main tenets of the faith are the same, but the small and even trivial difference is only in a few words, in outward forms and in private ceremonies. [And] that the foundational stone of the Armenian Church agrees with the

⁵⁵³RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, l. 1ob.

⁵⁵⁴Robert Geraci disputes this narrative, using a study of Volga Muslims to argue that the state engaged in the Russification of many heterodox communities. See Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁵⁵⁵Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths*, 4.

⁵⁵⁶RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, l. 6.

⁵⁵⁷The structure and format of the Armenian catechism was modeled on the Russian Orthodox version.

Greco-Russian Church, for the dogmas are based on reason and the power of Holy Scripture.⁵⁵⁸

In a word, in the reign of Nicholas I, the tsarist state and the Armenian Church not only derived mutual political benefit, but also coordinated efforts to emphasize publicly the dogmatic ties between the two national churches.⁵⁵⁹ Although serious discord arose in the next decades, this symbiosis lasted until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Russian government maintained the integrity of Armenian religious culture to derive political advantage. While the *Polozhenie* of 1836 subordinated Echmiadzin to St. Petersburg, it privileged the Armenian Church and, by extension, the Armenian nation, at a time when few other groups in the Caucasus or elsewhere received similar concessions. For example, tsarist officials not only ended the long tradition of Georgian peasants “volunteering” for bondage and prohibited the sale of serfs without land, but in 1836 also required Georgian serf owners to provide documentary evidence of serf ownership, without which the bondsmen could legally seek freedom.⁵⁶⁰ Interpreted by many Georgian elites as a Russian attack on their historical prerogatives, such restrictions pitted aristocratic Georgians against an “alien bureaucracy” and reminded them that they remained “the servant[s] of a new master.”⁵⁶¹ While almost no Armenians owned serfs, as a nation they avoided similar constraints on their everyday life. Although Suny has insisted that the tsarist regime “failed to Russify Georgian society,”⁵⁶² it

⁵⁵⁸RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, ll. 6ob-7.

⁵⁵⁹More, minor evidence of the Russo-Armenian religious symbiosis in this era includes state and local permission for the expansion of Armenian churches in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the Lazarevs’ construction of new Armenian orphanages in Moscow. See RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 179, l. 41.

⁵⁶⁰Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 67.

⁵⁶¹Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 68.

⁵⁶²Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, x.

absorbed the Georgian Orthodox Church into its own Orthodox Church's administration as early as 1811, and hardly anyone could imagine the government bestowing upon Georgians such privileges as it granted to Armenians with the *Polozhenie* of 1836. The political implications of the Armenian diaspora explain this difference.

The tenure of Patriarch Nerses (1843-57), who succeeded Hovannes, represented the complex relationship between the government and the Armenian Church. Upon the death of Hovannes, Perovskii and Neidgardt agreed on the importance of “reinforcing the domination of the Echmiadzin patriarchal throne over the entire Armenian Church and delivering our government the moral influence over all Armenians, [including] those outside the empire.”⁵⁶³ To this end, the autocracy dispatched a “special bureaucrat” to Echmiadzin, tasked with “giving the election such a direction, that the lot falls on a person worthy of Imperial approval, disposed toward Russia, and enjoying equal respect among foreign and Russian Armenians, even if the patriarch elected on these bases is not a Russian subject.”⁵⁶⁴

No sources survive to illustrate the results of this mission, but, with or without tsarist interference, the 1843 election boded well for the autocracy. Unanimously elected by twenty-six tsarist and foreign-subject Armenian delegates in April 1843, Nerses finally received the tsar's approval after thirteen years of exile as the archbishop of the Bessarabian-Nakhichevan diocese.⁵⁶⁵ In a sign of the tsar's efforts to woo the Armenian diaspora, Nicholas sent ornate gifts

⁵⁶³ *AKAK*, IX (1884), 714.

⁵⁶⁴ *AKAK*, IX (1884), 714. Two agents of the Interior Ministry were selected for this mission.

⁵⁶⁵ *AKAK*, IX (1884), 715. It is not clear whether senior representatives of foreign Armenian communities attended the election in Echmiadzin or, as Werth suggests, merely sent written deeds and low-ranking representatives. In either case, it appears that both Ottoman and Persian Armenians participated in the 1843 election and recognized its results. See Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 211.

to the candidates who lost the election, including the archbishop of Jerusalem and some Persian and Ottoman Armenian representatives.⁵⁶⁶ This development reflected the importance assigned by the government to maintaining its position as the patron of foreign-subject Christians, particularly of Armenians in the Ottoman empire. The state sought not only to nurture ties with Echmiadzin, but also to develop rapport with Echmiadzin's rivals abroad. The new Catholicos, meanwhile, both engaged with and resisted the tsarist government.

Nerses accomplished much in meeting Russian expectations. He reestablished the submission of the Constantinople patriarch to Echmiadzin and normalized relations with the Ottoman government in 1844.⁵⁶⁷ Nerses also cooperated with Vorontsov to found a new “commercial school” in the South Caucasus and to send Armenian and other native students to elite institutions in the two capitals, including St. Petersburg University and the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow.⁵⁶⁸ The viceroy supported the patriarch's plans for a new seminary in Echmiadzin, insisting to the tsar that this project would yield advantages “in the political sense, for there is no doubt that Armenians from Constantinople, India, and other parts of the Orient will send their children to Echmiadzin for education.”⁵⁶⁹ Vorontsov extolled Nerses to the tsar in 1846, praising the prelate as “always ready and always able to help in everything useful.”⁵⁷⁰ Before his retirement, too, Vorontsov lionized Nerses as the local administration's “powerful and always prepared weapon,” and assured his replacement at the head of the

⁵⁶⁶ *AKAK*, IX (1884), 715-16. The presents included crosses and rings decorated with precious stones.

⁵⁶⁷ Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 212.

⁵⁶⁸ *AKAK*, X (1885), 842.

⁵⁶⁹ *AKAK*, X (1885), 857.

⁵⁷⁰ *AKAK*, X (1885), 842.

Caucasus, Viceroy Bariatinskii, that “I have always found in him full readiness to assist us in everything that is useful, . . . soon you will fully confirm this.”⁵⁷¹

Yet Nerses also “vigorously resisted the constraints imposed by the [*Polozhenie* of 1836], which he regarded as being inconsistent with the dignity of his position and the prerogatives of his predecessors.”⁵⁷² Specifically, Nerses undermined the authority of the Echmiadzin Synod, seeing it as a threat to his clout, and also delayed the appointment of new bishops to amplify his influence. Such actions aroused the resentment of other senior Armenian clergy, including the archbishop of the Bessarabian-Nakhichevan diocese, who complained to St. Petersburg about Nerses’s excesses. The Interior Ministry, while overall deferential to the prelate, conceded that “the unlimited despotism of Patriarch Nerses is manifest in all of his actions.”⁵⁷³

Despite such impediments, state-church relations within the Russo-Armenian encounter developed amicably at mid-century. Indeed, at times the autocracy made legal exceptions for the Armenian Church. For example, in 1851 Nerses complained to Vorontsov that Catholic proselytizers in the South Caucasus were converting individual Apostolic Armenians into the Catholic faith.⁵⁷⁴ Nerses accused Catholic missionaries of targeting young and uneducated Armenians.⁵⁷⁵ Although these efforts bore limited fruit, they compelled Echmiadzin to seek the state’s assistance.⁵⁷⁶ Vorontsov conveyed to Interior Minister Perovskii the Armenian patriarch’s

⁵⁷¹AKAK, X (1885), 96.

⁵⁷²Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 212.

⁵⁷³Quoted in Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos,” 212.

⁵⁷⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, ll. 5-7ob. Also: RGIA, f. 1268, op. 6, d. 44, ll. 1-1ob.

⁵⁷⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, l. 6.

⁵⁷⁶As Werth has pointed out, “Still, data (presumably provided by the patriarch) indicating that the persistent efforts of Catholic clergy over more than a half-century (1787-1846) had resulted in the

request “that the Armenian-Gregorian clergy have complete freedom in returning its progeny to the core of their church.”⁵⁷⁷ Nerses not only asked for the authority to take these actions without the preliminary approval of tsarist officials, but also urged the government to expel Catholic Armenian priests from the Caucasus to Poland. Apparently in a concession, he allowed for the possibility of transferring Catholic Polish clergy to Russia proper and the Caucasus, including regions populated by Armenians.⁵⁷⁸ Nerses likely believed that Armenians would be less inclined to accept Catholicism from ethnic Polish, rather than Armenian, priests. In effect, this demonstrated Echmiadzin’s implicit assumption of the interplay between ethnic and religious identities among tsarist-subject Armenians. While Nerses probably realized that the sudden influx of Catholic Armenian clergy in Poland would cause myriad logistical problems, he acquiesced to accepting Catholic Polish priests among Armenian communities, evidently confident that Polish proselytizers would prove unsuccessful among his compatriots.

Tsarist officials endorsed Echmiadzin’s efforts to “shield Gregorian Armenians from Catholicism.”⁵⁷⁹ Vorontsov lobbied Perovskii to make a legal exception in this case, allowing the Armenian Church to convert Catholic Armenians to the Apostolic confession without the onerous participation of imperial ministers. Although state law⁵⁸⁰ required the bureaucratic approval of all conversions between non-Orthodox Christians, Vorontsov sided with Nerses in

‘enticement’ of just 26 men and 21 women scarcely suggests a crisis.” See Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths*, 88 (footnote 66).

⁵⁷⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, l. 2.

⁵⁷⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, l. 2ob.

⁵⁷⁹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, l. 2ob.

⁵⁸⁰[ст. 111, п. 4 XIV т. св. Гражд. зак. изд. 1842 года]

arguing that the Armenians presented a unique case. The interior minister concurred with the viceroy and the patriarch, concluding that “with respect to the Armenian Gregorian church, Armenian Catholics occupy an exceptional position, because they are merely the lost progeny of that ancient church.”⁵⁸¹ The emperor approved these measures.⁵⁸²

While the autocracy supported Echmiadzin’s reconversion of wayward Catholic Armenians, it maintained a tight grip on the Armenian Church’s missionary activity. In 1853, Patriarch Nerses petitioned for allowing local tsarist officials in the Caucasus, rather than the tsar and his ministers in St. Petersburg, to permit voluntary Muslim baptism in the Armenian rite.⁵⁸³ The autocracy rejected this request, pointing out that between 1843 and 1852 just 109 Caucasian Muslims converted to the Armenian creed.⁵⁸⁴

Likewise, the state had no tolerance for Orthodox apostasy. When in 1854 news reached St. Petersburg that “several” residents of *Shemakhinskaia guberniia* (in modern Azerbaijan) had converted from “Greco-Georgian” and, reports implied, Russian, Orthodoxy to the Apostolic Armenian confession, Tsar Nicholas took up the case.⁵⁸⁵ Although zealous local authorities had convicted the defectors of apostasy, the tsar and the Interior Ministry relented, instructing regional officials in the Caucasus to continue their attempts to return the individuals to Orthodoxy but avoid “constraining their personality” (*ne stesniaia ikh lichnosti*).⁵⁸⁶ This episode

⁵⁸¹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, ll. 16-16ob.

⁵⁸²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 7, ll. 17-18ob.

⁵⁸³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 7, d. 364a, ll. 1-2. Nerses justified this request by arguing that the long delay in receiving permission from the capital discouraged Muslims from converting to the Armenian faith.

⁵⁸⁴RGIA, f. 1268, op. 7, d. 364a, l. 6.

⁵⁸⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 11, ll. 1-4ob.

⁵⁸⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 11, l. 7.

confirmed that the tsarist government protected the integrity of its predominant Orthodox confession against the encroachment of otherwise favored foreign faiths.

To be sure, the state and the Orthodox Church did not always cooperate with the Armenian Church. In 1857, the Orthodox leadership foiled Echmiadzin's attempts to expand its foothold in Moscow.⁵⁸⁷ The dispute traced to the fundraising of the city's Armenian community, which collected money for the construction of a monastery on the grounds belonging to an Armenian cemetery. The Armenians of Moscow enlisted the support of Patriarch Nerses, who corresponded with state officials to secure the necessary approval for the new monastery. But Moscow Metropolitan Filaret opposed this initiative, alerting the Holy Synod to the Armenian plans and vociferously objecting to the perceived encroachment on his jurisdiction. He argued that the city's Armenian population was too small to justify a new monastery, and maintained that the approval of the project would "make an unfavorable impression upon the Orthodox people of Moscow," who "from ancient times have been especially strongly marked by the character of the dominant confession in Russia, and in the interests of general wellbeing [the Orthodox community of Moscow] demands the protection of its character now and in the future."⁵⁸⁸ Even more worrisome to Filaret was the likelihood that the Roman Catholic Church, emboldened by the Armenian example, would establish monasteries in Moscow and thus threaten not only the Orthodox hold on Moscow but also entire Orthodox Russia.

Thus the Armenian Church in the second quarter of the nineteenth century operated within a conditional framework. On the one hand, it enjoyed the exclusive right to convert non-Orthodox Christians into the Armenian faith and benefitted from the government's distrust of

⁵⁸⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 39, ll. 1-5.

⁵⁸⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 39, l. 4.

Catholic and Protestant proselytizing. On the other hand, the church had to observe its Orthodox counterpart's prerogatives, maintaining a delicate balance between promoting its interests and avoiding antagonizing the venerable Russian institution.

The complexity of the relationship between the Armenian Church and the tsarist state lay in the fact that not just domestic interests were at stake. Unique in that it exercised real influence over coreligionist communities in Persia, Turkey, Europe, India, and beyond, the Armenian Church at Echmiadzin brought the government of Nicholas I diverse geopolitical advantages. At the same time that officials in St. Petersburg relied on the Echmiadzin Catholicos to reestablish diplomatic ties with Constantinople, tsarist diplomats worked to secure foreign Armenian prelates' submission to Echmiadzin. That is why the state kept no more than a loose hold on the Armenian clergy and laity. Yet this policy clashed with inherent Russian interests whenever the advances of the Armenian confession posed real or imagined threats to the Orthodox faith.

Overall, any leeway the autocracy granted to its non-Orthodox subjects in hopes of structuring and regulating their existence, the state also extended to Armenian external activities. As Robert Crews has argued, "Confessional communities that subjected the followers to divine as well as monarchical judgment provided useful forms of social discipline to complement the will of the sovereign."⁵⁸⁹ Elsewhere, Crews has shown that the empire coopted Muslim community leaders into its bureaucratic and cultural fabric in an effort to attain stability on its imperial periphery.⁵⁹⁰ If, however, the government employed religious toleration as a system of control over non-Russians, in the Armenian case the state sought more than docile subjects. The

⁵⁸⁹Robert Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia," in *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 1 (February 2003): 59.

⁵⁹⁰Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

opportunity to project diplomatic influence into the capitals of Eastern empires through Armenian clerics outweighed the dangers of Armenian proselytizing or encroachment upon traditional Orthodox spheres of influence. Thus the encounter between the tsarist state and the Armenian Church in the second quarter of the nineteenth century represented a careful calculation on each side. The codification of Armenian rights and obligations with the *Polozhenie* of 1836 evinced Ann Stoler's "active realignment and reformation" that was driven by geopolitical realities beyond tsarist frontiers.

For the Armenian ecclesiastical leadership, especially Catholicos Nerses, the vision of an independent Armenia—articulated more clearly in the second half of the nineteenth century—quickly yielded to a desire to secure the submission of the diaspora to Echmiadzin. Consequently, Nerses styled himself pope, not president. Unlike some of his quixotic lay compatriots, Nerses understood after his exile to Kishinev that the Russian government would tolerate no irredentist claims. Thus an aim of theological and, by extension, cultural and economic authority over distant Armenian communities drove the policies of the Catholicos, for which even his tsarist overlords faulted him. The ecumenical factor is imperative to understanding the evolution of Russo-Armenian ties under Nicholas I, but the economic dimension of that imperial encounter played an equally potent role.

Economic Encounters

Armenians' economic roles defined their rights and obligations within Russian society no less than ecumenical considerations. To examine Armenians' economic and social position in Russia, I turn to the state's taxation and other fiscal policies toward large Armenian communities in the Caucasus, in Crimea, and in Astrakhan province. The three distinct examples yield a more comprehensive understanding of the Russo-Armenian economic relationship under Tsar Nicholas I. The autocracy struggled to integrate Armenians economically into the country,

issuing contradictory statutes and demonstrating uncertainty about the social role of various Armenian communities. Indeed, no other Armenian-related matter elicited as much policy dissent among senior tsarist statesmen during Nicholas's reign. Disagreements flared between both senior and provincial tsarist officials over the socioeconomic role, and its political implications, of Russia's Armenian population.

The disputes among government officials regarding economic policy toward the Caucasus reflected the state's unease about the integration of that region into the Russian empire. As historian Ekaterina Pravilova tells us, St. Petersburg sought, but eventually failed, to fuse its imperial territories into a cohesive budgetary framework.⁵⁹¹ Despite the vast cultural, political, and financial disparities between the various peripheries, including the Caucasus, Turkestan, Poland, and Finland, the government pursued a unifying economic strategy for much of the nineteenth century. Yet the tenure of Finance Minister Egor Kankrin (1823-44) represented an important deviation from this policy.

In 1827 Kankrin became the first senior Russian official to articulate an economic policy of "colonialism" toward the South Caucasus.⁵⁹² He insisted that "the government should not think about uniting [the South Caucasus] with the general state structure and should not hope to make it a part of Russia or of the Russian people [*Rossiiskii narod*] in the moral sense."⁵⁹³

Nudged by the influential finance minister, St. Petersburg began to view the region as a market

⁵⁹¹Ekaterina Pravilova, *Finansy imperii: Den'gi i vlast' v politike Rossii na natsional'nykh okrainakh, 1801-1917* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel'stvo, 2006), 13.

⁵⁹²Pravilova, *Finansy imperii*, 107.

⁵⁹³Quoted in Robert Geraci, "Capitalist Stereotypes and the Economic Organization of the Russian Empire: The Case of the Tiflis Armenians," in Michael Branch, ed., *Defining Self: Essays on Emergent Identities in Russia, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2009), 368.

for Russian products and a source of revenue, discouraging the development of local manufacturing. Kankrin decried efforts to integrate the South Caucasus into the broader Russian economic system, promoting it instead as an “Asiatic province” that could be exploited for Russia’s economic benefit. By the early 1830s, Kankrin and Rozen openly argued about the financial independence of the South Caucasus. In 1832, under Kankrin’s pressure and responding to reports of local corruption and mismanagement, the Council of Ministers ordered that the Finance Ministry assume tighter control over the economy of the South Caucasus. Although Rozen succeeded in delaying the implementation of the new regulations by two years, soon the region was required to send all of its revenue to St. Petersburg, which would then distribute it back to the administration in Tiflis.⁵⁹⁴ Additional reforms in 1840 brought the territory under the Finance Ministry’s total control. Even after the establishment of the Caucasus viceroyalty in 1845 and Vorontsov’s receipt of *carte blanche* powers, the economy and revenues of the South Caucasus remained in the hands of the Finance Ministry in St. Petersburg.⁵⁹⁵

The Armenian community of Astrakhan offers a valuable example of the evolution of Russian economic policies toward Armenians. Astrakhan represented a strategically important and relatively large commercial center in southern Russia, and its Armenians, mostly immigrants from Persia, settled there well before the empire’s annexation of the Caucasus. The community

⁵⁹⁴Pravilova, *Finansy imperii*, 108-09.

⁵⁹⁵Pravilova, *Finansy imperii*, 111. The Caucasus administration regained control over the local economy only in 1858.

thrived, establishing its own academy in 1810 and newspaper in 1815.⁵⁹⁶ By the 1880s, more than 6,000 Armenians lived among the city's 73,000 residents.

The experience of Astrakhan Armenians in the mid-1830s demonstrates that as late as that decade the autocracy had reason to maintain the exclusive economic privileges of long-settled Armenian subjects.⁵⁹⁷ In October 1833, the State Council ruled that all Armenian merchants in southern Russian provinces must abide by the general tax regulations governing the activities of all tsarist-subject traders.⁵⁹⁸ Finance Minister Egor Kankrin, long opposed to the state's privileged treatment of Armenians, informed provincial governors that local Armenian businessmen were henceforth required to enlist in merchant guilds and pay corresponding taxes, for Tsar Nicholas had concurred with the State Council's proclamation that it was "inappropriate to provide advantages to Armenians over Russians."⁵⁹⁹

This resolution proved as temporary as incomplete. In early 1835, some Armenian merchants from Astrakhan complained to the provincial governor that, in violation of the prerogatives they had enjoyed since 1799, the Astrakhan city authorities charged them new "city and local taxes" (*gorodskie i zemskie povinnosti*) of 40 rubles per person.⁶⁰⁰ This substantial amount was levied in addition to the standard urban tax of 2.76 rubles per person that all of the

⁵⁹⁶"400 let armianskoi diaspore v Astrakhani," in *Volga: Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia gazeta Astrakhanskoi oblasti*. Accessed November 10, 2015. <http://www.volgaru.ru/index.php?retro&article=1317>

⁵⁹⁷For imperial tax policies for Astrakhan Armenians in the early 1830s, see RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 786, ll. 1-49. For detailed overviews of the policies in the mid-1830s, see RGIA, f. 1341, op. 37, d. 2619, ll. 1-6ob and also RGIA, f. 1341, op. 37, d. 1422, ll. 1-6.

⁵⁹⁸RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, ll. 198-99.

⁵⁹⁹RGIA, f. 571, op. 5, d. 740, l. 198ob.

⁶⁰⁰RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 42, ll. 2-8ob. The reasons for this tax's introduction are unclear.

city's Armenian residents paid, irrespective of their vocation.⁶⁰¹ Moreover, local Armenian merchants continued to pay between 25 and 100 rubles for each trade license. Consequently, in the first half of the 1830s, some Astrakhan Armenian businessmen paid as much as 142.76 rubles per year to the city government.

The provincial administration, *Astrakhanskoe gubernskoe pravlenie*, sided with the city's Armenian merchants.⁶⁰² It agreed that according to the relevant royal fiats of 1799 and 1825, Astrakhan Armenians were liable only for urban and merchant taxes, which they had been paying dutifully. The additional urban tax of 40 rubles was deemed unjustified because "it would not only involve the violations of the rights granted to them by the government, but also heavy burdens for them."⁶⁰³ The provincial administration thus prohibited city officials from collecting the new *gorodskie i zemskie povinnosti* of 40 rubles. The fact that these taxes benefited only the city government and not the provincial administration cannot be overlooked.

When city authorities in Astrakhan appealed the decision of the provincial administration to the imperial capital, the Finance Ministry, the Interior Ministry, and the Senate examined the matter.⁶⁰⁴ The review determined that, when emperors Catherine and Paul settled Armenians in Astrakhan in the eighteenth century, they had received temporary, not hereditary, economic privileges. In 1824 and 1825, the city's untaxed Armenian traders were assessed new dues, but these taxes remained below standard rates. In early 1836, imperial authorities ruled that the

⁶⁰¹It appears that even this tax of 2.76 that all Astrakhan Armenians paid was three times as much as their non-Armenian neighbors paid.

⁶⁰²RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 42, ll. 2ob-3.

⁶⁰³RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 42, l. 3ob.

⁶⁰⁴RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 42, ll. 4-9.

Astrakhan city government had the right to charge one-quarter percent from the city's Armenian and non-Armenian merchants, in addition to the regular urban taxes paid by all residents, but it could not assess any additional taxes from local Armenian businessmen.⁶⁰⁵ Essentially, this episode demonstrated the complex economic considerations informing the Russian bureaucracy's encounter with Armenians. By the mid-1830s, in Astrakhan and elsewhere, there arose a dissonance of policies between the local authorities and their provincial and imperial superiors. While local agents often opposed the economic advantages enjoyed by Armenians, the imperial government maintained their privileged economic conditions.

Perhaps spurred by this debate, in May 1836 Tsar Nicholas I issued a decree that sought the "equalization of dues" (*uravnenie podatei*) paid by Armenians and non-Armenians in southern Russia.⁶⁰⁶ The fiat affected tsarist-subject Armenians not only in Astrakhan, but also the large Armenian communities of Crimea, including the Khersonskaia, Tavricheskaia, and Ekaterinoslavskaia *gubernii*.⁶⁰⁷ The new regulations required the "end of all hitherto collected from Armenians diverse individual, household [*s dvorov*], and land taxes," replacing them with standardized rates applicable to all tsarist subjects.⁶⁰⁸ New, transitional tax rates applied to previously exempt communities: "Armenian burghers [*Arman-meshchan*], regardless of their [current] obligations for city and local taxes, are to be assessed a special collection for the

⁶⁰⁵RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 42, l. 9.

⁶⁰⁶RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 76, l. 7.

⁶⁰⁷In 1802, the massive *Novorossiiskaia guberniia* of modern Ukraine and Crimea was divided into these three smaller *gubernii*.

⁶⁰⁸GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 15.

treasury.”⁶⁰⁹ Within ten years, though, these “special” rates would be phased out to match the dues of their Russian and other non-Armenian neighbors. The regulations also affected “Armenian settlers,” although it is unclear whether this applied to recent or long-established immigrants. While there were some important rate adjustments, the key change consisted in that poll taxes (*s dush*) were introduced, abandoning those assessed from households (*s dvorov*).⁶¹⁰

Some provincial authorities misapplied the 1836 regulations to the Armenians in their jurisdiction. The officials in Ekaterinoslavskaiia *guberniia*, for example, assessed Armenian merchants and “settlers” taxes in excess of the prescribed rates.⁶¹¹ No sources survive to clarify the motivation of such local bureaucrats, but despite local Armenians’ complaints to the Finance Ministry, St. Petersburg took no action to rectify the situation. Yet the central government not always ignored the concerns of local Armenian communities, paying more attention to complaints originating in strategically or economically important regions. For instance, two Armenian communities in Crimea objected to the 1836 regulations, arguing that emperors Catherine and Paul had bestowed on them “eternal” exemptions.⁶¹² Mikhail Vorontsov, the governor of Novorossiia and Bessarabia (soon to become Caucasus viceroy), agreed with the Armenians in his province. With them also sided Interior Minister Dmitrii Bludov, but they faced the opposition of Finance Minister Kankrin.⁶¹³ The State Council ruled that “no privileges can be

⁶⁰⁹RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 76, ll. 9-9ob.

⁶¹⁰For a concise overview of these changes, see RGIA, f. 1152, op. 2, d. 76, ll. 9-9ob. For a more thorough discussion, see GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, ll. 15-34.

⁶¹¹GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 26.

⁶¹²GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 21. The communities in question were the Catholic Armenians of Karasubazar and the Apostolic Armenians of Staryi Krym, both on the Crimean peninsula.

⁶¹³GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 21.

eternal,” and, apparently unaware of the discrepancies in Ekaterinoslavskaiia *guberniia* and elsewhere, cited the edict of May 1836 in concluding that “the government’s intention to bring all Armenians under the same regulation is obvious.”⁶¹⁴

Part of the explanation for the dissonance among state and provincial officials about the Armenians’ tax obligations lay in the fact that Nicholas’s decrees were aimed at groups “excluded from the privileges of 1799.” Despite the State Council’s repeated declarations that “no privileges can be eternal,” Tsar Nicholas I implicitly reaffirmed his predecessors’ edicts from the late eighteenth century by ordering his bureaucracy to “levy taxes not on all Armenians living in Russia, but those who are excluded from the privileges of 1799.”⁶¹⁵ This stipulation resulted in Russian and Armenian disagreements about which communities were and were not affected by the new laws. In a word, the tax reforms of the 1830s sought *de jure* fiscal standardization but yielded *de facto* irregularities. To be sure, under Nicholas, Armenian tax rates varied from Crimea to Astrakhan to the Caucasus.

Aggrieved Armenians alerted the autocrat to this fact during his 1837 tour of the Caucasus. Representatives of the Nakhichevan Armenian community petitioned the tsar to remain under the prerogatives issued in 1779.⁶¹⁶ While evidence suggests that Rozen, Vorontsov, and even Police Chief Benkendorf were sympathetic to the Armenian requests, again the most acute resistance came from Finance Minister Kankrin. He found the matter “entirely disrespectful and even inappropriate,” pointing out that Nakhichevan Armenians desired

⁶¹⁴GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, ll. 22-22ob.

⁶¹⁵GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 26.

⁶¹⁶GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 27.

exemptions “while native Russian subjects pay substantially higher tax quantities.”⁶¹⁷ For much of the Nicholaevan era, Vorontsov and Kankrin voiced directly opposing views regarding the economic responsibilities and rights of tsarist-subject Armenians.⁶¹⁸

At the heart of the debate were conflicting notions of imperial goals and ethnonational integration. While Kankrin sought to enrich St. Petersburg’s coffers through “colonial” economic policies in the South Caucasus and held pejorative views of that region’s natives, Vorontsov resisted such methods and worked to promote Armenian and Georgian social mobility within Russian society. The finance minister needed Armenians to produce raw materials and wealth that would flow into central Russia, rebuking their supporters for seeking the “merger,” “integration,” and “cooperation” between those *Aziatsy* and ethnic Russians. In the Caucasus Kankrin pursued glory for the metropolis, not the growth of local culture and social integration. In contrast, as Robert Geraci has stressed, Vorontsov viewed Armenians as “necessary and desirable partners who could help the region flourish.”⁶¹⁹ Yet despite these divergent tactics, both men sought to capitalize upon the empire’s non-Russian diversity. Vorontsov envisioned non-Russians contributing to the growth and vitality of Russia not through taxation and curtailed economic activity within a marginalized Caucasus, as did Kankrin, but rather by integrating into Russian social, cultural, and political life, which is why he dispatched Caucasian youths to universities in the two capitals and brought Russian cultural symbols to Tiflis.

⁶¹⁷GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 27.

⁶¹⁸GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302 contains many examples of this, some of which I have cited throughout this section. For more instances, see l. 27 and 29 of that file.

⁶¹⁹Geraci, “Capitalist Stereotypes and the Economic Organization of the Russian Empire,” 368.

When the debate over Armenian tax obligations reached the Senate in the spring of 1839, it sided with the Armenians and their tsarist allies, mainly Vorontsov and former Interior Minister Bludov, but it focused upon only some of the empire's Armenian communities. The Senate recommended that the Armenians of Karasubazar and Saryi Krym, both in Crimea, as well as Grigoriopol in modern Moldova and Nakhichevan-on-Don, remain under their former privileges and be excused from the tsar's 1836 regulations.⁶²⁰ In particular, these communities were to continue paying household, not individual, taxes. Kankrin refused to sign the proposal, insisting that the Senate's decision countermanded the State Council's emphasis on the impossibility of "eternal" economic prerogatives. Instead, the finance minister proposed leaving under privileges only those Armenians who had resided in the aforementioned cities at the time of the issuance of the original decrees, without extending those economic advantages to their descendants.⁶²¹ The senators remained unconvinced by Kankrin's counter-proposal.⁶²²

The opposing camps soon compromised. In 1840, the autocracy granted a ten-year exemption from the 1836 law to the Armenians of Karasubazar, Saryi Krym, Grigoriopol, and Nakhichevan-on-Don.⁶²³ However, in a puzzling decision, the State Council ruled that the regime "should not mix [*smeshivat*] Armenians in those regions that Russia conquered by force with those who came to us in response to the invitation of the government."⁶²⁴ Evidently, the

⁶²⁰GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 30.

⁶²¹Likely Armenian resistance and incomplete population data in the provinces made this an almost impossible proposal, a fact that must have been clear to Kankrin.

⁶²²GARF, f. 672, op. 1, d. 302, l. 31 and 34.

⁶²³RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 129, l. 36-37.

⁶²⁴RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, l. 6ob.

Armenian community of Astrakhan fell into the former category, leaving them under the effects of the 1836 reforms and, effectively, creating yet another legal exception.

Astrakhan Armenians protested, entreating the government to extend the same fiscal laws to them as to the Armenians of Crimea.⁶²⁵ In particular, Astrakhan Armenians argued that they too had voluntarily answered the state's call for foreign settlers in the eighteenth century, colonizing Astrakhan and the northern coast of the Caspian Sea at the behest of the Russian empire. Notably, this Armenian community sought "eternal" tax prerogatives, rather than the ten-year exemptions granted to the Armenians in Crimea, Grigoriopol, and Nakhichevan-on-Don. It also wished to continue paying taxes assessed on households rather than on individuals. The community cited its contributions to the regional economic development, mainly commercial agriculture and trade, to support its argument. The military governor of Astrakhan province agreed that the Armenians in his jurisdiction "are in the same circumstances and have the same rights" as their compatriots in other Russian provinces.⁶²⁶ The finance and interior ministries, however, rejected Astrakhan Armenians' petition, finding that just 390 individuals, among that city's nearly 2,600 Armenians, were eligible for the 1799 exemptions, and stressing that the extended privileges of non-Astrakhan Armenians were scheduled to expire by 1847.⁶²⁷

Upon review, the Senate partially sided with Astrakhan Armenians. It concluded that they were correct in arguing that they had settled in that city voluntarily in the eighteenth century, at which point the government had promised them taxation based on households rather than

⁶²⁵RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, ll. 7ob-9.

⁶²⁶RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, l. 9.

⁶²⁷RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, l. 9ob. Although the 10-year extension was granted in 1840, it was applied retroactively from 1836, setting its expiration in January 1847.

individuals.⁶²⁸ Consequently, the Senate affirmed the State Council's recommendation to charge nineteenth-century Armenian immigrants in Astrakhan just two rubles per household, and those who had arrived in the eighteenth century were to be assessed even lesser rates. The Interior Ministry endorsed this decision, but Kankrin's Finance Ministry refused to follow suit, arguing that insufficient evidence proved that Astrakhan Armenians had voluntarily arrived in the region at the invitation of the tsarist state.⁶²⁹

Justice Minister Count Viktor Panin (1841-62), a longstanding member of Nicholas's inner circle,⁶³⁰ reexamined the issue in the spring of 1848, concluding that "the difference between the decrees granted to the Armenians of Astrakhan and the other four cities further affirms the fairness of extending to the former the power of the royally approved State Council's decision of 25 November 1840."⁶³¹ The justice minister insisted that "in all fairness, this right must now be accorded to the descendants of Astrakhan Armenians, [who were] awarded by a decree the complete freedom from taxes and who did not [benefit] from the 1840 [extension] only because they had not applied for it."⁶³² In a word, Panin backed Astrakhan Armenians and joined Vorontsov, Bludov, and the governor of Astrakhan against Kankrin. Among influential state institutions and actors, only the Department of the State Economy supported the finance

⁶²⁸RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, l. 11.

⁶²⁹RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, l. 13.

⁶³⁰For Panin's political biography, see Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 167-92.

⁶³¹RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, ll. 41-41ob.

⁶³²RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, ll. 42ob-43.

minister's views, concluding that it was "convinced neither of the basis nor the desirability of extending to Astrakhan Armenians the 1840 decision of the State Council."⁶³³

The Senate resolved the matter soon after Panin's input. Astrakhan Armenians who had settled in the city before 1799, and their direct descendants, were "not brought into the general taxation system," and assessed instead a flat household tax of two silver rubles per year, in addition to the standard city and local taxes paid by all locals.⁶³⁴ It appears that this regulation affected no more than 400 individuals. The city's other Armenians, who had arrived after 1799, were to be charged the same tax rates as all other local residents, depending on their respective estates and guilds. The tsar soon approved this decision, bringing to an end one of the more divisive issues to affect the Russian political elite in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This episode tells us much about contemporaneous nationalities policy and the role of Armenians in it. First, the state sought but failed to achieve a uniform economic approach toward the Armenian communities under its dominion, reluctantly recognizing the need for distinct policies that were dictated by historical precedents as much as regional realities. Second, senior tsarist statesmen conceived of Armenian rights and responsibilities in starkly different ways, undercutting the notion of political solidarity within Nicholas's ruling circle. Third, this case demonstrates the empire's difficult navigation of the process of ethnonational absorption. While some officials insisted that Armenians had received sufficient privileges to become rooted in their new homeland, other statesmen argued that continued prerogatives benefited the Russian state and their continuation yielded "justice" and "fairness."

⁶³³RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, ll. 47ob-48.

⁶³⁴RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, l. 67ob.

Overall, this protracted episode helped the autocracy to settle on a new understanding, if not an imperial strategy, of nationalities policy. As the State Council stressed in its ruling of 1848, “privileges, at times given to foreigners settling in Russia, are necessarily reasoned with the needs and circumstances of the localities where they settle, which is why such benefits cannot and must not be the same for everyone.”⁶³⁵ Despite the government’s efforts to standardize the collection of taxes in accord with its pursuit of an efficiently managed empire, the state’s economic encounter with such non-Russian subjects as Armenians showed that no blanket policies proved practical or feasible. The final resolution of this episode, when the state reluctantly granted permanent exemptions to some but not all Armenian communities, clearly affirmed this reality. This circumstance echoes Pravilova’s argument that individual region’s political circumstances, rather than a pan-imperial economic program, drove the implementation of fiscal and financial policies on the empire’s peripheries.⁶³⁶

This climate facilitated the seemingly contradictory status of Armenians in the Caucasus, where the tsarist state at once celebrated and obstructed their socioeconomic advancement. The reports of generals Rozen and Neidgardt, two of Nicholas’s commanders in the Caucasus, evince this Russian paradox. On the one hand, in 1834, Rozen resisted the attempts of three Armenian villages in the Caucasus to reclassify their estate categorization for economic purposes, arguing that the communities’ financial circumstances did not justify tax breaks.⁶³⁷ On the other hand, in 1836, Rozen opposed the state’s plans to introduce new tariffs and other trade restrictions in the

⁶³⁵RGIA, f. 1152, op. 3, d. 31, ll. 50ob-51.

⁶³⁶Pravilova, *Finansy imperii*, 369.

⁶³⁷RGIA, f. 1150, op. 2, d. 4, ll. 5-8.

region, arguing that such constraints harmed the “welfare of the Transcaucasus.”⁶³⁸ Fearing that new economic restrictions would drive local Armenians to seek their profits abroad, Rozen maintained that Armenians “live by the trade industry, and their very loyalty to Russia is based upon it. What can be expected if, because of the limitation of their trade deals, . . . they turn to resettlement in Turkey?”⁶³⁹ The consequences of such a scenario, warned Rozen, would transcend the regional interests of the Caucasus economy and affect the empire’s foreign affairs: “In that case, not only will the region become impoverished, [but] one cannot fail to foresee the harmful consequences in the political sense, and we will certainly lose the influence we have acquired over Armenians in Persia and Turkey, which is always needed and beneficial for us, especially in times of war with those powers.”⁶⁴⁰

Several years later, Neidgardt both lauded and cautioned against the social and economic progress made by the Armenians of the South Caucasus.⁶⁴¹ In a report to the tsar in July 1843, Neidgardt praised local Armenians for setting a “good example” for their Georgian neighbors, whom he accused of lethargy.⁶⁴² The general emphasized that “the nature of the Armenian upper and middle classes has nothing in common with the nature of the Georgian nobility and merchantry.” But his praise also contained a warning: “They [Armenians] are more educated, care for the education of children, even making donations, *but all of their intellectual abilities,*

⁶³⁸ AKAK VIII (1881), 165-67.

⁶³⁹ AKAK VIII (1881), 166.

⁶⁴⁰ AKAK VIII (1881), 166.

⁶⁴¹ RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, ll. 11-13ob.

⁶⁴² RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, l. 11.

all their activity, is directed at [financial] acquisition.”⁶⁴³ Because, according to Neidgardt, Armenians “hold the trade in their hands,” they had marginalized Georgians and other natives in the region’s commerce. Among the prominent businessmen of Tiflis, “just one . . . notable Georgian trader” could be found.⁶⁴⁴ The city’s Armenian merchants “little by little ousted from trade all other nationalities and to eliminate all competition they support each other through guarantees and money.”⁶⁴⁵ To rectify this situation, which produced “disadvantages for the region as well as for the government,” Neidgardt proposed recruiting “merchants and capital from Russia” to Tiflis.⁶⁴⁶ He was confident that “Russian capital would enter into . . . competition with Armenians that is beneficial to the government, and would reduce the presently very strong importance of Armenians in all affairs and enterprises.”⁶⁴⁷ Neidgardt’s proposal echoed the argument made a decade earlier by Russian economist P. Vysheslavtsov, who insisted in 1834 that “Asiatic” enterprise had left the South Caucasus’s economy in a primitive state and urged Russian merchants to replace their Armenian counterparts.⁶⁴⁸ Although Neidgardt’s leadership of the Caucasus administration did not last long enough to enact these plans, his views showed the tsarist government’s simultaneous appreciation and apprehension about the economic, social, and political implications of ostensibly exclusive Armenian advancement in Tiflis and beyond.

⁶⁴³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, l. 13ob. Emphasis mine. Neidgardt also supported the founding of private Armenian schools in the Caucasus. See RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 623, ll. 1-8ob.

⁶⁴⁴RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, l. 13ob.

⁶⁴⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, ll. 13ob-14.

⁶⁴⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, l. 14.

⁶⁴⁷RGIA, f. 1268, op. 1, d. 509, l. 14.

⁶⁴⁸P. Vysheslavtsov, “Vzgliad na Zakavkaz’e v khoziaistvennom i torgovom otnoshenii ego k Rossii,” in *Syn otechestva* 66 (1834): 39.

Despite such concerns, at mid-century the Russian political establishment conceived of middle-class urban Armenians, in the Caucasus and Russia proper, in laudatory terms. While Kankrin's orientalist wariness about Armenian entrepreneurship never faded from the Russian political imagination,⁶⁴⁹ within two decades of the empire's annexation of the South Caucasus tsarist officialdom recognized the broadly beneficial effects of local Armenian commerce. In 1846, the inaugural volume of the annual *Caucasus Calendar*, published by the viceroy's administration under the auspices of the imperial military establishment, emphasized the distinct socioeconomic role of local Armenians.⁶⁵⁰ The publication contrasted them against their main Christian neighbors in the Caucasus, Georgians, who "are generally carefree [and] fun but no strangers to hard work," although "their only occupation is agriculture."⁶⁵¹

In contrast to Georgians, "Armenians undeniably occupy a very important place among the residents of the Transcaucasus, according to their abilities, enterprise, and pursuit of education. They have always been considered the most active toilers of the Orient [*vseгда shchitalis' deiatel'neishimi truzhenikami vostoka*]."⁶⁵² While Armenian peasants in the rural Caucasus hardly distinguished themselves from their non-Armenian neighbors, urban Armenians attained a standing where "there is no craft, no trade, in which they do not engage." The *Caucasus Calendar* insisted that, thanks in part to Russia's rescue of Armenians from their

⁶⁴⁹ As late as 1913, Caucasus viceroy I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov saw the need to dispel popular fears of Armenian commercial domination by announcing: "Only about a fifth of Armenians live outside their homeland, employed principally in commercial-industrial enterprises, creating in the peoples among whom they live a false impression about Armenians in general." Quoted in Geraci, "Capitalist Stereotypes and the Economic Organization of the Russian Empire," 367.

⁶⁵⁰ *Kavkazskii kalendar' na 1846 god, izdannyi ot kantseliarii kavkazskogo namestnika* (St. Petersburg: Voennaia tipografiia, 1846).

⁶⁵¹ *Kavkazskii kalendar'* (1846), 140.

⁶⁵² *Kavkazskii kalendar'* (1846), 140.

“enslavement” at the hands of their former Muslim overlords and to the “beneficial fruits of Russian rule,” by mid-century Armenians had come to excel in the region’s social and economic life. “Highly gifted with the spirit of entrepreneurship and an aptitude for commerce, [Armenians] from time immemorial exclusively control the trade not only in Georgia, but also in almost all other Transcaucasian provinces. On their own they have established trade routes to Russia, which only through them traffics its goods to Georgia.”⁶⁵³ The publication particularly commended Armenians for securing the region’s trade with such European commercial centers as Leipzig, Hamburg, Trieste, and Marseille.

The Russo-Armenian economic encounter during the reign of Nicholas I demonstrated the government’s complex encounters with non-Russian groups. While the state welcomed the broader impact of urban Armenians’ commercial success in Tiflis and elsewhere, it feared the social and, by extension, political implications of growing Armenians prosperity. Moreover, officials’ engagement with Armenians affected the empire’s perceptions of other subject nations, such as Georgians. In the Caucasus, tsarist officials applauded the broader benefits of Armenian business while hoping that the Armenian example would inspire their Georgian and other regional neighbors. Yet several administrators, such as Rozen and Neidgardt, implicitly promoted the Russian view of Armenian traders as motivated by individual and community interests that ostensibly seldom stretched to include non-Armenian elements. When in the 1830s and 1840s plans to attract Russian entrepreneurs to the South Caucasus were proposed, the underlying assumption was that ethnic Russian merchants, unlike their Armenian counterparts, engaged in morally acceptable practices that benefitted the common good.

⁶⁵³ *Kavkazskii kalendar’* (1846), 140.

Conclusion

The autocracy under Tsar Nicholas I struggled to reconcile the demands of a well-regulated empire with the circumstances of such imperial minorities as Armenians. The state wished to capitalize upon the Armenian Church's authority in the diaspora to project influence beyond its borders, but took steps toward standardizing the economic life of its Armenian subjects, abandoning these efforts when competing visions of nationalities policy and ethnonational integration of non-Russians permeated the official discourse. In these endeavors, St. Petersburg sought streamlined policies to achieve "uniformity and simplicity of legal relationships and categories,"⁶⁵⁴ rather than social or political equality among its subjects.

When, in 1838-40, the autocracy integrated the independent Armenian courts of Astrakhan, Kizliar, and Mozdok into the imperial judicial system,⁶⁵⁵ Nicholas professed a desire to see those Armenian communities "use the court and justice [system] on equal footing with Our native and all other subjects."⁶⁵⁶ In practice, however, the empire's ethnonational, cultural, and economic diversity made such goals impossible, as the autocracy's return to previously abolished policies shows. For an emperor who, according to Richard Wortman, "viewed the improvement of the governmental system as his own personal concern," the driving philosophy was not egalitarianism but efficiency.⁶⁵⁷ As a result, the Russian state essentialized its Armenian subjects as Christian allies and able traders. The disagreements of senior statesmen, such as Kankrin and Vorontsov, suggest that the government struggled to grasp the various

⁶⁵⁴Raëff, *Michael Speransky*, 337.

⁶⁵⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 7, d. 485, ll. 1-91.

⁶⁵⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 7, d. 485, l. 85.

⁶⁵⁷Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 133.

manifestations of “Armenian” identity. Classifying minorities—whether “diligent” Armenians, “lethargic” Georgians, or “dangerous” Muslim highlanders—gave the state an opportunity to mobilize them, or against them, to achieve its ultimate aims of vitality and stability. St. Petersburg consciously asserted these non-Russian groups’ inequality by essentializing them, maintaining the dominance of the Great Russian nation among the polyethnic empire’s population. Yet, under Nicholas’s distinctly personal approach to politics, the state equated juridical and fiscal standardization with modern governance at a time when the majority of ethnic Russians remained in bondage. Thus a patchwork of similarly inconsistent regulations characterized Nicholas’s nationalities policy. The tsar dreamed of reestablishing the political order of his empress grandmother’s world, one that rarely faced the challenges of post-1789 republican aspirations and national agitations.

But in the second quarter of the nineteenth century the Armenian diaspora, within and beyond the Romanov realm, sought security and prosperity, not a national state. Catholicos Nerses, politically the most influential Armenian in that era, yearned to become the pope of the diaspora, not the president of an Armenian republic. Before the rise of a concerted Armenian nationalist movement in the last decades of the century, Armenia’s diaspora looked to the Russian throne for the protection and recognition of its religious and cultural identities. To this end, it chose to cooperate with the tsarist government, albeit with periodic symptoms of discord. Few Armenians in Russia, especially among the nonelites, pursued social or administrative “equality” with other groups, including Russians, because they enjoyed special economic privileges. Ordinary Armenians in the Caucasus and Russia prioritized personal and community stability and growth, seeing few incentives for political agitation against their imperial overlord.

To be sure, in the first half of the nineteenth century a multitude of considerations informed the tsarist state's encounter with Armenians. In his cogent overview of the evolution of Russian perceptions of Tiflis Armenian merchants in that era, Robert Geraci highlighted officialdom's negative stereotyping of Armenian business practices and its desire for a greater Russian role in the Tiflis trade. But Geraci found it "somewhat odd" that Viceroy Vorontsov sided with Armenian businessmen against Russian industrialists in 1850, seeking the explanation for this development in the inconsistent behavior of the Muscovite merchants.⁶⁵⁸ However, as this chapter has demonstrated, Vorontsov and other senior tsarist statesmen weighed both economic and political factors in their interactions with Armenians. In that light, the viceroy's decision to support Armenians in their dispute with ethnic Russian businessmen becomes less puzzling, because Vorontsov sought to benefit from the Armenian diaspora's political connections as much as its economic networks. In that context, he chose to maintain constructive relations with Armenians even at the cost of ignoring the interests of ethnic Russian elements. In a word, imperial agents recognized and wished to capitalize upon not only Armenians' real or exaggerated economic acumen, but also upon the political implications of the Armenian Church's authority in the diaspora. As the next chapter shows, Nicholas's successor, Alexander II, deployed the Armenian diaspora as Russia's answer to Europe's Eastern Question.

⁶⁵⁸Geraci, "Capitalist Stereotypes and the Economic Organization of the Russian Empire," 378.

CHAPTER 4: RUSSIA'S RESPONSE TO THE EASTERN QUESTION AND THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA, 1855-1881

“The Armenians, no matter in which country they live, always see in Russia a defender of their church and nationality—circumstances that have quite an important significance for our politics in the Orient.”

-Interior Minister Petr Valuev, 1861

“The Eastern Question is not only a Russian question; it concerns the tranquility of Europe, of the world, and common prosperity, mankind, and Christian civilization.”

-Foreign Minister and Chancellor Aleksandr Gorchakov, 1876

Russia's encounter with Armenians in the reign of Alexander II (1855-81) cannot be divorced from the implications of the Armenian diaspora's transimperial existence and the broader challenges of the Eastern Question. Armenians were key to tsarist foreign policy in the East and to the Eastern Question in particular. In trying to balance its influence over Armenians outside Russia with maintaining control over Armenians within the empire, St. Petersburg often produced contradictory initiatives. Because Russia ruled over only a portion of the Armenian diaspora, another part of which resided in the Ottoman empire, it had to contend with a unique set of political circumstances. Recognizing that Armenians combined foreign with domestic advantages and liabilities for the Russian government, the state maneuvered to maintain its prominence in their lives.

Armenians stood at the heart of the Russian response to the Eastern Question. St. Petersburg aspired to be recognized as *the* political benefactor and economic patron of the

Armenian diaspora, seeking to reorient all Armenians toward Russia's orbit. Eager to capitalize on the deep social networks of Western Armenians within the sultan's domain and cognizant of their discontent, tsarist officials relied on the Armenian nation and church to advance their foreign policy in the East. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, Russia continued to promote itself as the defender of minority Christians in Turkey and resettled thousands of Ottoman Armenians into tsarist domains. Reflecting social and cultural advances spurred by the Great Reforms and the rise of a civil society, the Russo-Ottoman War played out on the front pages of St. Petersburg dailies, where the revival of the Eastern Question in a popular war pulled Armenians into a spotlight shone by Russian liberals. The periodical press in the imperial capital urged the Russian government to redouble its support for foreign-subject Armenians out of past and future political incentives, and even pushed the state to carve an Armenian homeland out of Ottoman territory. During the real and perceived encroachment of Western missionaries upon foreign and tsarist Armenians, Russian officials coordinated with the Echmiadzin leadership to counteract the proselytizing of foreign faiths, often without reciprocal strategic benefits.

Yet the state worked to prevent Armenians from placing their national allegiances above their civil subjecthood to the tsarist empire. The authorities suppressed privately conceived national Armenian institutions, prohibited the unsanctioned collection of donations for foreign-subject Armenians, and strove to prevent the Russian revolutionary movement from animating Armenian nationalism.

Viceroy and Villains

Viceroy Vorontsov's retirement in 1854 came at an inopportune time for Russia's affairs in the Caucasus. Taking place at the height of the Crimean War and leaving many of his goals unfinished, the statesman's resignation placed added pressure on the regional administration. The emperor replaced Vorontsov with General Nikolai Nikolaevich Muravev, a protégé of Ermolov

and a decorated veteran of the 1828-29 imperial campaigns. Muravev arrived in Tiflis on 1 March 1855, just hours after news had reached the city of the death of Tsar Nicholas I.⁶⁵⁹ Muravev's tenure at the head of the Caucasus administration lasted just nineteen months, first tarnished then vindicated by his army's efforts to seize the Ottoman fortress of Kars in eastern Anatolia. Although his soldiers finally sacked the citadel in November 1855, in September 1856 General Count Aleksandr Ivanovich Bariatinskii replaced Muravev, whom the new tsar, Alexander II (1855-81), promoted to membership in the State Council.

With the Crimean War's conclusion in the spring of 1856, Bariatinskii took advantage of the regional army's swollen ranks to penetrate deep into Dagestan and end the North Caucasus insurgency. In late August 1859, the general scribbled to the tsar: "Shamil has been captured and sent to Petersburg."⁶⁶⁰ In a separate missive, Bariatinskii boasted, "the fate of the eastern Caucasus has been resolved definitively. After fifty years of a bloody struggle, the day of peace has come to this country."⁶⁶¹ The North Caucasus fully capitulated in 1864, when new viceroy Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich (1863-81), the tsar's brother, forced the surrender of the last rebels in the Kuban region and along the Black Sea coast.⁶⁶²

For years after its defeat in the Crimean War, Russia's relations with Turkey and Britain remained tense. In the wake of the Treaty of Paris, Bariatinskii alerted St. Petersburg to the shadowy visits of British and Turkish military and merchant vessels to the Black Sea coast

⁶⁵⁹ *AKAK* XI (1888), ii.

⁶⁶⁰ *AKAK* XII (1904), i.

⁶⁶¹ *RGVIA*, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6677, l. 28.

⁶⁶² *GARF*, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 1-1ob. Mikhail Nikolaevich employed particularly harsh methods, forcefully relocating about 90,000 Muslim residents along the Kuban River and pressuring 418,000 North Caucasians into emigrating to the Ottoman empire. See *GARF*, f. 652, op. 1, d. 236, l. 5.

populated by the North Caucasian highlanders. In August 1857, the viceroy emphasized to the war minister “how harmful it is for us that North Caucasus tribes along the Black Sea coast, who are hostile to us, receive openly and without hindrance assistance from abroad, in weapons and military supplies, and also from constantly arriving bands of European and Turkish [outsiders].”⁶⁶³ In St. Petersburg, too, members of the General Staff and other senior statesmen emphasized the growing political-economic competition between Russia and Britain in the Caucasus, on the Caspian, and in Central Asia.⁶⁶⁴ Acknowledging the lessons of the Crimean defeat, Russia launched administrative and economic modernization in the Caucasus and beyond.

Between 1855 and 1880, the jurisdiction of the Caucasus civilian administration expanded, at the expense of the military, by 80 percent to cover almost the entire Caucasus territory and 4,767,000 residents.⁶⁶⁵ At the same time, the regional bureaucracy was trimmed, some provinces and districts amalgamated, and the authority of provincial governors boosted to expedite their work.⁶⁶⁶ The viceroyalty’s hands were fully untied in 1858 when St. Petersburg allowed it to keep all of the revenues derived from the South, but not North, Caucasus.⁶⁶⁷ Thus Bariatinskii received the financial *carte blanche* that even his powerful predecessor, Vorontsov,

⁶⁶³RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 6662, l. 46.

⁶⁶⁴RGVIA, f. 446, op. 1, d. 37, ll. 1-3.

⁶⁶⁵GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 1.

⁶⁶⁶GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 4-5.

⁶⁶⁷GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 360b-37. See also GARF, f. 652, op. 1, d. 236, l. 30. The Caucasus viceroyalty also received supplemental annual funding from St. Petersburg. In contrast to the finances of the South Caucasus, which came under the viceroy’s control in 1858, the imperial Finance Ministry administered the finances of the North Caucasus.

had not enjoyed.⁶⁶⁸ Other improvements included the spread of highways, railroads, and telegraph lines. Bariatinskii recognized the pressing need for such changes upon arriving in Tiflis: “At present time the Transcaucasian provinces are connected to the empire only on the geographical map; in reality they comprise a region in all respects separate from the rest of Russia.”⁶⁶⁹ The viceroy worked closely with his liberal, reform-minded chief of staff, Dmitrii Miliutin, who would serve as war minister from 1861 to 1881 and oversee major military changes. The two men accomplished much in pulling the Caucasus closer to modernity and closer to Russia.

Whereas during the Crimean War the Georgian Military Highway was the only reliable link between the Caucasus and Russia proper, by the end of Alexander II’s reign in 1881, nearly 600 miles of railroad tracks helped integrate the region with the imperial core.⁶⁷⁰ Almost 10,000 miles of telegraph cable further added to the transformation of the region. Private steamship companies rushed to the Black and Caspian seas, and a new port, at Petrovsk on the Caspian, was built and another one soon opened at Poti on the Black Sea.⁶⁷¹ Bariatinskii advocated these advancements out of both socioeconomic and strategic considerations, convinced that once modern transportation and communications were introduced in the region, “the Caucasus Army

⁶⁶⁸Ekaterina Pravilova, *Finansy imperii: Den’gi i vlast’ v politike Rossii na natsional’nykh okrainakh, 1801-1917* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel’stvo, 2006), 116-17.

⁶⁶⁹GARF, f. 722, op. 1, d. 475, l. 1.

⁶⁷⁰GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 19. Additionally, in 1879, Alexander II ordered the construction of five new railroad lines in the Caucasus, covering nearly 1,000 miles.

⁶⁷¹GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 20.

will hang like an avalanche over Asiatic Turkey, over Persia, and over the Indian route. Russian power in Asia will turn from a ghost into reality.”⁶⁷²

Even more impressive were the advancements in education. In 1856, within the territory of the Caucasus viceroyalty, there were 95 state-owned, public, and private schools.⁶⁷³ These schools accommodated approximately 5,500 pupils. By 1880, the number of schools had risen to 2,157 with about 62,000 pupils.⁶⁷⁴ The regional pedagogical staff increased nearly tenfold, from 375 teachers in 1856 to 3,735 in 1880. The imperial treasury, moreover, tripled the budget for education in the Caucasus from 193,000 rubles in 1856 to 600,000 in 1880.⁶⁷⁵ Other income, from private donations, benevolent societies, and student tuition payments, brought over 1,200,000 rubles annually for local educational initiatives. The region’s industrial and commercial transformations were no less dramatic.

An oil boom, mainly around Baku and the Caspian coast, erupted in the 1870s. In 1873, the temporary leasing of state-owned oil fields to private contractors was ended in favor of permanent sales of Caucasian oil wells to private companies.⁶⁷⁶ This initiative not only brought a one-time revenue of 3,000,000 rubles to the state treasury but also revolutionized the extraction of crude oil in the region: between 1872 and 1878 alone, the output increased from 54 million

⁶⁷²GARF, f. 722, op. 1, d. 475, l. 13. In 1881, the Caucasus Army contained 4,301 officers and about 124,000 soldiers. These numbers were roughly doubled during wartime mobilization. See GARF, f. 652, op. 1, d. 236, l. 28.

⁶⁷³GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 24-25.

⁶⁷⁴GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 25. The statistics for 1880 exclude 1,152 madrasas (*uchilishch musul'manskikh mechetskikh*) with about 15,000 pupils.

⁶⁷⁵GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 25-26.

⁶⁷⁶GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 32.

pounds (1.5 million poods) to 722 million pounds (20 million poods).⁶⁷⁷ By the summer of 1878, the St. Petersburg newspaper *Golos* informed the imperial capital that in Baku “oil freely pours out of wells, forms streams and rivers, and floods the fields of strangers.”⁶⁷⁸

The proliferation of refineries, factories, and rail lines accompanied this development, as did the attendant improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of the locals, who gained the ability to heat and light their homes at affordable rates. The price of photogen, an illuminant similar to kerosene that Russia imported from the United States prior to the Caucasus oil boom, fell from 45 to 3 kopecks per pound in the 1870s.⁶⁷⁹ These transformations gave reason for Viceroy Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich to report optimistically to his brother, Tsar Alexander II, in February 1880: “Perhaps soon the future will see the Caucasus [become] . . . an integral part of the general state organism, will see it not as an object of difficulties and sacrifices for Russia, but as a source of new strength and of new rewards for those sacrifices, which were made to possess it.”⁶⁸⁰ Yet the modernization of the Caucasus and other regions gave rise to nationalisms, social discontent, and revolutionary political movements throughout the empire.

Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War aroused popular unrest, nearly bankrupted the state treasury, and humiliated the tsar’s proud military. In part spurred by this crisis, the new tsar implemented the Great Reforms, transforming the country’s judicial, military, economic, and social spheres, including freeing the serfs in 1861. Terence Emmons has labeled the Great Reforms the “greatest single piece of state-directed social engineering in modern European

⁶⁷⁷GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 32ob.

⁶⁷⁸*Golos*, 15 July 1878, no. 194.

⁶⁷⁹GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 32ob.

⁶⁸⁰GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 40ob-41.

history before the twentieth century.”⁶⁸¹ But as historian Larisa Zakharova has argued, Alexander II introduced the reforms to strengthen the autocracy, not to appease liberals or relax the government’s grip on an inchoate civil society.⁶⁸²

By the 1870s the rise of European socialism, peasant populism, Russian and non-Russian nationalism, nihilism, and student radicalism challenged the foundations of the autocracy. Between 1873 and 1877 alone, over 1,600 tsarist subjects were implicated in subversive political movements.⁶⁸³ In the spring of 1875, the Council of Ministers listened warily to the reports of the Third Section about the proliferation of antigovernment “revolutionary propaganda” throughout the empire.⁶⁸⁴ Whereas in 1866 the secret police had uncovered early signs of socialist agitation in only four provinces, by 1875 there was evidence of such subversive movements in over 30 provinces, “indisputably proving the deficiency of the [state’s] measures” and demonstrating “the necessity of more systematic countermeasures against anarchist aspirations.”⁶⁸⁵ The ministers discussed with bewilderment the apparent apathy of ordinary Russians toward the threat to public order posed by the revolutionaries, “for the achievement of whose ideals are required streams, rivers, floods of blood.”⁶⁸⁶ Although non-Russians constituted less than 5 percent of arrested revolutionaries, their presence, and their real and imagined ties to the “outside

⁶⁸¹Quoted in Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova, eds., *Russia’s Great Reforms, 1855-1881* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vii.

⁶⁸²Larisa Zakharova, “Emperor Alexander II, 1855-1881,” in Donald J. Raleigh, ed., *The Emperors and Empresses of Russia: Rediscovering the Romanovs* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 294-333.

⁶⁸³GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, l. 13.

⁶⁸⁴GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, l. 2.

⁶⁸⁵GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, l. 2ob.

⁶⁸⁶GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, l. 3ob.

world,” elicited particular concern from St. Petersburg. Among those detained between 1873 and 1877, the Third Section deemed a handful of non-Russians, including Jews and Caucasians (of unspecified national origins), to be especially guilty of subversive activity.⁶⁸⁷ The ministers feared that foreign ideologies could infect the tsarist youth, Russian and non-Russian, emphasizing that many subjects return from studying in “Zurich, Bern, and Geneva” infused with “the destructive influence of the Russian émigrés, who strive with all strength to spread anarchist principles in the state.”⁶⁸⁸ Whether attending the lectures of such anarchist émigré ideologues as Mikhail Bakunin in Switzerland or translating into Ukrainian illicit literature at St. Vladimir University in Kiev, scores of tsarist-subject youths challenged the political and social status quo.⁶⁸⁹ For the state, an acute threat came from the merger of youth agitation and nationalism in the imperial periphery. Few tsarist domains exemplified this dangerous synthesis more strikingly than the Caucasus.

Although social, economic, and cultural circumstances in the South Caucasus distinguished it from the imperial core and the more developed western borderlands, the political situation in Tiflis in the late 1870s reflected the general unease that characterized Russia proper. While there were fewer students and well-educated elites in Tiflis than in Petersburg, Odessa, or Kiev, the local tsarist administration feared the “transfer of political agitation” to their territory.⁶⁹⁰ Specifically, regional officials linked anarchist and socialist ideologies with a

⁶⁸⁷GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, ll. 15-16.

⁶⁸⁸GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, ll. 21ob-22.

⁶⁸⁹The ministers noted warily: “However mad his teachings, Bakunin’s works and the sermons of his followers have had an astounding and terrifying influence upon the youth.” See GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 162, 1877, d. 146, l. 68ob.

⁶⁹⁰GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 164, 1879, d. 59, l. 28.

particular group's nationalism: "The agitators take advantage . . . and help spread all manifestations of antagonism in society, [thus we] cannot fully ignore the clearly demonstrated . . . nationalist aspirations toward separation [*stremeniia k obosobleniiu*] of intellectual Armenians in the Caucasus."⁶⁹¹

Officials linked the revolutionary movement in Russia proper with the real and perceived rise of Armenian nationalism in the South Caucasus. In December 1879, the head of the Tiflis Provincial Gendarme Administration (*gubernskoe zhandarmskoe upravlenie*, hereafter GZhU) alerted St. Petersburg to what he interpreted as a connection between Russian socialism and Armenian nationalism.⁶⁹² He warned that "the present emergence of Armenian nationalist tendencies in the Caucasus" will be compounded by the broader revolutionary movement if not checked through the "strict supervision over the spread of nationalist ideas among Armenians."⁶⁹³ Tsarist agents in Tiflis worried that "Russian socialists . . . can easily establish here a nest not only with banned books, but also with a printing house and an armory . . . of course in order to act against the government."⁶⁹⁴ The authorities identified only Armenians as a potential threat, suggesting that officials began to associate political subversion with Armenians.

How can this be explained? Among the dozens of distinct ethnonational groups populating the South Caucasus,⁶⁹⁵ from the Russian perspective, Armenians alone possessed the

⁶⁹¹GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 164, 1879, d. 59, ll. 28ob-29.

⁶⁹²GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 164, 1879, d. 59, ll. 28-29.

⁶⁹³GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 164, 1879, d. 59, l. 29.

⁶⁹⁴GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 164, 1879, d. 59, l. 29ob.

⁶⁹⁵Population statistics for the Caucasus before the end of the nineteenth century are partial, but some details are known. In 1881, the entire Caucasus contained approximately 5,550,000 residents. These included 1,370,000 Russians (mostly sectarians), 1,250,000 "Turks and Tatars," about one million Georgians, 820,000 "Caucasian-highlander peoples," and 730,000 Armenians. The total number of

distinct factors necessary for a *potential* political challenge to the status quo. Their economic standing and attendant social influence in the Caucasus and elsewhere, the domestic and foreign authority of their national church, and the diasporic distribution of Armenians throughout Eurasia, all affected tsarist officials' perception of Armenian political aims and abilities. Even in the absence of hard evidence of secessionist nationalist ambitions, Russian authorities in the 1870s began to envision links between still-benign Armenian nationalism (which focused on Western Armenia) and the diverse subversive youth campaign in the imperial core, fearing the synthesis of the revolutionary movement and nationalism in the Caucasus.

By 1880, Tiflis became a hub for Russian and non-Russian political dissidents, attracting revolutionaries from St. Petersburg, Moscow, and universities throughout the empire.⁶⁹⁶ The South Caucasian capital's remoteness from the centers of imperial power, its proximity to the porous borders of the Ottoman and Persian empires, and the city's lively cultural ambiance drew diverse dissidents. The provincial GZhU grumbled that the Third Section "constantly" inundated Tiflis with arrest and surveillance orders for fugitives from Russia. The problem compelled local authorities to track daily the arrival of each outsider, especially of intellectuals. Officials also sought to double the number of police stations in the region to combat the proliferation of socialist and other illicit publications, underground presses, and clandestine groups.⁶⁹⁷

In addition to socialist circles, provincial authorities pursued ill-defined "political-national" tendencies among Caucasian natives. In one example, tsarist agents in Tiflis arrested a

Christian peoples comprised about 3,070,000, with the rest (about 2,480,000) Muslim. See GARF f. 652, op. 1, d. 236, l. 23.

⁶⁹⁶GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 165, 1880, d. 81, ll. 4-4ob.

⁶⁹⁷GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 165, 1880, d. 141, ll. 2-7.

young Armenian for distributing portraits of the writer Mikael Nalbandian,⁶⁹⁸ an exiled socialist with ties to some of the era's leading dissidents, including Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin, and Nikolai Ogarev. Soon the viceroy personally followed all Third Section investigations of political revolutionaries in the Caucasus.⁶⁹⁹ Thus the hallmarks of modernity introduced during Alexander II's reign in Russia and the Caucasus spurred reciprocal social resistance, characterized by unique variations in the imperial regions.

The Great Reforms in the Caucasus

The Russian empire's reforms and modernization followed situational patterns that accounted for the regional diversity of ethnicities, confessions, and social groups.⁷⁰⁰ Because in the Caucasus few uniform categories existed, the implementation of the Great Reforms there exposed the logistical problems inherent in modernizing a polyethnic and multiconfessional empire. Armenians illustrate this point, but their experience was hardly unique during Alexander's reign. Although the policies enacted in St. Petersburg reverberated in the Caucasus, they did so with distinct iterations.

At the onset of Tsar Alexander II's reign in 1855, vast incongruities characterized the judicial system of the Caucasus. While the provinces under the jurisdiction of the civilian administration largely followed the general legal codes and bureaucratic procedures found in Russia,⁷⁰¹ the Caucasian territories under the control of the military administration maintained

⁶⁹⁸GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 165, 1880, d. 141, ll. 7ob-8.

⁶⁹⁹GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., op. 165, 1880, d. 141, ll. 21-21ob.

⁷⁰⁰For a broad overview, see Eklof et al, *Russia's Great Reforms*.

⁷⁰¹For an overview, see Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

various traditional national and tribal legal systems from the pre-Russian era.⁷⁰² The legal affairs of some groups—Armenians, Georgians, and others—were standardized in 1838-40, including the integration of independent Armenian courts in Astrakhan, Kizliar, Mozdok, and elsewhere into the imperial judicial system.⁷⁰³ But the jurisprudence of such groups as Cossacks and Muslim highlanders remained significantly distinct from Russian legal statutes. Often separate legal codes governed the lives of different minorities in the same territory, frustrating local residents and sowing bureaucratic confusion.⁷⁰⁴

The legal transformations of the Great Reforms provided a catalyst for righting the inconsistent jurisprudence of the Caucasus. In early 1868, some of the legal provisions were extended to the civilian-administered regions of the Caucasus.⁷⁰⁵ In 1871 almost the entire territory was brought under a single judicial system, which still lagged behind its Russian counterpart.⁷⁰⁶ New courts throughout the viceroyalty accompanied the revision of legal codes. But while Armenian witnesses gained the right to swear to an Armenian priest in court, a key aspect of the Russian judicial reform, trial by jury, did not extend to the Caucasus. By the viceroy's own admission in 1880, the changes "cannot be deemed fully satisfactory of the needs and desires of the local populations."⁷⁰⁷ Yet the standardization and expansion of courts signaled advancement from the prereform era in that St. Petersburg continued the administrative

⁷⁰²GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 5ob-6.

⁷⁰³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 7, d. 485, ll. 1-91.

⁷⁰⁴Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich summarized years later some of these discrepancies to his brother. See GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 7.

⁷⁰⁵GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 7-7ob.

⁷⁰⁶As late as 1880 some regions of the Caucasus, such as Dagestan, followed separate legal structures.

⁷⁰⁷GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 8.

modernization of the Caucasus. The introduction of some legal provisions to the Caucasus opened the possibility for previously excluded groups to take part in the execution of universal justice,⁷⁰⁸ gradually abandoning anachronistic national and tribal legal systems in the Caucasus.

Peasant reform in the Caucasus made a more immediate and indelible mark upon the region's social and economic structure. Prior to the 1860s, multiple forms of personal bondage existed in the Caucasus. In the Georgian regions, serfdom represented a deeply ingrained and diverse social norm, in which not only royals and nobles but also clergy, merchants, and even peasant serfs owned serfs.⁷⁰⁹ (In 1832, tsarist officials in Georgia restricted the ownership of serfs to nobles.⁷¹⁰) Russian rule curbed the powers of Georgian serfowners, but until the 1860s the practice continued on largely the same proportional scale as in Russia.⁷¹¹ In contrast to the Georgian provinces, in the Dagestan, Kuban, Sukhum and other Muslim North Caucasian districts, personal bondage, according to viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich, "was characterized by total lack of rights," and resembled "slavery."⁷¹² Conversely, in the Muslim territories of the South Caucasus (mainly modern Azerbaijan), no de jure serfdom existed. Local farmers working

⁷⁰⁸As historian Louise McReynolds has accented in reference to one aspect of the legal reforms, "The theatricality of the adversarial courtroom made it a place where modernity could be performed by all involved in the pursuit of justice." See Louise McReynolds, *Murder Most Russian: True Crime and Punishment in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 3.

⁷⁰⁹Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1989), 67.

⁷¹⁰According to Suny, "Those serfs owned by non-nobles had either to be sold or allowed to buy their freedom; otherwise they reverted to state peasants. At the same time nobles were given the right to exile offending peasants to the North Caucasus."

⁷¹¹For example, tsarist officials required Georgian nobles to provide documentary proof of serf ownership and allowed serfs to buy their freedom. See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 67.

⁷¹²GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 9-9ob.

the lands of wealthy lords were classified as “state peasants” with ostensibly some rights, but de facto their conditions paralleled serfdom.⁷¹³

Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich, after succeeding Bariatinskii in March 1863, wasted no time in coordinating with Alexander II and the Caucasus Committee to extend similar regulations to his jurisdiction.⁷¹⁴ As early as October 1863, the Grand Duke discussed with his brother tentative strategies for this complex endeavor.⁷¹⁵ Initial plans called for freeing the serfs without land—a proposal to which Georgian nobles acquiesced—but was later revised to emancipating the serfs with land, for which they had to reimburse the landowners.⁷¹⁶ As Suny summarized: “This proposal was a radical break with the nobles' position, but the government was determined not to create a mass of landless peasants that would ‘introduce into the state organism a constant element of disorder.’”⁷¹⁷

By the time the phased emancipation ended in 1870, approximately 297,500 newly freed peasants joined the region’s growing force of mobile free labor.⁷¹⁸ First to gain liberty were the bondsmen of Tiflis *guberniia* in 1864, followed by their counterparts in Kutais and two nearby districts in 1865, Mingrelia in 1866, Dagestan and Kuban in 1868, and the Sukhum military district in 1870. In Yerevan *guberniia*, where fewer serfs existed than in Georgian provinces

⁷¹³GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, ll. 9ob-10.

⁷¹⁴For an overview of this process, see GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 615, ll. 1-132. For a more succinct description of the emancipation in Georgia, see Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 96-112.

⁷¹⁵GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 615, l. 2. The likely reason for the emancipation’s start in Tiflis *guberniia* is that it was the center of the tsarist administration.

⁷¹⁶Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 102.

⁷¹⁷Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 102.

⁷¹⁸GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 10.

because of a comparatively smaller Armenian noble estate, emancipation was enacted in 1870. Thus the emancipation did not affect Armenians as much as it altered the everyday lives of Georgian elites. While new competitors and neighbors entered the socioeconomic spheres previously dominated by Armenians, the freeing of the serfs in the Caucasus impacted the economies and social relationships of other native groups more acutely.

The autocracy's administrative reforms in the Caucasus in the 1860s indicate its continued efforts to integrate the region into Russia. While the Georgian nobility—the largest native elite estate in the Caucasus—initially resisted the terms of the emancipation, the tsarist state remained determined to implement the 19 February 1861 proclamation to its fullest extent. Recognizing the Georgian lords' uniquely weak financial conditions, Russian authorities nevertheless pushed forward to bring the territory in line with the rest of the empire. The risks of alienating native elites were serious, but they did not outweigh the risks of allowing modernity to sidestep the Caucasus.

External Influence and Internal Control

This encounter of political and socioeconomic modernity with Caucasian natives posed unique challenges for the Russian empire. In an era of reconsideration of political and social bonds, the autocracy embarked on a multifaceted endeavor to (re)define its dialogue with Armenians. As late as the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the tsarist government struggled to balance its policies between expanding its influence upon Armenians abroad and maintaining control over its own Armenians in the Caucasus and elsewhere. While some tsarist elites backed the promotion of national Armenian institutions, other Russian officials advocated the cultural assimilation of Armenians. No master plan directed the government's approach because individual ministers resisted relinquishing their jurisdictions, and also because senior statesmen espoused divergent visions of empire.

In July 1865, Tsar Alexander II initiated the most important recalibration of Russo-Armenian political ties since the *Polozhenie* of 1836. Under the emperor's orders, Caucasus Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich, Interior Minister Petr Valuev, and Foreign Minister Aleksandr Gorchakov—among the empire's most senior statesmen—convened to “coordinate the activities of their departments regarding the question of our government's relations with the Armenian church and nation.”⁷¹⁹ Two topics in particular dominated the men's agenda. First, they sought to synchronize their efforts at reconciling St. Petersburg-Echmiadzin ties with the state policy of exerting political influence over Armenians living abroad. Second, they emphasized the importance of checking the work of foreign missionaries among Caucasian Armenians.⁷²⁰

At the heart of the debate were several interrelated questions: To which degree did the Armenian faith, a close dogmatic and liturgical cousin of Russian Orthodoxy, qualify as a “foreign faith”? How far should the government go in shielding Echmiadzin from the encroachment of Protestant and Catholic agents? How best to utilize the foreign sway of the Armenian Church, especially in Turkey, to achieve tsarist political objectives? Which policies in the Caucasus ought to be introduced or revised to achieve a balance between internal stability and external influence? How, and how far, should Armenians be incorporated into the Russian political and social life? The ministers proposed different answers to these questions.

Gorchakov's warnings about the recent successes of “secret” Protestant proselytizing among Caucasian Armenians drew the attention of the viceroy and the interior minister.⁷²¹ The three men agreed on the need to cooperate with the Armenian Church to eradicate such alien

⁷¹⁹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 1.

⁷²⁰RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 2-3.

⁷²¹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 6-7ob.

doctrines among tsarist subjects. To this end, Gorchakov wished to increase his ministry's coordination with Echmiadzin's leadership, who "by its very nature is connected to our foreign policy." In justifying a closer political partnership between the autocracy and Echmiadzin, the foreign minister stressed the kinship of the Russian and Armenian faiths: "Although our laws place the Gregorian church among the heterodox, it is not, strictly speaking, a heterodox church, in terms of its main dogmas and the similarity of its rites with the Orthodox Church, and deserves [our] support and protection against [foreign] propaganda."⁷²²

While Mikhail Nikolaevich and Valuev expressed "complete agreement" with Gorchakov's need for more thorough links to the Echmiadzin leadership, they resisted his implication that the Armenian faith deserved legal declassification as a heterodox creed.⁷²³ The viceroy and interior minister posited that the empire's existing laws for heterodox faiths protected the Armenian Church from external threats. Although they acknowledged parallel Russo-Armenian interests in combating Protestantism and Catholicism, Mikhail Nikolaevich and Valuev refused to consider the possibility of introducing a separate legal status for the Armenian faith.⁷²⁴ At the same time, all three statesmen agreed about the imperative of continuing to nudge Echmiadzin along a path most favorable to tsarist foreign policy.

To gain greater control of this process, the political elite considered introducing a special government "advisor" to the Echmiadzin patriarch.⁷²⁵ An ethnic Armenian bureaucrat, this tsarist

⁷²²RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 6-7ob.

⁷²³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 8.

⁷²⁴Mikhail Nikolaevich and Valuev also objected to Gorchakov's proposal to invite the patriarch to St. Petersburg and present him with a special royal commendation. See RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 10ob-11.

⁷²⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 9ob-10. It is unclear who proposed this scheme.

agent would be tasked with “convincing the Catholicos [to undertake] measures and courses of action that aim to dispose the [Russian] government and [Armenian] nation toward him, and strengthen his influence abroad.”⁷²⁶ The advisor would lobby the Catholicos to execute policies that were in line with Russian interests, focusing on Armenians both within and outside the tsarist empire. Mikhail Nikolaevich, Valuev, and Gorchakov rejected this scheme, not only doubting its efficacy but also fearing broader repercussions. The interior minister argued that the plan would “more likely elicit suspicion than sympathy from the patriarch and the Armenians themselves, which is enough reason to fear that [a tsarist advisor to Echmiadzin], in order to acquire influence, in many cases would sacrifice the perspectives and interests of our government.”⁷²⁷ This scenario could precipitate “the establishment of Armenian national autonomy.” Such concerns suggest that, as late as the mid-1860s, the autocracy—still negotiating between domestic control over Echmiadzin and its foreign influence—privileged the latter over the former.⁷²⁸ The government desired a tighter grip on the affairs of the Armenian Church but recognized the potential dangers, foreign and domestic, of alienating clerical and lay Armenians.

Gorchakov understood this dilemma well. According to an official summary of the July 1865 meeting, the foreign minister stressed to his colleagues that “in light of the tremendous importance for our political interests of maintaining foreign Armenians’ trust and devotion to our

⁷²⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 9ob-10.

⁷²⁷RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 10-10ob. This appears to be an official summary of his statement, rather than his own words.

⁷²⁸See chapter 3. For a broader overview, see Paul Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos at Home and Abroad,” in *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds*, ed. Osamu Ieda and Tomohiko Uyama (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2006), 203-35.

government,” the state had to reassess its policies.⁷²⁹ In particular, Gorchakov argued that in “all matters pertaining to Armenians and the Armenian Church,” domestic considerations must be “subordinated” to foreign policy imperatives. Consequently, he insisted on elevating the external prestige and political cachet of the Echmiadzin patriarchy.⁷³⁰

Valuev disagreed with Gorchakov’s stance, likely fearing the erosion of his ministry’s oversight of tsarist-subject Armenians. The interior minister acknowledged the necessity of maintaining foreign Armenians’ favorable disposition toward Russia, but resisted what he interpreted as Gorchakov’s attempt to assign special status to the Armenian nation.⁷³¹ Valuev argued that tsarist laws governing all groups within the empire, including Russians and the Orthodox Church, could not be ignored out of “more or less conjectural” goals pursued by Gorchakov. More potently, the interior minister opposed the establishment of “an exceptional position for a quite insignificant portion of the population, which the Armenians of the empire constitute.”⁷³² Valuev feared foreign and tsarist Armenians’ pursuit of the “reestablishment of its national autonomy,” and thus wished to “avoid all that which directly or indirectly could contribute to the maintenance or spread of such aspirations.”⁷³³ Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich sided with Valuev, even arguing that the elevation of Echmiadzin’s external influence could

⁷²⁹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 11ob.

⁷³⁰RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 12.

⁷³¹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 12-12ob.

⁷³²RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 12-12ob.

⁷³³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 12ob.

backfire by promoting the notion of Armenian exceptionalism and giving the impression of preferential treatment within a nationally kaleidoscopic imperial domain.⁷³⁴

In sum, in the 1860s the tsarist political elite struggled to reconcile the unique challenges and opportunities of Armenian diasporic, transimperial existence. Although the ministers recognized that a combination of external and internal considerations regarding Armenian political affairs had to be weighed at all times, they disagreed about whether the government should amplify Echmiadzin's foreign influence or prevent the realization of some Armenians' "political dreams." The case of the Armenian scholar-cleric Gavril Aivazovskii illustrates this interplay of religion, diaspora, and diplomacy at the heart of the autocracy's political encounter with Armenians.

A Domestic Diaspora: Gavril Aivazovskii

Born in Russia, Gavril Aivazovskii was taken as a child by mechtarist monks to be raised and educated in Vienna.⁷³⁵ Aivazovskii was the elder brother of Hovhannes Aivazian, better known by his Russified name of Ivan Aivazovskii, a renowned marine artist. While his brother stayed in their native Crimea, Gavril became a life-long scholar and priest in Europe, where he educated Armenian youths in Venice and Paris. Aivazovskii spent eight years in the latter city, where he established an academy that attracted Armenians from throughout Europe and also Turkey, Baghdad, and India. He also published a literary Armenian journal that gained equal prominence among lay and clerical diaspora Armenians. Aivazovskii's promotion of Armenian "national questions" and resistance to Catholicism's influence on European Armenians

⁷³⁴RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 12ob-13.

⁷³⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 15-16. The mechtarists are Benedictine monks of the Armenian Catholic Church, established in 1717 and based in Vienna and Venice.

eventually elicited the ire of the Catholic Church, which drove him out of Paris and the mechitarist order. Expelled from Europe, Aivazovskii returned under the authority and aegis of the Echmiadzin and Constantinople patriarchs, who lauded him for his scholarship and promotion of Armenian national interests.

Back in the tsar's domain, Aivazovskii sought to recreate his Paris academy in Odessa, on the Black Sea.⁷³⁶ He argued that Russia's 1.5 million Armenian subjects required a national educational center no less than their compatriots in Europe. Aivazovskii maintained that Russia's political interests demanded a national Armenian academy that would counteract the growing sway of Western dogmas with Armenians. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, Aivazovskii stressed, eroded some of its influence among Ottoman Armenians, while at the same time the stature of British Protestantism and French Catholicism had grown to unprecedented levels among Ottoman and Russian Armenians.

In 1856, Alexander approved the plan, thanks in part to the endorsement of such tsarist officials as Russian ambassador to France Pavel Kiselev.⁷³⁷ Aivazovskii's request to establish the academy in the Crimean city of Feodosia, rather than in Odessa, also met with approval.⁷³⁸ In a sign of the emperor's backing of Aivazovskii's academy, the tsar held an audience with the cleric in November 1857, lauding his work and tasking the Interior Ministry with facilitating its execution.⁷³⁹ More consequentially, Alexander appointed Aivazovskii the archbishop of the

⁷³⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 17.

⁷³⁷RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 18. Kiselev was also former minister of state properties.

⁷³⁸Aivazovskii argued that Feodosia was a more suitable location because of a recently started steamship route between Feodosia and Constantinople and a promised plan to link Crimea with St. Petersburg and Moscow by railroad.

⁷³⁹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 19ob-20.

Nakhichevan-Bessarabian Armenian eparchy (which included Crimea), one of the largest and most profitable in the Russian empire. According to state records, the tsar took this decision not only to expedite Aivazovskii's project but also to allow him to use the eparchy's finances for his academy.⁷⁴⁰ But Aivazovskii's promotion came during an interregnum in Echmiadzin's patriarchy, thereby letting the tsar to sidestep the Armenian Church leadership. Although many tsarist and foreign Armenians supported Aivazovskii,⁷⁴¹ his elevation to the head of the Nakhichevan-Bessarabian eparchy without Echmiadzin's consent aroused popular discontent.⁷⁴²

Russian sources paint a picture of a mismanaged and corrupt Nakhichevan-Bessarabian eparchy administration prior to Aivazovskii's arrival, characterized by lost or embezzled church funds and poor organization.⁷⁴³ Indeed, Interior Minister Sergei Lanskoi asked Aivazovskii to address these issues upon his promotion to the head of the eparchy. The new archbishop made important strides in this direction, initially supported by local Armenian elders and also the Echmiadzin Synod. But Aivazovskii soon discovered that his eparchy's poor monetary situation prevented him from opening his academy using local church funds. To his rescue came wealthy Armenian businessman Arutiun Khalibov, who donated 50,000 silver rubles to fund an

⁷⁴⁰Russian synopses of this case claim that many local Armenians from Crimea petitioned the government to allow Aivazovskii to use church finances for the establishment of his academy. See RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 18ob.

⁷⁴¹Armenians in Constantinople celebrated Aivazovskii's plans, vowing to send their children for education in Feodosia. See RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 18.

⁷⁴²Another source of tension was Aivazovskii's plan to relocate the headquarters of the Nakhichevan-Bessarabian eparchy from Kishinev to Feodosia, where he argued it would be closer to the large Armenian communities of Crimea and Nakhichevan-on-Don. See RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 21.

⁷⁴³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 22ob-24.

Armenian academy in Feodosia.⁷⁴⁴ By mid-1858, Aivazovskii had secured the final permissions of the Russian political elite, including the tsar, the ministers of the interior, foreign affairs, and education, and the governor general of the Novorossiisk and Bessarabian governorate.⁷⁴⁵

On 12 October 1858, the Khalibov Armenian Academy of Feodosia, named for its primary benefactor, opened its doors to its first 50 students.⁷⁴⁶ By the following academic year, the six-year school enrolled about 130 pupils, mainly from the Ottoman and Russian Armenian communities. A press opened at the academy soon after its founding, and between 1860 and 1863 a journal was published in Armenian, Russian, and French, after which it came out only in Armenian.⁷⁴⁷ The aims of the journal, according to one Russian account, reflected the broader purpose of the Khalibov academy: “the propagation of the light of science and knowledge among the Armenian people, [and] the development in it of civil virtues and dedication to that government that patronizes it.”⁷⁴⁸ In a word, the gestation of pro-Russian attitudes among Armenian youths—foreign and tsarist—constituted a key political aim of the new academy, alongside its more generic aspirations toward enlightenment. The Romanov state embraced these goals, underscored by Tsar Alexander II’s visit to the academy in September 1861, where he met with Aivazovskii and Khalibov and commended their work.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁴In 1862, Khalibov donated an additional 150,000 rubles for the construction of a new, larger facility for the academy. See RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 29.

⁷⁴⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 27.

⁷⁴⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 27ob.

⁷⁴⁷RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 28ob.

⁷⁴⁸RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 28ob.

⁷⁴⁹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 29.

In contrast to the Russian government, the Echmiadzin leadership soon withdrew its backing of Aivazovskii. Not only was his promotion to archbishop conducted without the patriarchy's preliminary approval, but he also demonstrated more initiative than the heavily hierarchical and intransigent church could tolerate. When a new Catholicos, Mateos, was elected in 1858, he wasted no time in summoning Aivazovskii to Echmiadzin. Although the nature of their audience is unknown, the fact that Mateos delayed his affirmation of Aivazovskii as the archbishop of the Nakhichevan-Bessarabian eparchy points to tension between the two clerics.⁷⁵⁰ Soon, despite the Russian government's and Armenian laity's support for Aivazovskii, Mateos set out on a multifaceted campaign against the ambitious priest.⁷⁵¹

By the early 1860s, Mateos and his allies in Crimea publicly renounced Aivazovskii's initiatives. A common rumor charged Aivazovskii and Khalibov with stealing church funds to finance their academy.⁷⁵² More likely, however, the secularism of such Armenian intellectuals as Aivazovskii threatened the church's preeminence in Armenian culture. Mateos condemned Aivazovskii for his emphasis on secular education and publishing, and accused him of neglecting his duties toward the spiritual and administrative management of his eparchy.⁷⁵³ In his campaign against Aivazovskii, Mateos ordered snap audits of the Nakhichevan-Bessarabian eparchy, intimidated priests who edited the Khalibov academy journal, and pressured Tiflis booksellers not to sell publications from Aivazovskii's press.⁷⁵⁴ The academy withstood such adversity for a

⁷⁵⁰RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 32-33.

⁷⁵¹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 33ob.

⁷⁵²RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 34.

⁷⁵³RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, ll. 35-35ob.

⁷⁵⁴RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 103, l. 37.

decade but succumbed in 1871, closing its doors and converting the facilities into a church-administered Armenian seminary.

Largely unbeknown to the government, the animosity between Aivazovskii and Echmiadzin paralleled the conflicting visions of Armenian identity that pitted traditional church-centered culture against the growing secularism of Armenian intellectuals.⁷⁵⁵ The strife within Russia's Armenian community at mid-century surfaced in the competition between publications that used the vernacular Armenian (*ashkharhabar*) and those that preferred the classical Armenian of the church (*grabar*). Aivazovskii joined such Armenian intellectuals as writer Khachatur Abovian, jurist Grigor Otian, and editor and novelist Hovannes Hisarian in modernizing Armenian culture and urging the secularization of education. The Russian government stayed out of these debates as long as it perceived them as apolitical.

Yet, in a risky rebuke of Echmiadzin, the autocracy embraced the mission and role of the Khalibov academy. While cognizant of the potential political dangers associated with alienating the Armenian Church and its senior leadership, the tsarist government backed Aivazovskii's plans throughout the 1860s, even propping it up with an annual subsidy of 11,000 rubles.⁷⁵⁶ But the creation of national Armenian academies in Russia remained a politically controversial prospect that aroused policy disagreement among senior statesmen.

Valuev and Gorchakov, the interior and foreign ministers, respectively, supported the establishment not only of Aivazovskii's academy but also of a similar institution in Astrakhan.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁵See Ronald G. Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 23 and 59.

⁷⁵⁶RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 13-15ob.

⁷⁵⁷RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 1-1ob.

The men emphasized the mutual interests of the Russian government and the Armenian Church, entirely overlooking, intentionally or inadvertently, the serious rift between Aivazovskii and Mateos. The statesmen advocated “counteracting the Western powers’ religious-political propaganda among foreign Armenians, which is as harmful to Russia as it is to the Armenian-Gregorian Church.”⁷⁵⁸ Moreover, “in order to spread and consolidate Russia’s influence” upon foreign-subject Armenians, and to “strengthen the moral and religious bonds” between Armenians outside and inside the Russian empire, the ministers supported the founding of such exclusively Armenian educational centers as the Khalibov academy in Crimea.⁷⁵⁹ Unlike the Lazarev Institute, which sought to integrate Armenians into Russian society and the state by producing professional cadres for the tsarist service and private commerce, the institutions supported by Valuev and Gorchakov aimed to attract Armenians from abroad, reorienting them toward Russia’s orbit not through a Russian-focused curriculum but simply through the offering of subsidized education.

Several unique features characterized the Khalibov academy and another proposed institution in Astrakhan.⁷⁶⁰ First, they were intended “primarily” for foreign-subject Armenians, who received financial assistance from the Russian government. Second, to appeal to foreign Armenians, all instruction was to be conducted in Armenian, and no Russian-language courses were part of the mandatory curriculum (at least for non-tsarist Armenians). Third, the schools’ jurisdictional oversight would be divided between the Interior Ministry and the Echmiadzin

⁷⁵⁸RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 1.

⁷⁵⁹RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 1-1ob. However, by 1868 MVD Valuev lost confidence in the Khalibov academy’s ability to attract Armenians from abroad. See RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 13-15ob.

⁷⁶⁰RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 1ob.

patriarchy, shutting out the Education Ministry. Finally, all tsarist-subject graduates of these academies were admitted into the lowest, fourteenth rung of the Russian table of ranks, while their foreign classmates entered the “personal honorary citizen” estate with hereditary rights.

The Education Ministry opposed this proposal. Minister Ivan Delianov (1882-97) conceded the need for “the most decisive rebuff” of Western religious and political ideas, and agreed with the importance of elevating Echmiadzin’s external prestige as part of “strengthening Russia’s influence on Turkish and Persian Armenians.”⁷⁶¹ However, the ministry resisted calls for the establishment in Russia of exclusively Armenian national academies that catered to foreign-subject Armenians. It argued that Western powers targeted Russia’s Armenians as much as their foreign compatriots, thus requiring a greater domestic focus on the political, cultural, and social integration of Armenians into the empire. Essentially, the Education Ministry advocated the cultural assimilation of tsarist-subject Armenians. In a statement that undoubtedly reflected the views of many tsarist statesmen, Delianov insisted that the government

must be solely focused on that [the Armenian] youth receives a common education with all of its Russian countrymen, that it is raised on the Russian language in educational facilities common for all, [raised] on Russian literature and Russian history, in the spirit of unwavering devotion to its Russian fatherland and Emperor, [and thus] completely melds [*srodnilos*] with all of the intellectual and moral interests of Russia and from childhood becomes tempered against all intrigues and agitations, as incongruous with its own wellbeing as with the tranquility of Russia on her southeastern periphery.⁷⁶²

In a word, the Education Ministry argued that the expansion of such institutions as the Khalibov academy would drive a wedge between Russia’s Armenian subjects and the tsarist government, and also emphasized the need for absorbing the Armenian youth into the Russian social and

⁷⁶¹RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 2.

⁷⁶²RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 2ob-3. In a specific grievance against the Khalibov academy, the Education Ministry wrote that Aivazovskii’s original petition had stated that Armenian would be *a major*, not *the only*, language of instruction. See RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 8-8ob.

cultural fabric. The failure to implement these policies, Delianov warned, would result in the growth of “national” ideas among tsarist-subject Armenians.

Indeed, the Education Ministry and other government agencies feared that certain state policies, such as the establishment of national academies, could arouse Armenian nationalism. The ministry cautioned that exclusive regulations that deviated from standard laws governing all *inorodtsy* (aliens) would “inevitably be interpreted as backing the national-political aspirations that are artificially excited among Armenians by hostile [foreign] policies.”⁷⁶³ Delianov also warned that Ottoman Armenian pupils at the proposed academies would infect their tsarist-subject classmates with anti-Russian sentiments. The result would be an atmosphere where “a young generation of Russian Armenians, it is safe to say, would take away from the schools . . . a love not for Russia, but for a fantastical future Armenia, and would represent ardent supporters of Armenian autonomy, [which is] preached by Russia’s adversaries.”⁷⁶⁴

Russia’s unique sociopolitical and ethnonational circumstances made the implementation of national academies impossible, the Education Ministry held. Delianov argued that, unlike in “Austria, France, or England,” with their comparably smaller Armenian populations, in Russia distinctive factors rendered the establishment of the Khalibov academy politically counterproductive.⁷⁶⁵ Because Russia’s Armenians lived closer to their historical homeland, and also closer to the headquarters of their church, they were more likely to develop nationalist tendencies as a result of school-induced cultural consciousness. Consequently, the minister insisted, Russia had an “obligation” to shield its Armenians from “all the political and religious

⁷⁶³RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 3.

⁷⁶⁴RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 3ob.

⁷⁶⁵RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 3ob-4ob and also 9ob.

machinations of its adversaries.”⁷⁶⁶ In contrast, Delianov claimed that Western countries could afford to promote Armenian national education “without the slightest fears” precisely because of the small Armenian populations residing in those states.

In reorienting Armenians abroad toward Russia’s orbit, the tsarist Education Ministry proposed a different model for reconciling Russo-Armenian domestic and foreign goals. Instead of national academies in Russia that recruited Armenians from abroad, Delianov suggested that the government provide “material and moral” sponsorship for “schools for the secular education of Armenians” in Turkey and Persia.⁷⁶⁷ Such institutions would strive to counteract the work of Western missionaries among non-Russian Armenians. They would promote the political interests of the tsarist state and the ecumenical interests of Echmiadzin by maintaining a pro-Russian curriculum. Staffed by Russian-Armenian graduates of the empire’s top universities, these schools would advertise the benefits of Russian subjecthood among foreign Armenians. Moreover, the Education Ministry insisted that Armenians from abroad should be recruited into the general-purpose academies and universities of the Russian empire, where they could learn alongside their tsarist-subject Armenian compatriots and Russian classmates.⁷⁶⁸ At such institutions, where no distinctions were made along ethnic or national lines, foreign Armenians would be inculcated with a spirit of political and cultural devotion toward Russia and toward Echmiadzin, spreading it among their compatriots upon returning to their home countries.⁷⁶⁹ The

⁷⁶⁶RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 9ob.

⁷⁶⁷RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 5-6. The ministry also proposed establishing “a considerable number” of Armenian seminaries throughout Russia.

⁷⁶⁸RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, ll. 6-7ob.

⁷⁶⁹The Education Ministry was confident that Turkish and Persian Armenian communities would send their children to be educated in Russia, producing new generations of “zealous devotees and agents of

Russian government's vacillation between the promotion of national, quasi-secular Armenian institutions and the cultural assimilation of Armenians reflected the complexity of the state's political encounter with the Armenian diaspora.

Seesaw Politics

Driven not by a master plan but by the realities of fluid geopolitics, Alexander II's government simultaneously confronted, co-opted, and cooperated with Armenians. At the same time as the state worked with the Armenian Church to stave off the influence of British, French, and American missionaries in the Caucasus, it resisted attempts by secular Armenians to form benevolent organizations. Tsarist authorities cooperated with Echmiadzin because they feared the political consequences of the diffusion of Western faiths among their non-Russian subjects. Yet St. Petersburg did not tolerate Armenian social initiatives that could yield political, cultural, and economic autonomy.

The Armenian Church looked to the government to silence its Russian and Armenian critics. In 1856, Professor Stepanos Nazarian of the Lazarev Institute founded in Moscow an Armenian-language journal, *Hyusisapayl* (Aurora Borealis).⁷⁷⁰ Caucasus Viceroy Bariatinskii and Count Alexei Orlov, the head of the Lazarev Institute, backed the journal's establishment, clearing the way for its approval by the Education Ministry.⁷⁷¹ But Nazarian, an advocate of secularism in Armenian literature and culture, turned his publication into a platform for Armenians unhappy with their clergy to voice their grievances. By 1858, prominent senior

Russia in the Orient, the more they melded with the intellectual life of Russia." See RGIA, f. 880, op. 5, d. 278, l. 10.

⁷⁷⁰RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 46, ll. 5-6ob.

⁷⁷¹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 46, l. 7.

clergymen protested to the government about the journal's "malicious articles, aimed against the Armenian-Gregorian clergy in general . . . and sharp, entirely false attacks on some of the members of our senior clergy."⁷⁷² The tsarist state took these complaints seriously, prompting investigations of *Hyusisapayl* by the Education Ministry and the St. Petersburg censorship committee. The government even questioned the individual censors who had cleared the questionable articles, forcing them to provide a defense against each accusation.⁷⁷³ Although the state finally ruled in Nazarian's favor and refused to ban his journal, its pursuit of the claims made by the Armenian clergy suggests a desire to appease the Armenian Church.

More acute examples of cooperation between the Russian state and the Armenian Church can be gleaned from the two sides' partnership against the encroachment of Western religions in the early 1860s. In 1861, eighty-one Armenians from *Shemakhinskaia* province, excommunicated by the Echmiadzin patriarch from the Armenian Church for unspecified offenses and consequently socially ostracized, sought to convert to Lutheranism.⁷⁷⁴ While Interior Minister Petr Valuev agreed that it was not in the autocracy's interests to permit their conversion, he also criticized the role of Patriarch Mateos in this affair. First, in a letter to Viceroy Bariatinskii, Valuev stressed not only the dogmatic kinship of Russian Orthodoxy and the Armenian Apostolic Church, but also highlighted the latter's role in Russian foreign policy.⁷⁷⁵ "The Armenians," insisted the interior minister, "no matter in which country they live,

⁷⁷²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 46, ll. 5-6ob. Armenian clergy from Astrakhan also asked to have local copies of *Hyusisapayl* withdrawn from circulation.

⁷⁷³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 46, ll. 13-19. The censors mainly disputed the Armenian clergy's claims that the journal contained anti-religious and anti-clerical statements.

⁷⁷⁴RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, ll. 4-8.

⁷⁷⁵RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, ll. 4ob-5.

always see in Russia a defender of their church and nationality—circumstances that have quite an important significance for our politics in the Orient.”⁷⁷⁶ Valuev asserted that Russia had always “shielded” Armenians, inside and outside Russia, from the efforts of Western missionaries, “who seek, with the strong assistance of Western powers, to spread Catholicism and Protestantism among Armenians, the natural result of which will be the strengthening of French and English influence at the expense of our standing in the Orient.”⁷⁷⁷

Thus what worried tsarist authorities more than the conversion of Armenians to Western faiths was the potential subsequent advancements of Western powers into Russia’s imperial domains. Valuev believed that, should Armenians embrace Protestantism, “then likely the English government will deem it necessary to set up its consuls in several cities of the Transcaucasus, and thus will strengthen England’s influence upon the natives of the Caucasus.”⁷⁷⁸ Another consideration played an important role here.

Valuev insisted that Patriarch Mateos’s intolerant policies had brought this crisis upon his church and the Russian government. The interior minister blamed the prelate for driving small groups of his own countrymen toward Protestantism. Valuev maintained that Mateos, in a zealous effort to combat the encroachment of Western faiths, excommunicated and ostracized many Armenians for such transgressions as group scripture reading and prayer, which the patriarch interpreted as sympathy toward Protestantism.⁷⁷⁹ Prior to his election to Echmiadzin, Mateos, then the patriarch of Constantinople, drove “thousands” of Armenians to secede from

⁷⁷⁶RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, ll. 4ob-5.

⁷⁷⁷RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, l. 5.

⁷⁷⁸RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, l. 7.

⁷⁷⁹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, ll. 5-5ob.

their national church and join Protestantism, which led to English agents pressuring Ottoman authorities to establish separate legal protections for non-Apostolic Armenians in Turkey. Now at the helm of Echmiadzin, Mateos engaged in “the same spirit of intolerance and religious persecution, so contrary to the spirit of Christian teachings and our laws, which permit wide tolerance in matters of conscience.”⁷⁸⁰ Consequently, Valuev believed that the petition of eighty-one Armenians to convert to Lutheranism was driven less by personal conviction than their persecution by Mateos. The minister suggested that the government reject their request but “urge” the patriarch to exercise more tolerance toward his flock, including permitting the eighty-one apostates to return to the church and to congregate for private worship.⁷⁸¹ Thus even when the state grew frustrated with Echmiadzin’s internal policies, it collaborated with the Armenian Church against Western creeds.

To be sure, few matters evoked as much cooperation between Echmiadzin and St. Petersburg as their opposition to Western proselytizing. Throughout the reign of Alexander II, Russian officials and Armenian clerics worked together to prevent Protestant and Catholic missionaries from making inroads among Armenians living within and outside the Russian empire. Whatever their national origin—Britain, France, Austria, Switzerland, or the United States—foreign religious agents represented a simultaneous threat to the autocracy and Echmiadzin. Especially after the Polish uprising of 1863, the Russian government viewed the conversion of its heterodox subjects to Western faiths as facilitating the growth of foreign

⁷⁸⁰RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, ll. 5ob-6.

⁷⁸¹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 10, d. 111, ll. 7ob-8. As late as September 1864 Armenians from *Shemakhinskaia guberniia* continued to seek permission to convert to Lutheranism, suggesting that this proposal failed.

political influence in the tsarist empire's periphery and beyond.⁷⁸² Given the close economic links and common national consciousness of Russian and non-Russian Armenians, the autocracy took note whenever foreign missionaries targeted non-tsarist subject Armenians for proselytism.

For example, in October 1873, the Russian consul general in the northern Persian city of Tabriz alerted St. Petersburg to the arrival of American missionaries.⁷⁸³ Flush with funds and apparently enjoying the approval of Persian authorities, the American proselytizers had the potential to make significant inroads among the shah's Armenian subjects. The Russian diplomat warned his superiors that local Armenian youths were particularly susceptible to the American efforts, insisting that "many young Armenians will easily go over to Protestantism, partly out of the precariousness of their religious convictions and partly out of selfish [*korystnykh*] reasons."⁷⁸⁴ Russian officials noted that among the recent Armenian converts, three young people were tsarist subjects.⁷⁸⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs alerted Echmiadzin to this information, urging Patriarch Kevork to "counter Protestant propaganda among Armenians."⁷⁸⁶ The Catholicos had already replaced the infirm Armenian bishop of Tabriz with a younger and better-educated cleric and ordered the renovation of local Armenian schools.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸²Paul Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 153-58.

⁷⁸³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 156, ll. 2-3.

⁷⁸⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 156, l. 2ob.

⁷⁸⁵The Russian consul general was also concerned that local Muslims' "fanaticism" would not simply render the Americans' efforts futile, but would unleash a bloody reprisal against all local Christian minorities, putting the lives of Russians and Armenians at risk. According to the Russian diplomat, the British consul general in Tabriz had already warned the American missionaries that they could expect no help from the British should conflict arise.

⁷⁸⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 156, l. 4ob.

⁷⁸⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 156, l. 8.

The presence of American missionaries riled the Russian government throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Two organizations in particular equally unnerved tsarist statesmen and Armenian clergymen: the American Bible Society (ABS) and the American Missionary Society (AMS). Enjoying Washington’s diplomatic backing, these entities targeted Armenians in Russia through the distribution of Armenian-language publications. As early as May 1872, the US ambassador to Turkey, George H. Boker, asked his Russian counterpart in Constantinople, Nikolai Ignatev, to secure the tsarist government’s permission for the ABS to import New Testament Bibles into Russia.⁷⁸⁸ Although the ABS published Bibles in twenty-three languages, it sought the right to import only Armenian-language publications into Russia, suggesting that the organization focused specifically on this national group. These Bibles were printed in modern Armenian vernacular (*ashkarabar*), accessible to countless non-elites, rather than the classical Armenian used by Echmiadzin (*grabar*).⁷⁸⁹ Boker arranged for Ignatev to receive a representative of the ABS, Isaac Bliss, who provided the Russian envoy with copies of the American Bibles.⁷⁹⁰ In a departure from diplomatic protocol, Boker intimated to Ignatev that the ABS possessed “secret methods” for smuggling its publications into Russia, but preferred to have official permission.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, ll. 1-2ob. Ignatev was a venerable statesman who would go on to hold the positions of minister of state properties and interior minister under Alexander III.

⁷⁸⁹According to Razmik Panossian, the new vernacular, based on the spoken language, represented “reform (and secularism),” while the classical language represented “conservatism (and the church).” See Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 136-38.

⁷⁹⁰Ignatev forwarded the American Bibles to St. Petersburg for analysis.

⁷⁹¹RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, l. 2.

St. Petersburg rebuffed the American request but corresponded with Echmiadzin to ascertain the position of the Armenian Church. Interior Minister Aleksandr Timashev, who judged the American appeal to be “inappropriate,” sent copies of the American Bibles to Patriarch Kevork and Baron Nikolai, the head of the Caucasus viceroy’s administration.⁷⁹² Kevork informed the authorities that the American texts contained “significant differences in the content and style” from Apostolic doctrine and found in the American Bibles “omissions of entire sentences, resulting in the distortion of teachings of not only the Armenian, but also the entire Eastern, church.”⁷⁹³ Baron Nikolai and the ministers in St. Petersburg concurred with Kevork’s assessment. By late 1873, the tsarist government had coordinated with the Armenian Church to forbid the importation of Armenian-language ABS publications into the Caucasus.

Concerted Russo-Armenian efforts to stem the work of Western missionaries hardly discouraged the US government, which continued to lobby on behalf of American groups. In the spring of 1882, the State Department, through its embassy, formally asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to permit the work of the American Bible Society.⁷⁹⁴ Washington wanted St. Petersburg to allow the ABS to distribute its publications in the Caucasus, and also sought the tsarist government’s protection of ABS missionaries in Estland province from Lutheran clergy.

As part of this request, the American chargé d’affaires Wickman Hoffman submitted to Russian officials the appeal of the ABS.⁷⁹⁵ The organization argued that “dispensing with all thought of pecuniary gain and desiring to promote good morals and the well-being of mankind,”

⁷⁹²RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, ll. 4-5.

⁷⁹³RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, ll. 8-8ob.

⁷⁹⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, l. 26.

⁷⁹⁵The full text of the petition is at RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, ll. 31-32.

it engaged in no direct proselytizing.⁷⁹⁶ It sought to “secure from the Russian government equal privileges with those accorded to other citizens of the United States and the subjects of other nations in carrying [out] its legitimate business of importing into the empire and offering for sale [its publications].” Importantly, the organization identified specifically tsarist-subject Armenians as its primary focus, insisting that the Russian government “forbids the Society to do for the Armenians of Russia what their brethren in Turkey are very willing to have done for them.”⁷⁹⁷ The group and, by extension, the US government, implied that the Christian tsar’s policies toward his heterodox Christians fell short of the Muslim sultan’s rule over his own Christian minorities. Such accusations were particularly acerbic in the context of Russo-Ottoman antagonisms in the wake of the war of 1877-78 and the attendant anti-Armenian climate in the Ottoman empire.

In rejecting the American requests, the Russian state cited the wishes of the Armenian Church. Count Dmitrii Tolstoi, the interior minister and chief of the gendarmes, wrote to US Ambassador William Hunt in March 1883, that, “under Russian law, Armenian-language works of spiritual content, which are imported from abroad, are circulated in the Caucasus only with the approval of the Echmiadzin Patriarch Catholicos or the Armenian-Gregorian Synod.”⁷⁹⁸ Consequently, Russia’s “prohibition on the distribution in the empire of publications of the American Bible Society followed according to the conclusion of the [Echmiadzin] leadership.”⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, l. 31.

⁷⁹⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, ll. 31ob-32.

⁷⁹⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, ll. 57-57ob.

⁷⁹⁹RGIA, f. 821, op. 5, d. 999, l. 57ob.

Thus the autocracy signaled its recognition of Echmiadzin's prerogatives within the Russian empire. This case stands out from the Russo-Armenian cooperation against British and French missionaries because the Russian government had fewer geopolitical reasons to fear the encroachment of American influence in the Caucasus. Unlike the Western European powers, the United States posed no immediate challenge to Russian hegemony in its southern periphery. Until the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Russo-American relations progressed amicably, underscored by the sale of Alaska in 1867 and St. Petersburg's support for the Union during the Civil War.⁸⁰⁰ As the influential newspaper *Golos* highlighted during the Congress of Berlin in 1878, with the possible exception of Germany, "there is no country in the Old or New World that elicits as much sympathy from Russia as America."⁸⁰¹ Ties between the two countries worsened only toward the latter decades of the century with the rise of anti-Jewish political sentiment in Russia and broader ideological differences during the conservatism of Alexander III. Thus, with Russia having little to fear from potential American political influence on Armenians, its opposition to the Washington-backed efforts of the ABS was informed by its desire to appease Echmiadzin and to maintain symbiotic ties with Armenians.

Yet strife was as much a characteristic of the Russo-Armenian dynamic as partnership. The autocracy especially resisted Armenian social initiatives that it feared could yield political or economic implications for nominal Armenian autonomy. For example, in 1865 the government barred the formation of a private, secular Armenian benevolent society that promoted commercial training. A wealthy tsarist-subject Armenian businessman, Nikita Sanasarov,

⁸⁰⁰Norman E. Saul makes this argument in *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

⁸⁰¹*Golos*, 21 April 1878, no. 109.

envisioned a philanthropic organization that would “improve the intellectual and material wellbeing of Armenians” in the Russian empire.⁸⁰²

Sanasarov emphasized the political benefits to Russia of ensuring that its Armenian subjects flourish, echoing the arguments made decades earlier by the Lazarevs. The businessman insisted that the organization he proposed was necessary in order to maintain the superiority of tsarist-subject Armenians over their external compatriots, and thus to ensure Russia’s supremacy over its imperial rivals in the Orient. He argued that Armenians in Europe and the Near East, “from time immemorial have viewed Russia as a patron of the Armenian people and [also view] their compatriots living in Russia as those who enjoy the fruits of European civilization the most.”⁸⁰³ Yet now Turkey and the Western powers were working to depose Russia as the benefactor of the pan-Armenian nation, threatening the tsarist empire’s geopolitical interests. Not only had the Porte recently granted new legal protections to its Armenian subjects, but “at the same time England endeavors to master the Oriental trade, which Russia from long ago has maintained with Asia through Armenians.”⁸⁰⁴

To prevent such developments, Sanasarov argued that Russia had to ensure that its Armenians remain intellectually and economically more advanced than their compatriots abroad. Toward this goal, the benevolent society he proposed would spread among Russian Armenians basic knowledge of commerce and business, seeking to maintain the competitive edge of former generations of Armenian merchants, which Sanasarov believed had faded among his compatriots in Russia. To achieve these aims, his group would fund vocational schools, pay students' tuitions,

⁸⁰²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 72, ll. 1-2ob. Citation on l. 2.

⁸⁰³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 72, l. 1.

⁸⁰⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 72, l. 1ob.

and publish business-related booklets.⁸⁰⁵ The Interior Ministry's Department of Foreign Faiths supported Sanasarov's petition, agreeing that its implementation was likely to carry political advantages for the empire.⁸⁰⁶ However, Interior Minister Valuev and the minister of education disagreed. They questioned the project's feasibility, doubted the financial stability of the program, and criticized the proposal's vagueness.⁸⁰⁷ The notion of a privately initiated, secular benevolent society that promoted Armenian commercial training proved too radical for the autocracy. Because neither the government nor Echmiadzin would control such an enterprise, officials feared that it would animate a self-reliant, secular Armenian identity that had fewer incentives to work within the tsarist political and social system.

This became a recurring tension. Seven years later, in 1872, two Armenian businessmen from Astrakhan sought to establish an "Astrakhan Armenian Benevolent Society." The proposed organization would "spread moral and intellectual education as well as crafts [training] among the poor Armenian children of both sexes in Astrakhan."⁸⁰⁸ The two philanthropists had already invested over 6,000 rubles into the project, and turned to the regional tsarist authorities to secure the final permissions. But the governor of Astrakhan criticized not only the plan but also its broader implications. In his assessment of the request for the Interior Ministry, the governor argued that the Russian government had historically erred in creating an insular Armenian community in Astrakhan that failed to integrate into its social, cultural, and economic surroundings. The governor insisted that the imperial state "artificially created in Astrakhan a

⁸⁰⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 72, ll. 2-2ob.

⁸⁰⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 72, l. 10ob.

⁸⁰⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 72, ll. 12-14.

⁸⁰⁸RGIA, f. 1287, op. 43, d. 502, l. 1.

privileged Armenian society, the isolation [*zamknutost*'] and orientation of which, given its legal rights, is now an anomaly in our time, which has drawn the attention of the Interior Ministry."⁸⁰⁹ Consequently, the governor opposed the establishment of a new Armenian academy, which would "only complicate the relationship between the [local] administration and the Armenian society." St. Petersburg concurred with this assessment, rejecting the proposed organization for the penurious children of Astrakhan Armenians.

The government's wariness of the solidification of a political Armenian identity within and beyond Russia influenced its policies toward tsarist Armenians sending remittances to their compatriots abroad. Only with the tsar's explicit approval were Armenians permitted to send financial assistance to their neighboring compatriots. For example, when in early 1871 a large fire in Constantinople damaged an Armenian church and several schools and homes, local Armenians turned to the Russian ambassador for help.⁸¹⁰ Through him, Ottoman Armenians petitioned the tsarist government to permit the collection of donations among the Armenians of the South Caucasus. The state conferred with the Echmiadzin patriarchy, whose consent led to Tsar Alexander II's approval of the petition. In a different example, in 1874 the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople requested the help of his Echmiadzin counterpart for the "starving" Armenians of Anatolia.⁸¹¹ The autocracy again permitted Echmiadzin to collect donations among tsarist-subject Armenians for the benefit of their compatriots in Turkey.

Yet when Armenians failed to seek the government's preliminary permission for such activity, the autocracy interpreted it as a sign of something sinister. When, in the spring of 1872,

⁸⁰⁹RGIA, f. 1287, op. 43, d. 502, l. 1ob.

⁸¹⁰RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 139, ll. 1-7.

⁸¹¹RGIA, f. 1268, op. 19, d. 191, ll. 1-6. It appears they had suffered a poor harvest.

an earthquake in northern Persia damaged several local Armenian communities, they turned to Echmiadzin for help.⁸¹² Apparently without the precursory nod of the tsarist government, the patriarch began collecting donations among Russia's Armenians for their compatriots in Persia.⁸¹³ Soon Russian officials in Astrakhan alerted the Interior Ministry to this unsanctioned campaign. Astrakhan governor N. N. Bippen saw in this development another symptom of nascent Armenian nationalism, emphasizing to St. Petersburg that "it will be hardly convenient in the future to permit such exclusive donations, [which] artificially buttress claims to the existence of an 'Armenian nation.'"⁸¹⁴ The state soon halted the campaign, finding that it deviated from the law (*Ustav ob upravlenii delami Armiano-Gregorianskoi tserkvi*) by failing to secure the tsar's permission for the collection of donations for the benefit of foreign subjects.⁸¹⁵

Such incidents remind us that, throughout the nineteenth century, the tsarist empire adapted its methods of rule to govern one part of the Armenian diaspora. The government strove to delineate a sphere of influence and affiliation for Russian-subject Armenians, seeking to prevent the maturation of a consciousness of a cohesive, multistate nation that transcended imperial boundaries. Such a scenario would jeopardize Russia's borders in the South Caucasus and beyond, because Armenians could not be allowed to place their national allegiances above their civil subjecthood to the tsarist empire. Neither the domestic secularization of Armenians

⁸¹²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 143, ll. 2-4ob.

⁸¹³The Armenian bishop of Astrakhan claimed that he believed that the state had sanctioned the donation campaign. It is unclear whether this is something that the patriarch told his subordinates. The Astrakhan bishop argued that he "always considered it my Christian duty to help the needy, inviting my congregation to do so [as well], seeing *nothing illegal in this good deed.*" (Emphasis in the original – underline.) See RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 143, l. 4ob.

⁸¹⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 143, l. 1ob.

⁸¹⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 143, ll. 6-9.

nor their church-supported interimperial bonds could be tolerated if St. Petersburg was to continue deploying the Armenian Church for its foreign policy. The dispersed Armenian nation's cultural kinship remained a liability even when the autocracy managed to harness it for its needs. To be sure, Russian statesmen recognized these dangers well, emphasizing that self-initiated Armenian donation campaigns were against tsarist interests because "they can have an international significance" (*mezhdunarodnoe znachenie*).⁸¹⁶ With the conflagration of interimperial war between Russia and Turkey in 1877-78, such considerations vis-à-vis Armenians intensified.

Armenians and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, or "Intentional Misunderstandings and Political Prejudices"

During the pan-European political crisis of 1878, when the West clamored against Russia's gains in the wake of its thrashing of Turkey, the influential St. Petersburg periodical *Golos* voiced the Russian public's frustrations when it lamented, "The future historian of Europe will be stunned by this period's entanglement of understandings and contradictions. He will find nothing similar in the annals of the world, and perhaps will entitle that portion of his work 'intentional misunderstandings and political prejudices.'" ⁸¹⁷ Indeed, complex interimperial, interethnic, and intercultural dynamics characterized both the immediate results and the broader reverberations of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78.

Several coalescing factors triggered that war. First, Russia's defeat two decades earlier in the Crimean War rendered revenge an important if implicit aspect of tsarist foreign policy. Second, rising nationalism in the Balkans, especially among the southern Slavic subjects of the sultan, grew in intensity while their imperial overlord declined in strength. Third, the Serb

⁸¹⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 143, ll. 9-9ob.

⁸¹⁷*Golos*, 19 April 1878, no. 107.

insurrection against Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875-77 aroused as much sympathy in St. Petersburg as concern in Western European capitals. While historiographical attention often accents the experience of the Balkan Slavs, the role played by Armenians on either side of the Russo-Ottoman imperial frontier in the Caucasus deserves examination because of its impact upon public opinion and state policy in Russia.

Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov orchestrated Russia's international resurgence after its Crimean shaming. Few tsarist officials played as decisive a role in reversing Russia's diplomatic and territorial losses in the 1850s as that statesman did under the reign of Tsar Alexander II. In April 1856, the new reformist emperor appointed Gorchakov to succeed Carl Nesselrode as foreign minister, ending the latter's four-decade command of Russian foreign policy. Gorchakov took up his task with alacrity, announcing that "the emperor wishes to live in good harmony with all governments," and also issuing his famous declaration: "They say that Russia sulks. Russia does not sulk. Russia is collecting herself."⁸¹⁸ As foreign minister (1856-82) and chancellor (1867-83), Gorchakov exercised more control over Russian relations with its neighbors than any official in the empire. An adroit diplomat and strategist, his policies ensured not only that Russia "collected" itself after defeat but also regained its stature as a perennial power in the international arena. He faced many challenges.

In 1875, rebellions by Ottoman-subject Bulgarians, Bosnians, Herzegovinians, Serbs, and Montenegrins challenged the Porte's hold on the Balkans, leading to Muslim-Christian atrocities and raising international concerns about a new clash between the West and Russia over the fate of the declining Turkish state. In response to Western fears of Russian advancement, Gorchakov

⁸¹⁸Quoted in Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27.

denied that St. Petersburg sought to conquer Ottoman territories. In an October 1876 letter to tsarist ambassador in London Petr Andreevich Shuvalov, the chancellor asked rhetorically, “What evidence must be provided to English ministers of [our] disinterest, [which is] based not on political advantages, but on rationality and common sense?”⁸¹⁹

Yet Gorchakov reiterated Russia’s self-promotion as the patron of Muslim-ruled Christians. The chancellor emphasized the “popular and Christian sentiment in Russia, which is too close to these countries and associated with them by [too] many ties [to be] limited to academic sympathies.”⁸²⁰ The statesman argued that these unique considerations placed upon the tsar responsibilities “which His Majesty cannot evade.” But Gorchakov insisted that all of Europe had a collective obligation to prevent the bloodshed of innocent Christians, for “the Eastern Question is not only a Russian question; it concerns the tranquility of Europe, of the world, and common prosperity, mankind, and Christian civilization.”⁸²¹ The plight of Ottoman Christians was more than a token geopolitical tool wielded by a zealous, resurgent empire. Throughout the war, tsarist agents not just protected Ottoman Christians but also cooperated with them against Turks. These circumstances manifested clearly in the Caucasus theater of war.

While the majority of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78 took place in the Balkans, events in the Caucasus and Anatolia proved no less consequential to the postwar era. The tsar placed his brother, Caucasus Viceroy Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, in command of the war effort in the Caucasus. By the end of 1877, over 113,000 tsarist officers and conscripts served in the Caucasus Army, outnumbered by the nearly 642,000 men mobilized for service in the

⁸¹⁹RGVIA, f. 485, op. 1, d. 594, l. 1.

⁸²⁰RGVIA, f. 485, op. 1, d. 594, l. 2.

⁸²¹RGVIA, f. 485, op. 1, d. 594, l. 2.

European theater.⁸²² The viceroy's immediate subordinate, who wielded the real authority over the military campaign in the Caucasus and Anatolia, was General Count Mikhail Loris-Melikov. An Armenian-heritage aristocrat born in Tiflis, Loris-Melikov completed his education in St. Petersburg after his expulsion from Moscow's Lazarev Institute for minor mischief. Decorated for his exploits against the highlanders in the North Caucasus and against the Turks during the Crimean War, the general also earned the tsarist political elites' respect for his managerial acumen. The viceroy trusted his general, handpicking him to spearhead Russia's campaign against Turkey in the Caucasus and granting him freedom of action. In December 1876, the Grand Duke bestowed on Loris-Melikov "complete independence" by excusing him from reporting to the War Ministry and the general staff in St. Petersburg.⁸²³ Essentially, Loris-Melikov had only two superiors: the Caucasus viceroy and the tsar. Such *carte blanche* was necessary because the general confronted enemies outside and inside the tsar's southern domain.

Some tsarist officials conceived of the Russo-Ottoman conflict as a clash between Islam and Christianity, fretting over the allegiance of tsarist-subject Muslims in the Caucasus. Loris-Melikov warned Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich in July 1877 that the Porte "prepares for a desperate struggle, seeing it as a battle for the life and death of Islam, and recognizing that in the Asia Minor [*Malo-Aziiskom*] theater of war [it] seeks more important results than a successful

⁸²²RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 8636, l. 3ob. Thus Russia mobilized about 755,470 regular forces for service in the 1877-78 war, taking advantage of the introduction of the draft in 1874. In 1812 about 576,000 regular and 320,000 irregular troops battled Napoleon. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29, Russia mobilized just 229,000 regular troops. During the Crimean War, Russia's army numbered over 1.7 million regular and 282,000 irregular soldiers, but only 426,000 were sent into combat. The growth of the armed forces paralleled the growth of the empire's population, which increased from about 41 million in 1812 to 74 million in 1858. All statistics from RGVIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 8636, ll. 3ob-36ob.

⁸²³RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 127, ll. 15-15ob.

defense.”⁸²⁴ The general remained convinced that Turkish forces aimed to invade tsarist territory in the South Caucasus, possibly Yerevan *guberniia*, and to rally local Muslims to their aid, igniting a major anti-Russian insurrection.⁸²⁵ Loris-Melikov cautioned Mikhail Nikolaevich that “the Turks indeed base their upcoming offensive actions upon the cooperation of the Muslims of the Transcaucasus.”⁸²⁶ The general warned the viceroy that Ottoman authorities viewed their army in eastern Anatolia as “a lever for raising among their coreligionists [in tsarist territory] a tidal wave of Islam.”⁸²⁷ Loris-Melikov was convinced that “the Turks recognize well that their success in the Transcaucasus will deliver a blow not only to our dominion [there], but also to all our influence in the rest of Asia.”⁸²⁸

Concerns about a Turkish invasion did not prevent the tsarist army from launching its own incursions into Ottoman territory. The most successful of these attacks captured the strategically important fortress-city of Kars in November 1877. Two Armenian-heritage tsarist commanders played decisive roles in the city’s conquest: Loris-Melikov and General Ivan Davidovich Lazarev. The victors took 10,000 Turkish soldiers prisoner and seized large armories and supplies.⁸²⁹ With Russian forces in Anatolia and the Balkans advancing rapidly, the Porte

⁸²⁴RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5.

⁸²⁵RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 70, ll. 6-6ob.

⁸²⁶RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 70, l. 5ob.

⁸²⁷RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 70, l. 7.

⁸²⁸RGIA, f. 866, op. 1, d. 70, ll. 7-7ob. Loris-Melikov issued these warnings to secure additional reinforcements in the South Caucasus.

⁸²⁹RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 35, l. 13. Kars remained under the tsar’s control until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918.

sued for peace in the spring of 1878. In early March, the combatants signed an armistice in San Stefano, a small village near Constantinople.⁸³⁰

San Stefano galvanized nationalism among many ethnic groups. The treaty guaranteed an autonomous Principality of Bulgaria, allowing it to shed nearly 500 years of Ottoman suzerainty. Romania gained its independence while Serbia and Montenegro nearly doubled in size at the expense of Ottoman territories. The accord also carried important implications for Armenians, because Russia annexed much of the territory historically labeled Western Armenia, including the Ottoman provinces of Kars, Batum, Alashkert, Beyazit, Artvin, and Olti. While in most of these districts Armenians comprised a national minority, thousands of Ottoman Armenians suddenly gained the prospect of tsarist subjecthood. Such dramatic Russian gains unsettled the Western powers, which had remained on the sidelines of that imperial clash.

Politicians and the public from London to Paris to Vienna clamored against what they saw as Russia's unilateral recalibration of the European balance of power. Andrei Kraevskii, an influential pioneer of the independent periodical press in imperial Russia,⁸³¹ noted with annoyance that the London newspapers met news of the San Stefano Treaty "quite coolly [ves'ma kholodno]."⁸³² *The Standard* suggested blockading the Dardanelles and occupying Egypt, while the *Daily Telegraph* went as far as urging the government to make "energetic" preparations for war. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post*, Kraevskii alerted St.

⁸³⁰The full text of the treaty is in RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 17, ll. 1-4. For a translation, see Basil Dmytryshyn, ed. *Imperial Russia: A Source Book, 1700-1917* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Publishers, 1990), 363-72.

⁸³¹Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 34-37.

⁸³²RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 52, l. 240.

Petersburg officials, printed “bellicose articles” calling for England to seek “vengeance” for Russia’s transgressions.⁸³³ Kraevskii also summarized the fears of the Austrian cabinet, which objected to the independence and expansion of Bulgaria, predicting that it would “threaten Europe with constant disturbances.”⁸³⁴ With the Western European capitals seemingly united in their opposition to the Russian gains vis-à-vis the Ottoman empire, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck hosted a conference of the European powers in the summer of 1878.

The Congress of Berlin, held from mid-June to mid-July 1878, sought to reconcile Russia’s defeat of Turkey with the geopolitical realities of the entire European continent. At the core of the debate were the implications of the Eastern Questions, yet again threatening to pit the West against Russia because of the Porte’s weakened hold on its vast domains. Britain, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary aimed to truncate the tsar’s gains at San Stefano, fearing the geopolitical reverberations of Russia’s westward expansion. The added natural resources, territorial annexations, and population absorptions stipulated at San Stefano rendered Russia an indelible leviathan, upending the post-Crimean European balance of power.

To the Russian public and statesmen, San Stefano was the rightful rejoinder to the injustices of the Crimean War, when the Western powers backed Turkey against Russia and imposed costly concessions upon St. Petersburg. When, in March 1878, news broke that the Europeans planned to debate the provisions of San Stefano, *Golos* exclaimed, “for Russian nature, the prolonged paroxysm of this crisis, incessantly revived in the form of various

⁸³³RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 52, l. 251.

⁸³⁴RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 52, l. 260.

conferences and protocols, is considerably more unbearable than the horrors of war.”⁸³⁵ The periodical echoed the sentiments of many officials when it insisted confidently:

No European power, not even England, will dare to reduce that which we gained on the path toward the liberation of the Christian tribes and acquired in the historical process of declining Turkish authority on the Balkan Peninsula. No one has the right to reduce the terms of our compensation that we have obtained from Turkey for war casualties.⁸³⁶

Golos charged Europe with apathy toward the plight of Ottoman Christians, including Armenians. The newspaper underscored this factor as one justification for tsarist actions against the sultan’s empire, reminding its readers that “Russia alone has shouldered the whole gigantic struggle against the enemies of the Christian religion and European civilization; the Russian people alone have paid with floods of blood for the liberation of the Christian population on the Balkan Peninsula, and only through a new war against Russia can she be forced to relinquish her achievements!”⁸³⁷ Private readers’ letters to the periodical also expressed dismay at Europe’s perceived preoccupation with the actions of Russia rather than Turkey, accusing Western diplomats of overlooking the Porte’s abuse of its Christians.⁸³⁸

To be sure, the Russian public echoed the government’s focus on the conditions of the sultan’s minorities, and the affairs of Ottoman Armenians prompted no less outcry than the plight of the Balkan Slavs. *Golos*, among the most vociferous unofficial Russian advocates for the Armenian cause, reached over 22,000 subscribers on the eve of the war in 1877, securing its

⁸³⁵ *Golos*, 1 March 1878, no. 60.

⁸³⁶ *Golos*, 1 March 1878, no. 60. For other examples of criticism of England’s foreign policy, see *Golos* editions from 5 March 1878, no. 64, 9 March 1878, no. 68, 16 March 1878, no. 75, and 21 March 1878, no. 80. In one fascinating article, the newspaper boasted, “in the anticipated war with England, we are preparing to meet the English at home, and at the same time preparing to visit their colonies.” See *Golos*, 11 April 1878, no. 101.

⁸³⁷ *Golos*, 2 March 1878, no. 61.

⁸³⁸ For one such example, published on the front page, see *Golos*, 4 March 1878, no. 63.

position among the imperial capital's esteemed dailies.⁸³⁹ Throughout the spring and summer of 1878, the newspaper not only covered European diplomatic negotiations but also rallied the tsarist government and public in support of the Ottoman Armenians.

Golos voiced Russia's insistence on the protection of non-Slavic Christians within the Ottoman domain. St. Petersburg sought not "conquests at the expense of its vanquished enemy," not the "destruction of the Ottoman empire," and not the "total annihilation of every follower of the Prophet."⁸⁴⁰ Instead, Russia demanded the "complete, definitive liberation of Christians, but not only Slavs, as they think in Western Europe."⁸⁴¹ This clear reference to Armenians and Greeks was intended to reaffirm Russia's support for the Ottoman Armenian population and intended as much for domestic consumption as external declaration. Indeed, as the Congress of Berlin approached, *Golos* grew increasingly vocal in its support of the Armenian cause. When, in April 1878, Circassian and Kurdish irregular cavalry raided several Armenian villages in eastern Anatolia, the Constantinople-based correspondent of *Golos* reported that "the Porte has paid no attention" to these abuses and that Ottoman Armenians "remain in the most critical position."⁸⁴² Citing the legal provisions of the San Stefano Treaty, the journalist urged the tsarist government to "take upon itself the protection of these unfortunate Armenians."

Russian officials—in occupied Ottoman territories, in the Caucasus, and in St. Petersburg—remained cognizant of the humanitarian, political, and logistical challenges posed by the Armenian dimension of the Eastern Question. As self-declared protectors of the sultan's

⁸³⁹See McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 39-46.

⁸⁴⁰*Golos*, 11 March 1878, no. 70.

⁸⁴¹*Golos*, 11 March 1878, no. 70.

⁸⁴²*Golos*, 7 April 1878, no. 97.

Christians, Russians had assumed a responsibility to ensure the welfare of Armenians, who, in turn, had eagerly accepted the promises of tsarist patronage. But no clear policy dictated the resettlement of threatened Ottoman Armenian communities to Russian territory, and the post-San Stefano political uncertainty yielded an ambiguous climate in the Caucasus and occupied Anatolia. As early as March 1878, tsarist officers in occupied Ottoman territories reported that San Stefano “was greeted especially joyfully by the local Christian population, in hopes that the territory we have occupied will enter into the domain of our empire and that thus they will be forever liberated from Turkish rule.”⁸⁴³ But with growing rumors of the Russian army’s imminent withdrawal from occupied territories, local Christians, mainly Armenians, were “convinced that the Turks will not forgive them the sympathy they have demonstrated toward us since our entry” into Ottoman lands. This fear of retribution compelled a “significant portion of Christians to wish to resettle into our domains, with the adoption of Russian subjecthood.”⁸⁴⁴ Over 2,000 families had already expressed this intention to Russian officers, and were “only waiting for our instructions.”

When no Russian permission for relocation came, Ottoman Armenians prepared for unsanctioned immigration. Tsarist agents in Erzurum reported in April 1878 that local Christians intended to follow the withdrawing Russian army, without formal approval.⁸⁴⁵ Although officers took “all measures to prevent” the relocation, desperate petitioners arrived at the Russian camp “daily,” declaring their intention to move eastward with or without authorization. Tsarist agents warned their superiors that many families and “perhaps entire communities” of Ottoman

⁸⁴³RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 11.

⁸⁴⁴RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 11ob.

⁸⁴⁵RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 40-40ob.

Christians wished to become Russian subjects. These Armenians and other Christians had “most compromised themselves against the Turkish government through their complete hospitality [*polnoe radushie*] toward Russian troops during the war,” and were “convinced that no articles of peace treaties . . . will protect them from the abuse of Muslims.”⁸⁴⁶ Russian officers emphasized that the refugees were prepared to settle in tsarist domains under any conditions, waiting for neither logistical nor financial preparations to be made, because they insisted that even a life of penury would surpass the “oppression” they were certain to experience after the departure of tsarist forces. As a sign of their determination, some Ottoman Armenian farmers refused to sow their fields, confident of their imminent relocation.⁸⁴⁷

Russian officials in the captured Ottoman territories struggled to prevent an unauthorized exodus of local Armenians into the tsarist South Caucasus. The tsar’s officers insisted to Armenians that their immigration to Russia could be sanctioned not by local military agents but by the highest levels of the government in St. Petersburg.⁸⁴⁸ Because signs indicated that thousands of would-be refugees were ready to flood the valleys and plains of the South Caucasus, Russian authorities searched for ways to delay the resettlement until proper diplomatic negotiations and logistical preparations could be carried out. One exasperated junior officer reported to his superiors that he was “constantly riding around, persuading and reassuring [Armenians], but nothing works, they all repeat the same thing: that they will be lost without

⁸⁴⁶RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 40ob.

⁸⁴⁷RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 41.

⁸⁴⁸RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 41-41ob.

[Russian] troops.”⁸⁴⁹ While the tsarist officialdom delayed its permission for Armenians to relocate from Turkey to Russia, the Petersburg press voiced its support for Western Armenians.

No major periodical advocated as much for the Armenian cause during the 1878 crisis as the newspaper *Golos*. It rallied Russian society and the state to rescue the sultan’s hapless Christians and to fulfill its promises to Armenians. On the eve of the Congress of Berlin, the paper emphasized the antiquity and ecumenical identity of Armenians, labeling that nation “one of the civilized nations of antiquity, part of the Greek sphere of ancient civilization.”⁸⁵⁰ The Armenian nation’s early adoption of Christianity “distinguished it from the orbit of Asiatic peoples, placed it in contradiction to their worldview, and aroused [their] hatred.” Branding Armenians “an outpost of Christianity in Asia,” *Golos* portrayed them as the first redoubt against the attacks of “the enemies of Christianity,” implying that Armenians had earned special gratitude from the “Christian world.” The paper also insisted that the Armenians of Anatolia “reside upon their native soil, within the confines of ancient Armenia.” Supposedly outnumbering Turks 2,000,000 to 900,000 in Anatolia, Armenians enjoyed no advantages of numerical majority, instead falling victim to a lethargic regime and marauding neighbors:

The living conditions of Armenians under Turkish rule present an outrageous [*vopishchuiu*] picture: Armenians live among a predatory, armed population of Kurds, and not only do not receive Turkish authorities’ protection from Kurdish raids, which are usually condoned by those authorities, but also are deprived of the ability to defend the honor and dignity of their family [and] the sanctity of their temples, because they are forbidden from carrying weapons.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁹RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 59.

⁸⁵⁰*Golos*, 28 May 1878, no. 146. The next two pages are based on this two-page article.

⁸⁵¹*Golos*, 28 May 1878, no. 146.

Golos also stressed that Armenians found no relief in the Ottoman judicial system, where no Christian could hope for a favorable result without the corroborating testimony of a Muslim witness, a rare occurrence because the Koran prohibits Muslims from testifying against coreligionists. The newspaper also enumerated the ways in which Ottoman Armenians enjoyed no hereditary property rights, unlike their Muslim neighbors. The Russian empire, the periodical insisted, had a moral responsibility to act.

Golos argued that Armenians had been loyal Russian allies for generations, assembling militias and serving as senior officers in charge of Russian armies in past wars. While the tsar's Armenians served in his military, the sultan's Armenians demonstrated overt "sympathy" toward Russia, for which they repeatedly paid with blood. "But never has Turkish rage against Armenians reached the stage that it did in this war," insisted *Golos*, "the systematic extermination of Armenians now constitutes the state doctrine of the Porte, *hekmeti khiukiumet* (state secret), as Turkish rulers say." The periodical dismissed the nominal reforms in Anatolia promised at San Stefano, arguing that they were too vague and insufficient to provide tangible security to local Christians. *Golos* echoed the fears of Ottoman Armenians when it argued that Muslim massacres of Christians were certain to take place upon the tsarist army's withdrawal.

To prevent such tragedies, *Golos* urged Russian diplomats at the Congress of Berlin to secure from the Porte concrete guarantees of protection for Ottoman Armenians. Most importantly, the periodical demanded the establishment of an "autonomous" Western Armenia within the Ottoman empire, analogous to the concessions granted to Bulgaria and other Ottoman subjects in the Balkans. "Armenia has the right," declared *Golos*, "to receive the same autonomy and the same reforms as will be introduced in Bosnia, Herzegovina and other Christian provinces of European Turkey." The paper emphasized both past and future Russo-Armenian cooperation:

Thus, Armenians would receive from us a just reward for that assistance, which they have provided to us in all of our wars with Turkey and Persia from the times of Peter the Great, and for those hardships and persecutions, which they have consequently endured at the hands of their Muslim rulers. Their sympathy toward us would gain a real foundation, and there is no doubt that the sympathy of such an intelligent, diligent, and large population of Asia Minor [*Maloi Azii*] can prove in time to be quite important.⁸⁵²

Thus the St. Petersburg press announced its unequivocal support for the Armenians of Turkey, urging the tsarist state to make the Armenian cause a key demand of its negotiations in Berlin. Despite the fact that Western European pressure at the Congress of Berlin greatly reduced Russia's gains at San Stefano, dashing any dreams of an autonomous Western Armenia, the vociferous pleas of *Golos* underscore the Russian public's support for the plight of Ottoman Armenians. *Golos* would not have printed such articles if its editors did not believe that their readers would be receptive to them. The newspaper took a liberal stance on the Eastern Question, urging a diplomatic solution that would yield a national home for Armenians. At a time when Bulgaria and other Slavic nations attained the contours of statehood, such as constitutions, the Russian liberal public included the non-Slavic Armenians in its polemics. Rather than the solidarity of ethnic kinship that drove pan-Slavism, liberal Russians' support for Western Armenians was grounded in notions of religious kinship and political synergy. Although this agenda did not match tsarist policy, it vocalized liberals' support for the Armenian cause. Ottoman Armenians learned of *Golos*'s efforts and expressed their gratitude in August 1878.

Several weeks after the disappointing results of the Berlin Congress became known, 285 Armenians from Erzurum signed a letter to the editors of *Golos*. The representatives thanked the

⁸⁵² *Golos*, 28 May 1878, no. 146.

newspaper and, by extension, the Russian public for its support of Ottoman Armenians.⁸⁵³ They conveyed their broader community's "feelings of immeasurable gratitude for those words of truth and defense, which you express on the pages of *Golos*." In a clear reciprocity toward the paeans of the Russian periodical, Ottoman Armenians underscored that a "people oppressed for centuries sheds tears of gratitude to the tsar-liberator, whose all-imperial will breaks the chains of slavery, which barbarism has placed upon the humble followers of Christ's teachings."⁸⁵⁴

Thus the sultan's Armenian subjects signaled their acceptance of the themes—ecumenical identity and minority oppression—that *Golos* and other Russian sympathizers promoted as justifications of tsarist support for the Armenian cause. Ottoman Armenians embraced the often-sensationalized and melodramatic Russian characterizations of their plight, which mixed facts and apocryphal accounts. In juxtaposing their "slavery" and Christianity against the "barbarism" and ostensibly Muslim oppression committed by their imperial rulers and neighbors, Ottoman Armenians adroitly evoked the very themes that galvanized the Russian public and statesmen. Such efforts bore tangible fruit.

Ottoman Armenian immigration into Russian territory started before the end of the war and the finalization of the new Russo-Ottoman boundary at the Congress of Berlin. Although Russian officers in Anatolia were often confused about their orders, the state's decision to abstain from forcefully preventing the immigration of Ottoman Armenians evinces St. Petersburg's decision. The exodus started as early as June 1877, when almost 2,000 Armenian

⁸⁵³RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 145-46. Tsarist officers in occupied territories rushed to assure their superiors that the Armenians had composed the letter on their own, without the participation of any Russian officials.

⁸⁵⁴RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, l. 146.

families accompanied the first withdrawing units of the tsarist army.⁸⁵⁵ Other groups of refugees snuck into the South Caucasus without Russian permission, prompting the governor of Yerevan to complain in July 1877 that “whole crowds” of Ottoman subjects had infiltrated his district. Soon Armenians from Erzurum, Alashkert, and other provinces moved en masse to newly annexed Kars and other former Ottoman districts.⁸⁵⁶

By the fall of 1878, the Russian empire formally opened the gates for Ottoman Armenians to settle in the South Caucasus. Several semi-official organizations sprang up in the region to facilitate the newcomers’ settlement. The refugees received 20 rubles per family as well as food and lumber for construction.⁸⁵⁷ The authorities granted supplemental financial support, usually an additional 15 rubles, to the most destitute families. The governor of Yerevan *guberniia* estimated that 50,000 rubles would be required to support the incoming refugees over the winter of 1878-79, suggesting that up to 2,500 families were expected.⁸⁵⁸ While most of the funding came from the imperial treasury, the refugees also received financial support from private donors. The Yerevan Committee for the Relief of the Immigrants from Turkey, for example, collected money from local residents, and its benefactors included the governor of Yerevan *guberniia*, M. I. Roslavlev, who donated a modest 50 rubles to the cause.⁸⁵⁹ Other sources of donation included newspapers and individuals in other parts of the Russian empire

⁸⁵⁵National Archive of Armenia (NAA), f. 94, op. 1, d. 208, l. 270.

⁸⁵⁶RGVIA, f. 15322, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 168-72.

⁸⁵⁷NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 247, ll. 1-2.

⁸⁵⁸NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 207, l. 4. The exact number, of course, depends on each family’s financial grant. If all 50,000 rubles were distributed to the refugees and each family received 20 rubles—which did not happen as some received as much as 35—then the totally number would be 2,500 families.

⁸⁵⁹NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 208, ll. 10-13.

and beyond, including Moscow, Kiev, Simferopol, Novorossiisk, and even Bulgaria. From mid-August 1877 to early January 1878, the Yerevan Committee for the Relief of the Immigrants from Turkey collected 4,213 rubles, and also distributed to the refugees the 3,835 rubles collected by its counterpart, the Tiflis Committee, bringing the total amount of private donations in that four and half month period to over 8,000 rubles.⁸⁶⁰

The immigrants settled in existing towns and also established new communities, such as Novobaiazet in Yerevan *guberniia*. The partial archival record can be useful for gaining a general understanding of the immigration scale. By January 1878, early in the Ottoman Armenian immigration process but one of the few dates for which collective population data is available, there were 2,511 individual refugees (298 families) in Echmiadzin *uezd*,⁸⁶¹ 2,509 individuals (307 families) in Novobaiazet *uezd*,⁸⁶² 582 individuals (74 families) in Yerevan *uezd*,⁸⁶³ and 300 individuals (43 families) in Surmalinskii *uezd*.⁸⁶⁴ These statistics are incomplete not only for January 1878, because Ottoman Armenians settled in other districts too, but also exclude the subsequent waves of immigrants that arrived throughout 1878. By July 1878, 7,018 Ottoman subjects, mostly Armenians, lived in Yerevan *guberniia*, receiving state assistance.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁰NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 208, ll. 10-3. Data on ll. 13ob-16ob suggests that the Yerevan Committee distributed over 7,000 rubles between August and January, but it is not clear whether this amount included the money collected in Tiflis.

⁸⁶¹NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 207, ll. 671-78.

⁸⁶²NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 207, ll. 683-690ob.

⁸⁶³NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 207, ll. 667-669ob.

⁸⁶⁴NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 207, ll. 680-81.

⁸⁶⁵NAA, f. 94, op. 1, d. 208, ll. 373-92.

In facilitating the immigration of Ottoman Armenians into its domain, Russia sought to fulfill the promises of protection that it had issued to Armenians for over a century. The state took advantage of this resettlement by bolstering its image as the defender of oppressed Christian minorities, thus continuing to exert political influence beyond its borders. Unlike the first half of the nineteenth century, when Armenians from Persia and Turkey were recruited as colonizers of newly annexed and under-populated lands, in the 1870s new motives drove the Russian absorption of foreign-subject Armenians. The immigrants became less frontier colonizers than kindred allies returning under the aegis of their patron.

Conclusion

Russia's encounter with the Armenian diaspora presented both opportunities and threats to St. Petersburg's political and diplomatic ambitions. Through governing one part of the vast diaspora, the tsarist state exercised leverage in the internal affairs of its rivals. Ottoman Armenians' sympathy toward Russia also allowed the autocracy further to weaken Turkey by cooperating with the sultan's Armenians and by transplanting that important element of the regional economy from eastern Anatolia.

In the Russo-Armenian encounter under Alexander II, Armenians had as many reasons to cooperate with Russia and to seek its patronage as they had to fear its imperial grip. The Armenian Church recognized that without the state's help Western missionaries threatened its flock and its prosperity. Even the attacks of Orthodox Russians upon the Armenian faith often ended in the state's backing of Echmiadzin. In this period, as throughout much of the nineteenth century, Armenians gained advantages from their association with the Russian empire. The security and economic opportunities provided by tsarist patronage outweighed the absence of an independent Armenian homeland for many tsarist, and even foreign, Armenians.

Yet the autocracy remained unprepared to provide the liberal concessions (to Russians or to foreigners) that *Golos* and some Armenians demanded. It was not in the government's interests to precipitate consciousness of a cohesive, multistate nation that transcended imperial boundaries. Such a scenario would jeopardize Russia's borders in the South Caucasus and beyond, because Armenians could not be allowed to place their national allegiances above their civil subjecthood to the tsarist empire. Consequently, the authorities suppressed private, secular Armenian institutions, prohibited the unsanctioned collection of donations for foreign subjects, and suspected ties between the Russian revolutionary movement and inchoate Armenian nationalism. As the next chapter demonstrates, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Russo-Armenian relations became more acrimonious in response to the combined impact of the rise of Armenian nationalism and Russian political conservatism under Alexander III.

CHAPTER 5: TSARIST PERCEPTIONS OF ARMENIANS IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

“The tsar of a giant state declares war on a tiny nation. But why are we surprised.”

-Armenian pamphlets, 1885

“Permission for Turkish Armenians to resettle in our territory can be justified only by a sense of humanitarianism. But in state matters, such considerations can have but a secondary influence.”

-Minister of Foreign Affairs Girs, 1888

A bloodied monarch emerged, dazed and disoriented, from his crippled carriage. A bomb blast had wounded him, killed his driver, and created confusion. Moments later, before the tsar’s retinue had time to react, a well-aimed bomb landed at the monarch’s feet, mortally wounding him. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881 ended the reign of an enigmatic ruler both lauded as a liberator and derided as an autocrat. His successor, Alexander III, inherited a Russia dangerously fragmented along social, political, and ethnic lines. Two decades after Alexander II had freed the serfs, created a modern judiciary, instituted a draft army, and reformed provincial administration, Russian society remained at odds with the forces shaping and reshaping the modern world.

Alexander III (1881-94) saw in his father’s assassination proof of what he had felt for years: the liberalization of imperial Russia over the past two decades had weakened the institution of the autocracy to dangerous levels. The young monarch vowed not to repeat his

father's mistakes and to reassert the tsar's ultimate control over the state.⁸⁶⁶ Looking beyond his father's example to the reign of his grandfather, Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55), Alexander III and his camarilla renounced the Great Reforms as an unjustifiable and dangerous deviation from the "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" trajectory of the prereform era. The new tsar maintained that Russia's western tilt since the Petrine era had squandered the glory of Muscovy and had bred the westernized society that produced regicidal radicals. Alexander's remedy for these ills relied on coerced Russification, a zealous Orthodox Church, a centralized bureaucracy, and an empowered tsar.⁸⁶⁷

The autocratic counter-reform camp clashed not only with the motley revolutionaries and radicals of the era, including the *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will) terrorists who had carried out Alexander II's assassination, but also with liberal members of the state bureaucracy. The resulting atmosphere revealed that different layers of Russian society adjusted to the pace of modernization at different rates. This circumstance emerged clearly during the crisis of the late imperial government, when several prominent officials resigned to protest the new policies. This event marked "the direct outcome of the failure of old and new loci of power to move in synchrony with each other and with the forces of modernization."⁸⁶⁸

Alexander III distrusted the liberal, westernized aristocracy and the professionalized bureaucracy, charging the latter with attempting to establish a "sovereign bureaucracy" that transformed the position of the tsar into little more than a sinecure. But his opposition to the

⁸⁶⁶For an overview, see Heide Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council: Bureaucracy and Counter-Reform in Late Imperial Russia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982).

⁸⁶⁷Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 237.

⁸⁶⁸Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, 10.

legacy of the Great Reforms went beyond egotistical anxiety. According to historian Heide Whelan, Alexander believed that the progress of the state and the nation could best be guaranteed under the watchful eye of a powerful autocrat, unrestricted in his authority by law or cumbersome legislatures. At the same time, the tsar recognized that his domain had grown too unwieldy to be run by an individual, acknowledging the necessity of a large bureaucracy.

Although promptly dismissed by the new tsar in 1881, few state officials exemplified the opposition to Alexander's conservatism as closely as Interior Minister Mikhail Loris-Melikov. After his exploits during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, he rose to political prominence in the imperial capital, joining the State Council and, in February 1880, heading the Supreme Administrative Commission. Tasked with responding to the rising tide of social discontent among Russian intellectuals, Loris-Melikov received a jarring reminder of the political situation's volatility during an attempt on his life just eight days after his promotion.⁸⁶⁹

A reformist monarchist, if not a liberal, Loris-Melikov eschewed repressive tactics in remedying the political and social ills facing the state. In April 1880, he called for the reevaluation of tax obligations; the reorganization of local administration; the expansion of civil rights for such groups as the Old Believers; changes to registration requirements, education, and even the abolition of the notorious Third Section.⁸⁷⁰ He also collaborated with other reform-minded officials, such as Minister of Finance Aleksandr Abaza, to repeal the unpopular salt tax, relax press censorship, and tighten exile regulations. Alexander II approved these measures and—based at least in part on Loris-Melikov's recommendation—removed the conservative Education Minister, D. A. Tolstoi. By August 1880, Loris-Melikov rose to Interior Minister and

⁸⁶⁹State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. 109, 3rd exped., 1880, op. 165, d. 234, ll. 1-55.

⁸⁷⁰Ovanesov and Sudavtsov, *Voенно-administrativnaia deiatel'nost' armian*, 143.

Chief of the Gendarmes, becoming the second-most powerful man in the empire. On the morning of 1 March 1881, Loris-Melikov met with the tsar to discuss the formation of a commission modeled on the one that two decades earlier had engineered the Great Reforms. Hours later, Alexander II was mortally wounded. His successor proved less open to the Armenian statesman's projects, compelling him and other like-minded officials, including Abaza and War Minister Miliutin, to resign within months.

For many of the tsarist empire's millions of non-Russian subjects, Alexander III's reign brought hardship. Alexander's pursuit of the Muscovy model, with its ostensibly unified ethnic and religious groups ruled by a strong Orthodox tsar, clashed with the modern reality of a multinational empire. The hitherto tolerated expressions of ethnic and national identity—language, religion, education, and institutions—were increasingly deemed a threat to the unity and vitality of the rejuvenated heir to the Muscovy throne. Informed by the example of his grandfather's Russification policies in the Western borderlands, Alexander III presented the renewed effort as a “defense of the national character and sovereign rights of the monarchy and the Russian people.”⁸⁷¹ Within months of Alexander's ascension, anti-Jewish pogroms rocked parts of Ukraine and Russia's two capitals.⁸⁷² Although the government did not instigate or promote these riots, new Interior Minister Nikolai Ignat'ev made clear that Jews—the “conquered foe”—had received too much liberty from the previous tsar.⁸⁷³

⁸⁷¹Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 237. Nicholas I, and to a smaller degree Alexander II, had implemented Russification in Poland and Ukraine.

⁸⁷²John Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Michael Aronson, *Troubled Waters: Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1990).

⁸⁷³Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 238.

This domestic political climate soon affected the state's foreign relations. As early as the summer of 1881, Russia's secret police turned their attention to the Russian émigré dissidents residing in Western Europe. Although Russia's own radicals had become well entrenched in St. Petersburg and Moscow by this time, some of the most active social revolutionaries engaged in recruitment, publishing, and fundraising from the relative safety of western capitals. Replacing the Third Section, the new Department of Police of the Interior Ministry (also known as *Okhranka*), emphasized in 1881 that "the secret and systematic surveillance of Russian émigrés abroad constitutes the main task of the Russian state police."⁸⁷⁴ Russia's primary partner in these endeavors was Austria-Hungary, and the two empires negotiated new agreements that tightened customs and border monitoring as early as August 1881.⁸⁷⁵ Six months later, Russian police established links with local law enforcement officials in Galicia, Bukovina, and Krakow.⁸⁷⁶

Russia's foreign policy in the Near East also evolved under Alexander III. Having defeated the sultan's army in the war of 1877-78, the tsar controlled Kars and Ardahan provinces, adding over 100,000 new Armenian subjects to his realm.⁸⁷⁷ Despite the limits imposed at the Congress of Berlin, Russia continued to promote itself as the protector of Ottoman Christians. The plight of Western Armenians elicited the attention of the Russian state, public, and Eastern Armenians. As historian Janet Klein has shown, Ottoman officials mobilized Kurdish militias in the late nineteenth century to maintain control over Armenian-populated

⁸⁷⁴GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, op. 77, 1881, d. 1313, ll. 1-2ob.

⁸⁷⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, op. 77, 1881, d. 1313, l. 24.

⁸⁷⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, op. 77, 1881, d. 1313, l. 39.

⁸⁷⁷Ronald G. Suny, "Eastern Armenians under Tsarist Rule," in Richard Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, volume 2 (New York: St. Martin's, 2004), 127.

regions and to provide a redoubt against Russia. Klein has contended that “Kurdish chiefs who signed on as militia members . . . appropriated the land and resources of their neighbors, many of whom were Armenian.”⁸⁷⁸ By the 1890s, “as the movement spread and as armed activities became more prevalent in the years following the initial recruitment for the Hamidiye, the anti-Armenian component of the Hamidiye’s *raison d’être* was further confirmed in the eyes of its creators.”⁸⁷⁹

The Rise of Armenian Nationalism

The manifestations of what Russians lumped under the label “Armenian nationalism” took on multiple forms that were not always distinct to tsarist imperial agents who often bemoaned the ambiguity of various Armenian political agendas.⁸⁸⁰ At their broadest level, the Armenian political movements of the Russian empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century espoused one of three objectives. The most prominent force, because of its size and vitality, included elements in Eastern Armenia who expressed outrage at the real and imagined mistreatment of the Western Armenian population of neighboring Anatolia and sought to redress this through violence directed at Turks and Kurds. Another group of Armenians, a distinct minority of nationalists, called for the establishment of an autonomous Armenian republic within the Russian empire, one that would enjoy the contours of statehood but also benefit from Russia’s protection. The most radical faction of Armenian irredentists strove to unite Western

⁸⁷⁸Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 14.

⁸⁷⁹Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, 26.

⁸⁸⁰For an overview, see Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

and Eastern Armenia to establish a sovereign nation-state. This internal diversity of Armenian nationalism challenged Russian authorities, who remained especially unclear about the goals and strategies of the groups crossing into Turkey from the South Caucasus.

The most visible expression of Armenian “nationalism” in this era, the cross-border raids of Eastern Armenians into Ottoman territory, eludes neat categorization into conventional definitions of nationalism. On the one hand, the tsar’s Armenians evinced cultural camaraderie with the sultan’s Armenians. The two groups spoke the same language, albeit with distinct regional dialects, worshiped according to the same dogma, and traced their origins to a once-unified political state. Thus, they fulfilled Ernest Gellner’s requirements for a “consciousness of a shared cultural, religious or territorial identity.”⁸⁸¹ However, they satisfied only two of the three components proposed by John Breuilly: they demonstrated “an explicit and peculiar character” and a primacy of self-interests and values, but did not enjoy “political sovereignty.”⁸⁸²

On the other hand, the majority of Russia’s Armenians did not seek to fuse Western and Eastern Armenia into an independent nation-state. Thus, although Michael Hechter’s definition of “unification nationalism” is probably the closest conceptual framework for understanding Armenians’ actions, this lack of a large-scale independence discourse poses serious challenges to the traditional conviction that each nationalism seeks an independent homeland.⁸⁸³ Indeed, even the most prominent Armenian revolutionary party of the era, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Dashnaktsutiun, conspicuously eschewed calls for the formation of an Armenian state. While some of their contemporary counterparts, such as the Hunchakian Revolutionary

⁸⁸¹Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁸⁸²John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁸⁸³Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Party, sought the establishment of an independent Armenia under the umbrella of international socialism, the Dashnaks sought the implementation of long-promised political, social, and economic reforms in Ottoman Armenia.

As a result, my use of the term “nationalism” to refer to the actions of Russian Armenians in the late nineteenth century looks to the definition proposed by theorist Azar Gat.⁸⁸⁴ His challenge of the modernist thesis of nationhood emphasizes the deep role of ethnicity, which he defines as the congruence of shared kinship and culture, in the formation of nationalism. The role of a shared religion among non-elites from Egypt to China, evinced in the mobilization of preindustrial and illiterate masses to rebuke external threats, demonstrates to Gat the examples of premodern “imagined communities” that Benedict Anderson overlooked. Gat rejects the modernist Eurocentric arguments of Gellner, Kohn, Hayes, Deutsch, Hobsbawm, and other theorists, who find the roots of nationalism in the social and political reverberations of the French and Industrial revolutions. Gat disputes Gellner’s argument that a congruence of state and ethnicity—his definition of nation—hardly existed before the modern era, and maintains instead that “sweeping processes of modernization, rather than inaugurating nationalism, simultaneously released, transformed, and enhanced it, while greatly increasing its legitimacy.”⁸⁸⁵

Gat’s emphasis on the role of a shared religious (and more broadly cultural) identity and the recognition of a collective kinship matches Eastern Armenians’ actions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Armenians defied tsarist laws and attacked Turks and Kurds not in hopes of wresting an independent Armenia from its two imperial overlords but rather out of a shared

⁸⁸⁴Azar Gat, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁸⁸⁵Gat, *Nations*, 249.

cultural bond and ethnonational solidarity that sought to protect Ottoman Armenians from real and imagined abuses. Indeed, some Armenian nationalist hardliners claimed to have been so moved by the calls of the Russian press to support the oppressed Christians of eastern Anatolia, that they interpreted this as a sign of the tsarist state's tacit endorsement of its Armenian subjects' cross-border raids. The gestation of Armenian nationalism, analogous to the examples elucidated by Gat, did not simply emerge or awaken at the end of the nineteenth century in response to mass media advancements or repressive state policies. Rather, a collective sense of shared culture and common identity had always existed within that nation's divided communities of the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian empires, but became more pronounced only in the late nineteenth century as external threats decreased and the Russo-Armenian bond began to fade.

Yet, before the rise of radical Armenian political parties in the late 1880s and early 1890s, a liberal and nationalist Armenian intelligentsia defined the search for national liberation in the late 1870s. While some discontented Russian youths turned toward the peasant socialism of the *narodovol'tsy*, their Armenian counterparts remained more enticed by the moderate, reform-oriented proposals exemplified by the influential Tiflis newspaper *Mshak* (Tiller) and its long-time editor, Grigor Artsruni (1872-92). *Mshak* "promoted a pro-Russian attitude among Armenians, advocated economic development along capitalist lines, and polemicized against the newly fashionable doctrines of socialism. Reform rather than revolution was the preferred way to improve Armenian life in Russia."⁸⁸⁶ At the same time, Artsruni rallied his compatriots across the imperial border against the injustices of the Ottoman government, urging the sultan's Armenians in July 1876 to follow the example of the rebellious Balkan Slavs: "It will be a

⁸⁸⁶Suny, in Hovannisian, 130-31.

disgrace for Armenians if they do not raise their voice in defense of their rights, at a time when other Ottoman subject nations sacrifice themselves, spilling their blood for freedom.”⁸⁸⁷

Fissures in the Russo-Armenian relationship began to form even before Alexander III took the throne. Some of the earliest reports from Russian officials in the South Caucasus investigating illicit Armenian organizations trickled into St. Petersburg ministries already in the mid-1870s. Among the first of these, on 8 April 1875, the head of the Yerevan Provincial Gendarme Administration (*gubernskoe zhandarmskoe upravlenie*, hereafter GZhU) alerted the Third Section that in Aleksandrapol’ *uezd* (district), police had uncovered a shadowy circle run by young Armenians.⁸⁸⁸ Intercepted missives revealed that the group had begun to “contemplate matters beneficial for the [Armenian] nation, excluding government matters, which are prohibited.”⁸⁸⁹ The circle’s members perceived its explicitly nonrevolutionary ethos to be so innocuous that they announced its establishment in regional Armenian newspapers. Yet at least one official report from May 1875 charged that the group was “established by Armenians with the aim of raising among their coreligionists a patriotic spirit and achieving independence.”⁸⁹⁰ A search of the apartment belonging to the group’s leader, Ambartsum Balasaniants, revealed literature published abroad and smuggled into the Russian empire, as well as patriotic Armenian poetry, some of which was written by his brother, a student at the Aleksandrapol’ seminary. Although Russian investigators devoted little space to elucidating the contents of such publications, it appears that they were more Armenophilic—in the sense of celebrating Armenian

⁸⁸⁷Quoted in A. M. Pogonian, *Karsskaia oblast’ v sostave Rossii* (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1983), 37.

⁸⁸⁸GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, l. 10.

⁸⁸⁹GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, l. 13ob.

⁸⁹⁰GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, l. 24.

antiquity and supposed national singularity—than Russophobic, and thus not as politically subversive as some of the texts that would be discovered in the next decade.

Almost concurrently with the discovery of Balasaniants's group, local police in Aleksandrapol' uncovered a more politically focused secret organization. With the ostensibly altruistic but hopelessly ambiguous name "Society of the Noble Aim" (*Obshchestvo s blagoiu tseliiu*), the group had been founded in 1869 by a local teacher, Arsenik Krit'iants.⁸⁹¹ Although detected and disbanded before it could boast of any tangible accomplishments, the group has earned its place in history as the "the first circle dedicated to Armenian liberation in the Russian Empire."⁸⁹² Meeting every Sunday in their furtive headquarters, which housed a library of banned Armenian publications, its members expressed a conspicuously political tone, if yet unfocused and unclear to tsarist authorities. With a notably more aggressive stance than anything heretofore seen by Russian officials, Krit'iants's writings called on the Armenian people to rediscover the fighting spirit of their ancestors and to shed the domination of the "crafty and treacherous Russians, the demented Tatars [Turks and Azeris], and the hateful Persians."⁸⁹³ The group's forty-three members contributed a small weekly fee used to purchase histories of Armenia published abroad, which were then distributed (often sold) to local Armenian students. Among Krit'iants's belongings the police discovered Armenian-language texts and newspapers from abroad, including material banned by the censors, such as literature printed in 1866 in Constantinople claiming that tsarist agents engaged in the Russification of Armenians.

⁸⁹¹*Obshchestvo s blagoiu tseliiu* is the Russian translation of the Armenian *Barenpatak Enkerutium*.

⁸⁹²Suny, in Hovannisian, 130.

⁸⁹³GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, ll. 24ob-25.

In a new twist, confiscated documents showed that unidentified members of the group had given nationalistic orations in Armenian churches. The audiences reacted to these appeals with “delight,” receptive to making sacrifices for the sake of establishing poorly defined “independence.”⁸⁹⁴ Krit’iants’s correspondence with other members vented that “the disgusting and hateful conduct of the Russians elicits [our] ire and indignation.”⁸⁹⁵ The police noted that a portrait of Hayk, the etiological patriarch of the Armenian people, hung “in a conspicuous spot” in his school office.⁸⁹⁶ The Tiflis court sentenced Krit’iants to six months of incarceration followed by two years of police surveillance. Balasaniants and his associates received only a “strong suggestion hereafter not to allow themselves to form any organizations without the government’s permission.”⁸⁹⁷ The trickle of isolated reports in the spring of 1875 of possible political dissatisfaction among Armenians belied the torrent of investigations, surveillance, reports, and flurry of Russian activity that would take place in the following decade in response to Armenian incursions into Ottoman territory.

Frontier Raiders

Eastern Armenians maintained strong cultural and economic ties with Western Armenians, and the plight of the sultan’s minority Christians became a *cause célèbre* among various groups in Russian Armenian society, just as it attracted attention in Europe.⁸⁹⁸ Whether

⁸⁹⁴GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, ll. 46ob-47.

⁸⁹⁵GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, l. 89.

⁸⁹⁶GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, l. 88.

⁸⁹⁷GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped., 1875, op. 160, d. 120, l. 90.

⁸⁹⁸Victor Hugo’s admonition against perceived European apathy succeeded to a degree in jarring the public’s attention to the plight of Ottoman Armenians: “A man is killed in Paris: it is a murder. The throats of fifty thousand people are cut in the East, and it is a question.” Some prominent examples include, James Creagh, *Armenians, Koords, and Turks* (London: Samuel Tinsley & Co., 1880); and, for a

based on legitimate or sensationalized claims of abuse, the fervor of Armenians and many Russians gathered strength in the early 1880s. Responding to the promised yet undelivered protections of the Congress of Berlin, Eastern Armenians sought to take matters into their own hands. While the Western powers granted autonomy and political self-determination to several Balkan Slav nations, such as Bulgarians, the fate of Western Armenians remained uncertain. In that age of nationalism, political sovereignty and security became the markers of modernity.⁸⁹⁹ The Congress of Berlin, according to historian Jerzy Jedlicki, “opened the epoch of the disintegration of empires and the multiplication of nations. The Bulgarians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Romanians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Jews, and others all began to claim their rights to a separate existence, justifying such rights by the unique nature of their cultures.”⁹⁰⁰ One of the key provisions of the accord called for the Ottoman government to ensure the protection of its minority Christians, including Armenians. The clause, article 61, in subsequent decades acquired gravity for Armenians of the Ottoman and Russian empires. The attention of purportedly “justice-loving” Europeans to the Armenian cause, mainly in Turkey but also in Russia, remained of paramount importance to Armenian nationalists, who were keenly aware of the primacy of the Eastern Question in European capitals.⁹⁰¹ One confiscated Armenian publication from 1890 chastised Armenians for their inaction, warning that “the nineteenth century calls all

later example, published after large-scale massacres of Ottoman Armenians in the mid-1890s, Malcolm MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1896).

⁸⁹⁹Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17.

⁹⁰⁰Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 260.

⁹⁰¹The authoritative treatment of this issue in the pan-European context remains M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966).

peoples to a free life, yet Armenians extend their hands even farther to be chained. In antiquity, the voice of the dissenters did not reverberate beyond the horizon, but now, thanks to the telegraph and post, the protestations of Armenians can be heard by peoples who love justice.”⁹⁰²

In this atmosphere arose the faction of Eastern Armenian nationalists determined to aid Western Armenians. One of the earliest Russian alerts came in October 1880 from the Governor General of the Caucasus (and the tsar’s brother), Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, who notified St. Petersburg about young Armenians’ illegal crossing of the border from the South Caucasus into Turkey.⁹⁰³ Half a year later, in April 1881, Yerevan police detained three Armenian students who had recently run away from a private Tiflis gymnasium. Under interrogation, the youths admitted that they had intended to cross into Turkey to join a band of so-called Van Volunteers (*Vanskie dobrovol'tsy*) in their struggle for the protection of Armenians against Kurds.⁹⁰⁴ The students had collected 300 rubles for the weapons and the journey through private donations in Tiflis, and the police report concluded that their appearance in Yerevan had “caused a strong reaction in all layers of the local Armenian population.”⁹⁰⁵ Rumors of similar incidents spread in Tiflis, Yerevan, and Aleksandropol’, with Russian imperial agents reporting that donations had been solicited for the funding and arming of volunteer units headed to Turkey.

The delay in the implementation of the protections for Ottoman Armenians stipulated by the Congress of Berlin continued to feed the nationalistic fervor among Russian Armenians.

⁹⁰²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 23.

⁹⁰³GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped, 1880, op. 165, d. 707, l. 1. Mikhail Nikolaevich reported that he had taken steps to stop their actions.

⁹⁰⁴Van is a city in an eponymous province in eastern Turkey.

⁹⁰⁵GARF, f. 109, 3rd exped, 1880, op. 165, d. 707, l. 3.

From illicit pamphlets to covert meetings and through the use of the Armenian-language press, Russian Armenians' frustrations at the perceived inaction of the European powers gathered momentum. Not uncommon, for example, was an anonymous letter received in March 1883 by the editor of the Armenian-language Yerevan newspaper *Psak* (Wreath). Postmarked in Moscow, the letter decried the plight of the sultan's Armenian subjects and lamented that, in the five years since the Congress of Berlin, no tangible steps had been taken to enforce Article 61:

We see that all articles of the Berlin treaty have been carried out, yet the promised and tiny reforms in Armenia, according to Article 61, have been left unattended. We see that Europe does not find the time to get involved in our affairs, since it already has too much work and issues that must be solved, after all it has its own pressing interests. We notice all of this very clearly, yet we wait as if for a miracle from the sky.⁹⁰⁶

The author equated waiting for Ottoman reforms to waiting for divine intervention, reminding the reader that no nation had ever achieved “freedom” (*svoboda*) without blood and sacrifice. “Will Europe really abandon its interests,” asked the author sardonically, “and for our sake make sacrifices, when we do not wish to make them for our own benefit? Do not forget that hitherto we have done nothing to attract Europe's attention to the fact that we are capable of independent self-determination (*upravliat' soboi nezavisimo*), which is one of our main weaknesses that Europe points out each time.”⁹⁰⁷

The author's message was clear: How can Armenians—whether subjects of the sultan or the tsar—expect the position of Ottoman Armenians to be improved, which this particular writer vaguely presented as independence, when Armenians have not yet demonstrated to the world both the dedication and the facility for self-determination? To wait and beg for foreign intervention and eventual providence was both fruitless and unbecoming of an ancient nation,

⁹⁰⁶GARF, f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 79, 1883, d. 172, l. 1a.

⁹⁰⁷GARF, f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 79, 1883, d. 172, l. 1a.

many believed, and it was Armenians who must make Europe understand that the time had come to extend the same privileges to Armenians that had been earned by Greeks. The only solution, then, lay in “proving to the enlightened world that the inhabitants of Armenia have been penetrated by ideas of freedom, that they too are capable and ready to sacrifice the lives of their dear, beloved sons for the sake of freedom. Who can forget those incredible self-sacrifices through which tiny Greece returned its former independence?”⁹⁰⁸ Russian Armenian nationalists who focused on aiding their Ottoman compatriots often invoked such examples of the sultan’s other minorities. Whether inspired by the struggles of the Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, or Egyptians,⁹⁰⁹ Armenians argued that the time had come to follow the actions of those nations and break away from Constantinople’s “barbaric” grip. To achieve these aims, Russian Armenians in the South Caucasus were called upon to provide “material and moral support” for the cause.

Tsarist authorities sought to prevent the crossing of their Armenian subjects into Ottoman lands. Wary of renewed hostilities with a traditional foe and seeing little to gain from Armenian political initiative, St. Petersburg dispatched Cossacks and Russian border guards to plug the porous frontier. But the mountainous terrain aided the undetected passage of small groups of Armenians, who often terrorized local Ottoman villagers on their way to attacking Turkish garrisons or Kurdish civilians whom they accused of maltreating the local Armenians. Yet, despite the Russian imperial regime’s clear disapproval of the Russian-Armenian raids into Ottoman lands, St. Petersburg breathed a sigh of relief whenever the Porte, not Russia, found itself in the crosshairs of Armenian nationalists.

⁹⁰⁸GARF, f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 79, 1883, d. 172, l. 2a.

⁹⁰⁹GARF, f. 102, 3 d-vo, op. 79, 1883, d. 172, l. 2b.

The appeals of various nationalists—whether in the form of anonymous letters to newspapers or in speeches in churches—gave rise to several small Armenian circles in Yerevan, Tiflis, and other regional cities. Attracting the attention of local authorities, these “benevolent” societies were deemed to be *potentially* subversive yet without specific political danger to the state. Reporting the results of an investigation into these groups to the ministers of justice and the interior in September 1883, the commander-in-chief in the Caucasus, Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Dondukov-Korsakov, concluded that the threat of Armenian nationalism to Russian interests remained low, because the groups aimed their energies at inducing action among Western Armenians against Ottoman authorities.⁹¹⁰ No clear evidence yet existed, he wrote, of similar goals on the part of Russian Armenians, although the discovery of maps of the ancient Armenian kingdom hinted at the presence “among some South Caucasian Armenians of vague (*neiasnykh*) dreams regarding the future reestablishment of unity and political independence of both Turkish and Russian Armenia.”⁹¹¹ Nonetheless, Dondukov-Korsakov found no evidence of a “serious political organization” threatening Russian interests. Indeed, he stressed that “the most limited number” of Armenian youths, including some teachers and publishers, could be accused of harboring unclear “dreams,” and that Armenian merchants and peasants “are utterly alien to these ideas.” Thus the attempts of Armenian agitators among those groups, concluded the head of the Caucasus, currently presented “nothing dangerous and are devoid of any significance.”⁹¹²

⁹¹⁰GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 11 and 17.

⁹¹¹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 11.

⁹¹²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 11ob-12.

For the remainder of this decade, Russian officials noted few instances of cross-border activities on the part of Russian Armenians, a lull that would be broken in the following decade. Fueled by ethnoreligious conflict between Armenians and their Turkish and Kurdish neighbors in Turkey, the steady stream of Eastern Armenians crossing into Ottoman territory or sending material help would pose major challenges for the tsarist regime. Armenian-Muslim strife within the sultan's domain had simmered long before the 1890s, with numerous Western travelers emphasizing the interethnic and interreligious conflicts they witnessed. For example, decades earlier, William Francis Ainsworth, a member of the Royal Geographical Society, highlighted Kurdish raids of Armenian villages near Erzurum. His travelogue pointed out that local Armenians had "not only been subject to an authorized vexation and spoliation entailed by Kurdish supremacy, but also to frequent incursions of the same predatory tribes; on which occasions they drive away all their cattle, sheep, and goats, and treat the inhabitants according as they submit quietly to be left destitute, or resist this cruel system of plunder."⁹¹³

Tsarist officials took note of these abuses. In the summer of 1890, Russian diplomats in Constantinople and Erzurum alerted St. Petersburg to the rise of Armenian-Muslim violence. In one incident that June, an anonymous tip to local police in Erzurum prompted a destructive search of the city's main Armenian church for stockpiled weapons. After some damage to the walls and floors failed to produce the weapons, two mobs of Armenians and Turks clashed, leaving 15 Armenians dead, including one Russian subject, and over 200 injured.⁹¹⁴ The mob's

⁹¹³William Francis Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea, and Armenia* (London: John W. Parker, West Strand, 1842), 379-80. See also T. B. Armstrong, *Journal of Travels in the Seat of War, during the last two campaigns of Russia and Turkey* (London: A. Seguin, 1831), 179-85; and Horatio Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1840), 227-28.

⁹¹⁴RGVIA, f. 450, op. 1, d. 111, ll. 8-15.

belief that the British and French consulates sheltered Armenians aggravated the situation, resulting in armed attacks on both diplomatic missions. Consul-General Clifford Lloyd barricaded himself into the British consulate, armed to the teeth. Although the Russian consulate escaped the mob's wrath that day, it was only a matter of time before these interethnic tensions in Turkey directly affected Russian interests.

In the wake of the skirmishes in Erzurum in the summer of 1890, Ottoman Armenians disseminated in parts of the Russian South Caucasus “exaggerated” accounts of these clashes.⁹¹⁵ Roused by the rumors, many Eastern Armenians became convinced that both Turkish officials and civilians engaged in the abuse of their Christian Armenian minority. Small parties of Armenians, often numbering between ten to fifty men, began to cross into Turkey from Russian territory to “avenge” the abuse of their compatriots. They exceeded their ostensible missions by attacking, plundering, and often murdering unsuspecting Kurdish villagers along the frontier.⁹¹⁶ Armenians captured by Russian border guards often freely admitted to crossing into Ottoman territory with the intention of “avenging the Muslims for their abuse of Turkish Armenians.”⁹¹⁷

Russian responses to Armenian incursions into Ottoman lands in the 1890s demonstrate a heightened sense of urgency compared to the previous decade. Despite increased Cossack and Russian border patrols, many Armenian units continued to slip through. On 2 September 1890, Cossack border guards clashed with a unit of 100 Armenian volunteers attempting to cross into Turkey with the intention of “avenging” (*mstit'*) the local Kurds for their abuse of Ottoman

⁹¹⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 2.

⁹¹⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 2.

⁹¹⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 6ob.

Armenians.⁹¹⁸ The fray left a Cossack and two Armenians dead, with the timely arrival of a Russian infantry unit resulting in the capture of twenty-seven Armenians and a cache of arms. Composed of men from throughout the region and beyond, including St. Petersburg, Yerevan, Tiflis, Elisavetopol', Kars, and Batumi, as well as the subjects of all three neighboring empires—Russia, Turkey, and Persia—the group's composition signaled deep cohesion among the region's Armenians. Yet not all members of this unit understood the position of the Russian authorities regarding their mission. Confusion and disagreement about Russian approval had slowed the group's advance, until several men deserted when they ostensibly realized that imperial officials had not sanctioned their task and that their outfit was hiding from Russian border patrols.⁹¹⁹ Later, some of these men claimed that reading pleas to help Ottoman Armenians printed in Russian newspapers convinced them that officials would “look the other way” at their actions.⁹²⁰

Tsarist officials confiscated from these fighters red epaulettes stamped with the Armenian letters “M. H.” Under interrogation, at least one of the captured men admitted that the abbreviation denoted “*Miutiun Hayastani*,” or United Armenia.⁹²¹ This discovery pointed to the existence of a more organized, and militant, group of Armenian nationalists than Russian authorities had heretofore encountered. The missives of the group's leader, Sarkis Kukunian, who was captured during the abortive incursion against Kurds, suggested that his band of 100 men constituted part of a broader Armenian movement rather than an isolated outburst of vengeful chauvinists. Kukunian informed tsarist officials that Russian Armenians armed

⁹¹⁸GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, ll. 8-8ob.

⁹¹⁹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 13.

⁹²⁰GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 12.

⁹²¹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, ll. 8-8ob.

Ottoman Armenian communities not to encourage an insurrection against the sultan but rather to force the Porte, with European pressure, to honor its obligations under the Berlin Treaty. The attention of the European community to the plight of the Ottoman Armenians was vital, Kukunian contended, for the improvement of their condition. Only the saber rattling of local Christians could solicit such attention.⁹²² Not uncommon among Armenians on both sides of the imperial border, such views were expressed to Russian interrogators by other captured rebels. After traveling from St. Petersburg to Tiflis, for example, Kukunian met Akop Vartapet, the leader of an Ottoman Armenian group who had come to the South Caucasus to solicit help from Russian Armenians.⁹²³ An Interior Ministry (MVD) investigative report concluded that Vartapet's mission had been to gather material assistance to achieve reforms prescribed by the Berlin Treaty through terroristic action inside Turkey:

The entire Armenian population of Turkey, said Akop, is ready to rebel, but they have no leaders, no weapons, no material resources, which is why it is necessary to arm Turkish Armenians and to organize independent bands, spreading them throughout the Turkish empire, for a struggle against Muslims. Without a doubt through this the attention of European powers will be attracted and with their help Turkey will be forced to comply with Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty.⁹²⁴

Although Kukunian disagreed with some of Vartapet's strategies and suspected him of mismanaging donations, Kukunian shared his fellow rebel's conviction that Armenian violence against Muslims in Turkey must be employed to exact tangible reforms through the application of European pressure on Constantinople. Both men travelled from village to village, in the South Caucasus as well as in Kars oblast, soliciting donations and making fiery harangues.

⁹²²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 10.

⁹²³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, ll. 9ob-10.

⁹²⁴GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 10.

The ramifications of these actions for the political status of Russian Armenians and Yerevan province remained ambiguous to St. Petersburg. The MVD stressed that the captured Armenians “categorically deny” any intention “to establish an independent Armenian kingdom, although . . . during their first interrogation, some [of the accused] declared their dream for this organization of an independent Armenia, but one that excluded those provinces, which comprise parts of Russia.”⁹²⁵ Moreover, other captured Armenians argued that their incursion into Turkey had been carried out as part of “a kind Christian goal” and intended to attract the attention of the tsar, who, in turn, would either secure the “freedom” of the Ottoman Armenians himself or would allow his Armenian subjects to rescue their neighboring brethren.⁹²⁶ Having for centuries steadfastly served as loyal subjects of the Romanovs, some Armenians claimed, they wished to see all of the sultan’s Christians relocated into the tsar’s aegis.

Suspicious Armenian initiatives, and the Russian scrutiny of them, transcended the political sphere and penetrated the region’s cultural life. Tsarist officials pursued every reported instance of questionable nationalistic expression with zeal, from tracking down the teachers of schoolchildren accused of singing nationalistic songs to students charged with producing subversive poetry. In one example from Kars, Russian officials learned of a children’s song whose lyrics invited “Armenians to raise arms for the emancipation of Turkish Armenia” and described an imaginary war of independence that would result in “total Armenian victory.”⁹²⁷ When in 1892 several Armenian schoolchildren in Kars were discovered reciting poetry with similar calls to arms, their teacher was arrested and charged with “membership in a secret

⁹²⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 13.

⁹²⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 14ob.

⁹²⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 22.

Armenian organization.”⁹²⁸ In another incident, Russian authorities accused a Kars teacher, Ter Akop, of encouraging his students to steal gold from their parents and either use it to travel to Turkey themselves or to donate it to volunteer units.⁹²⁹

In November 1890, Russian officials discovered pamphlets, written in Armenian, distributed throughout Tiflis and surrounding villages.⁹³⁰ Declaring that “the Armenian question now enters a new phase; long-enslaved Turkish Armenia demands freedom,” the proclamations targeted Russian Armenians. Warning that the time for seeking independence through “cultured ways” had ended and that “yesterday’s slaves have become revolutionaries,” the pamphlets announced that an “Armenian Revolutionary League” was prepared to shed blood for the “political and economic liberation of Turkish Armenia.” Each group within the Armenian community was exhorted to contribute: young men were urged to “take up arms,” women to “breathe soul into the holy task,” the elderly to “assist with advice,” the wealthy to “give material help,” and the clergy to “bless the freedom fighters.”

The scope of the Russian investigation into such activities reveals the tsarist regime’s wariness regarding the still-unclear political aspirations of its Armenian subjects. Investigations into Kukunian’s and Vartapet’s groups, for example, involved not only regional Russian resources in the Caucasus but also elicited the active participation of the ministries of the interior, justice, and war in St. Petersburg. To track down suspected members of Armenian organizations, officials pursued them into “every province of the empire” and monitored

⁹²⁸GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 22.

⁹²⁹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, ll. 23ob-24.

⁹³⁰GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 24ob.

suspected Armenian nationalists in such major cities as Warsaw.⁹³¹ Punishments ranged from warnings to months of solitary confinement or even exile. Most members of Kukumian's band, for example, received a month of solitary confinement followed by a year of police surveillance; the leader himself was sentenced to two months of isolation.⁹³² The quantity of state investigations of Eastern Armenians assisting Western Armenians overshadowed its pursuit of other Armenian nationalist subgroups in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, making this the largest Armenian threat perceived by the tsarist order. Loosely organized Armenian circles seeking a different aim, however, also posed a formidable challenge.

Unification and Independence

The most radical strain of Armenian nationalism in the South Caucasus advocated the creation of an independent nation-state that fused Western and Eastern Armenia. Although these irredentists could boast a less numerous membership than the groups determined to aid Ottoman Armenians, they earned their share of attention from tsarist officials in the wake of the closing of Armenian parish schools in 1885. Even before then, notifications of Russian Armenians' growing "national awareness" and its attendant threats to tsarist interests rattled St. Petersburg. Coupled with the rise of socialism's popularity among the Armenian youth of the South Caucasus, the state monitored their activities with particular attention. The basic question for Russian officials remained: which government did Armenian nationalists target?

In August 1883, the Interior Minister reported to Tsar Alexander III that investigations of Caucasian socialist circles had revealed several nefarious Armenian nationalist tendencies.⁹³³

⁹³¹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, ll. 41-42.

⁹³²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 30ob.

⁹³³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 1-6ob.

Among these, the MVD outlined a revitalized effort on the part of the region's Armenian intellectuals to inculcate in their youth "aspirations toward the political revival of the Armenian people." The head of the Yerevan gymnasium, for instance, took measures to check the "harmful influence" of Armenian propaganda aimed at promoting "political" thinking among the school's students. Provincial police connected this agitation to an organization of "lovers of the Armenian nationality and patriots" ("*Haya-ser*" and "*Azga-ser*").⁹³⁴ Several prominent local Armenians were implicated in the investigation, such as the assistant to the Secretary of the Yerevan Circuit Court, Ter-Zakharov, the head of Yerevan women's schools, Hovannesiants, and the editor of the Tiflis Armenian newspaper *Mshak*, Grigor Artsruni. A search of Ter-Zakharov's home uncovered "appeals to the Armenian youth and nation, inviting it to spill blood for the freedom of Armenia by taking part in the movement that ought to develop in the near future."⁹³⁵ These writings urged Armenians of the neighboring empires to set aside any differences and to focus on the "simultaneous uprising" in both western and eastern Armenia. In the homes of other suspects, the police discovered evidence of cooperation between Armenian nationalists of the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian empires, suggesting a new degree of political and national cohesion. Investigators insisted that evidence pointed to a "total solidarity between Turkish and Russian Armenians, equally seeking the reestablishment of their political unity and independence."⁹³⁶

Further scrutiny of this case uncovered the genesis of the "*Haya-ser*" and "*Azga-ser*" groups. In the wake of the Berlin Congress, Armenians in Constantinople and other major Ottoman cities had formed organizations to prepare the empire's Armenians for increased

⁹³⁴GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 2-2ob.

⁹³⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 3ob.

⁹³⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 4ob.

autonomy and self-administration. Once it became clear that the provisions of article 61 were not forthcoming, these Armenian groups turned to more subversive measures, such as underground printing and calls for rebellion.⁹³⁷ Discovered by Ottoman authorities, these revolutionary Armenian circles made their way into the perceived haven of the tsarist South Caucasus. But if Western Armenians had been receptive to the bellicose appeals of the rebels, Eastern Armenians proved more reluctant, to the chagrin of the recently relocated agitators. From calling for the Echmiadzin monastery to be moved out from under Russian control, to demanding a greater role for the Armenian language, these groups initiated a rejuvenated effort to promote among South Caucasian Armenians what Russian officials labeled “patriotic aspirations” (*patrioticheskii stremeniia*). The tracing of the link between Ottoman Armenian rebels and their new activities within Russian territory posed new challenges for tsarist officials. If hitherto they had been more familiar with their Armenian subjects crossing into Turkey, now Russian authorities had to confront the threat of Armenian self-determination movements aimed at altering the status quo in the South Caucasus.

What were the aims of these groups? Russian officials often bemoaned the perceived ambiguity of Armenian goals, peppering their reports with such charges as “anti-government,” “patriotic,” and “undesired wandering of minds.” However, with the growing quantity of intercepted correspondence, particularly among Armenian students, the contours of specific objectives began to come into focus for state officials. In August 1883, Interior Minister Orzhevskii reported to the tsar that “the existence in the higher schools of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kharkov of Armenian circles with social-democratic programs aimed at the achievement of federal rule (*federal'nogo pravleniia*) in Russia, through which the dreams of

⁹³⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 4ob-5.

Armenian patriots about the political independence of Armenia will come true, has been proven.”⁹³⁸ Evidence suggested, moreover, that similar circles were developing in the schools of the Caucasus. But what makes Orzhevskii’s report noteworthy is that it is one of the few pieces of evidence of an Armenian pursuit of political autonomy (in this case defined as federal rule) from Russian, state-produced sources.

Indeed, local tsarist authorities in the Caucasus often had to reassure St. Petersburg that Armenian nationalists’ efforts were directed against the Ottoman, rather than Russian, government. This reflected the fact that the links between ostensibly distinct Armenian objectives remained unclear to state officials. Although still convinced that “no serious political organization” of Armenians threatened Russian interests, Prince Dondukov-Korsakov, the commander-in-chief in the Caucasus, reported to the minister of justice in September 1883 that illicit, quasi-political Armenian circles, masquerading as benevolent or philanthropic societies but containing a “lining of a political nature,” had popped up in Yerevan.⁹³⁹ Nearly contradicting his earlier dismissal of these groups’ potential dangers to tsarist interests, Dondukov-Korsakov summarized their main goals as “the instigation of Asia Minor Armenians against Turkish overlordship and in providing them assistance . . . as well as moral support in the form of various articles of Armenian-patriotic focus in the local press, [and] the compilation of Armenian revolutionary instructions and propaganda about the unification and independence of the Armenian people.”⁹⁴⁰ The report comforted the MVD that such groups yet represented “nothing

⁹³⁸GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 6. This development was exacerbated by the fact that subversive activities were carried out through a deft combination of underground and open, legal means.

⁹³⁹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 10ob.

⁹⁴⁰GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 10ob.

serious, due to the extremely limited number of their sympathizers as well as because their objective is aimed at inciting . . . [Ottoman] Armenians against Ottoman rule. At present there is no reason to fear the spread of similar attitudes among Russian-subject Armenians,” although he concluded by proposing several preemptive measures to check the further growth of the embryonic and “murky ideas about the reestablishment of the political independence of the Armenian people.”⁹⁴¹

Tsarist ministries faced not only nationalism imported from across the border by the sultan’s Armenian subjects but also its locally developed strains. By 1883, the interior minister had reason to alert the royal court to the threat of “antigovernment aims of the Armenian intelligentsia.”⁹⁴² Armenian students in the South Caucasus used various means to propagate subversive material, often employing the Tiflis Armenian daily *Mshak* and the Yerevan newspaper *Psak*. The use of *Mshak* for Armenian nationalism particularly worried Russian officials given the newspaper’s reach: by 1886, it boasted 1,400 subscribers, more than any of the other four Armenian newspapers in Tiflis.⁹⁴³ In the imperial capital, too, young Armenians were accused of printing “anti-government” material. Students from universities in the Caucasus, St. Petersburg, and Moscow were implicated in the investigations. Intercepted correspondence between one Moscow University student and his counterpart in Yerevan revealed the existence

⁹⁴¹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 17ob.

⁹⁴²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 5ob.

⁹⁴³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1887, op. 83, d. 9, ch. 24, ll. 33-33ob. In 1886, the other major Armenian newspapers of Tiflis were *Nor-Dar*, *Megu hayastani*, *Ardzagank*, and the monthly journal *Akhpiur*. In contrast, there were just two Georgian-language papers in Tiflis: *Iveria* and *Teatr*. The combined readership (subscribers) of the Armenian papers in 1886 stood at 4,480, while the Georgian papers had a total of 1,060 subscribers. There was no major Armenian press in Yerevan in the mid-1880s (see GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1888, op. 84, d. 89, ch. 53, l. 10ob).

of a shadowy student group “Unity of Patriots” (*edinstvo patriotov*). In June 1887, Moscow police investigated a group of Armenian students from the Imperial Technical Institute for collecting donations for an indeterminate cause.⁹⁴⁴ In July 1888, the Department of Police ordered the Moscow police to monitor the activities of local Armenian students known to hold secret meetings with their counterparts from St. Petersburg.⁹⁴⁵ A student group at the St. Petersburg Forestry Institute engaged in “national questions, for which it subscribes to Armenian journals and acquires photographs of Armenian poets, ‘singers of the homeland,’” although no evidence suggested that members took part in any “revolutionary activity.”⁹⁴⁶

There was also indication of less benign student circles in other cities. Two separate groups in Moscow, including one at prestigious Moscow University, were accused in the fall of 1888 of following a “revolutionary program.” Unlike the St. Petersburg groups, which discussed Armenian poets and collected money for individual struggling friends, the Moscow groups hosted gatherings that lauded exiled political prisoners and read banned publications.⁹⁴⁷ Surveillance of one of these groups revealed that it sought donations, mainly from Armenian merchants of Moscow, up to ten times per year and could gather as much as 3,900 rubles per campaign. Although students comprised the core of similar circles discovered by Russian officials, there were also instances of faculty involvement. In March 1895, police intercepted letters from an Armenian in Odessa to Iurii Veselovskii, a professor at Moscow University.⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴⁴GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1887, op. 83, d. 280, ll. 1-3.

⁹⁴⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1888, op. 84, d. 297, l. 1.

⁹⁴⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1888, op. 84, d. 297, ll. 8-8ob.

⁹⁴⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1888, op. 84, d. 297, l. 11ob.

⁹⁴⁸GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 563, ll. 1-2. More details about Veselovskii are unavailable.

This discovery led to the uncovering of a large organization, “Progress,” with affiliated circles located in several imperial cities, including Odessa, Kharkov, and Tiflis. Members of “Progress” sought to “help Armenian schools through the shipment of libraries, teaching guides, etc.,” and strove to “encompass, as far as possible, all of Armenian society.”⁹⁴⁹

From the perspective of the tsarist state, Eastern Armenian nationalists in the last decades of the nineteenth century sought not so much the establishment of an autonomous Armenia within the tsarist empire, but rather the liberation, however defined, of Ottoman Armenians from Turkish mistreatment. How can this be explained? On the surface, the contrast between the two groups’ existence explains their divergent satisfactions with the status quo: the sultan’s Armenians received no security from the imperial order and often fell victim to their more powerful neighbors, while the tsar’s Armenians not only enjoyed economic and social prominence in the South Caucasus but also earned political clout within the tsarist bureaucracy. On a less quantifiable level, however, Russia’s Armenians focused on the plight of Ottoman Armenians out of fraternal investment in the betterment of their compatriots. Aiding the sultan’s Armenians without the permission of the tsarist state jeopardized Russian Armenians’ position within the imperial hierarchy, especially vis-à-vis their Georgian and Muslim neighbors in the South Caucasus. Yet a multifaceted and diverse Armenian effort risked their privileged position to achieve “national salvation.” With the rise of professional revolutionary groups, these efforts took on a more cohesive form.

⁹⁴⁹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 563, ll. 4-4ob.

Professional Revolutionaries

Professional Armenian revolutionary parties, like their predecessors, often aimed their energies at the sultan's domains and avoided confrontation with Russia. In fact, until the late 1880s, and in many cases beyond, liberal and nationalist Russian Armenians sought reform, not revolution.⁹⁵⁰ Although sympathetic and supportive of Western Armenians' revolutionary actions, Eastern Armenians had no reason to seek secession from Russia. Their successful economic situation and social position had earned them resentment from non-Russian neighbors and some Russian officials, but these factors had also secured for them an enviable socioeconomic niche in the South Caucasus. In an 1890 report to Tsar Alexander III, Dondukov-Korsakov opined:

Distinguished by undeniable aptitude, a penchant for education, and the persistent pursuit of wealth through all means, Armenians over the past thirty years have acquired a dominant economic position in the region. Having understood that whoever holds the capital and land acquires significance and strength even in the eyes of the government, Armenians have captured in the South Caucasus almost all trade, manufacturing, the majority of property in cities and part of land properties.⁹⁵¹

To challenge this status quo and strive for an independent nation-state would not be proposed in earnest until the formation of the socialist Hunchak party in 1887.⁹⁵² But the social revolutionary *zeitgeist* of Russia's multiethnic society in the latter part of the nineteenth century made the divorce of Armenian "liberation" movements from other disenchanted groups nearly impossible. Young Russian Armenians joined Georgian and Russian-led socialist circles from Yerevan to St.

⁹⁵⁰Suny, in Hovannisian, 130-31.

⁹⁵¹GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 7.

⁹⁵²The authoritative Anglophone treatment of the Hunchak and Dashnak movements remains Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

Petersburg. In 1883, when an imperial army deserter surrendered to Tiflis authorities in return for leniency, he exposed a large multinational socialist group operating in the South Caucasus.⁹⁵³ A Russian investigation found that young Armenians had taken a prominent role in the group's activities, joining their Georgian socialist comrades in establishing underground networks.

Although their actions often fell beyond the purview of the tsar's agents, the development of professional Armenian revolutionary movements affected the changing Russo-Armenian dynamic in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The conservatism of Alexander III's politics and the international community's continued inaction over Ottoman abuses galvanized previously docile Armenians and gave rise to professional revolutionary parties. These organizations boasted well-ordered internal hierarchies and more proactive strategies, although their objectives often were no less opaque than those of the South Caucasian student circles. The first such group, the Armenakan Party, arose in Van in 1885. While this Ottoman Armenian group "did not favor open agitation or demonstrations and did not include Armenian independence even as a long-range objective," it served as an important precursor to the two parties that Eastern Armenians soon established.⁹⁵⁴ The first of these more prolific parties appeared in 1887. Formed in Geneva by Russian Armenian émigrés, mainly Maro Vardanian and her fiancé Avetis Nazarbekian, the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party looked both to Russian populism and Marxism for achieving Armenian liberation. With a nod to Alexander Herzen's periodical *Kolokol* (Bell), the Armenian party took its name from the Armenian newspaper *Hunchak* (Bell).⁹⁵⁵ The Hunchaks, as they came to be known, combined two of many Russian

⁹⁵³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 1352, ll. 3-15.

⁹⁵⁴Richard Hovannisian, in Hovannisian, ed., *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 213.

⁹⁵⁵Hovannisian, *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 214.

Armenians' aims: the immediate freeing of Ottoman Armenians and the eventual establishment of an independent Armenian socialist state. Unlike the staunchly antisocialist Armenakan Party, the Hunchaks envisioned the cohabitation of the sultan's, the tsar's, and the shah's Armenians under the umbrella of international socialism.⁹⁵⁶ Given this inclusive outlook, the Hunchaks worked with Eastern and Western Armenians equally, seeking the cooperation of all Armenians in attaining an independent homeland. The Hunchaks gained support among various layers of regional Armenian communities, but a new party would challenge their domination.

Established in 1890 in Tiflis by Eastern Armenians, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Dashnaktsutiun, contested the Hunchaks' goals. The Dashnaks relegated the question of an independent nation-state to a secondary position behind the urgency of alleviating the plight of Ottoman Armenians. Focused on this task, the Dashnak manifesto of 1892, the *Program*, "did not even mention the word independence. It affirmed the need for reforms in Asiatic Turkey, but said nothing of complete separation from the Ottoman Empire."⁹⁵⁷ As opposed to the autonomy and independence pursued by the Hunchaks, the Dashnaks sought the type of political, social, and economic reforms in Ottoman Armenia that a dozen years earlier had been promised by the Congress of Berlin. Consequently, matters pertaining to Russian and Persian Armenians fell outside the purview of the Dashnaks. An important element, however, bound the two Armenian parties: terrorism was their preferred tactic for achieving their contrasting objectives.⁹⁵⁸ The Dashnaks, in particular, attacked Turkish officials, soldiers, and

⁹⁵⁶Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 169-70.

⁹⁵⁷Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 169.

⁹⁵⁸Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 171. Unlike these two groups, the Armenakan party did not condone terrorism, although its individual members did not always eschew such means.

even civilians, took hostages, and collaborated with other anti-Ottoman groups, such as the Bulgarian-controlled Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.⁹⁵⁹ Unlike their less-organized and less-capable sympathizers in the South Caucasus, the Dashnaks launched attacks either from Anatolian hideouts or from within Persian territory; as a rule, they did not operate from the tsar's domain, which explains their relative absence from tsarist police records.⁹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, both the Hunchak and Dashnaktsutiun parties were founded by the tsar's Armenian subjects who "had never lived in Turkish Armenia for any length of time,"⁹⁶¹ illustrating not only this community's perennial concern for the plight of the sultan's Armenians but also the diverse political development of Eastern Armenians.

The Closing of the Parish Schools

With each discovery of an Armenian student circle with questionable aims and potentially subversive intentions, the tsarist state homed in on the perceived origin of this threat. Coupled with Alexander III's Russian nationalism, the closing of the parish schools followed a broader pattern of reactionary conservatism, eroding many Eastern Armenians' dedication to the tsar. Convinced that "nationalism and a revolutionary spirit, 'patriotism and populism,' were rampant among Armenian students and had to be eradicated,"⁹⁶² Russian officials targeted Armenian parish schools as one of the foci of Armenian cultural and political initiative. St.

⁹⁵⁹The Dashnaks' terroristic methods often backfired. In one of the worst examples of this, Dashnak fighters captured the Imperial Ottoman Bank of Constantinople in August 1896, taking several civilian hostages, some of whom died in the ensuing rescue operation. In retribution, Constantinople's enraged Muslim residents slaughtered 6,000 of their Armenian neighbors.

⁹⁶⁰Indeed, there are practically no references to Dashnak activities in the files of the *Okhranka* between 1890 and 1895.

⁹⁶¹Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 182.

⁹⁶²Suny, in Hovannisian, 129-30.

Petersburg viewed these schools as the epicenter of several coalescing forces: the promotion of notions of Armenian political, cultural, and religious antiquity; historical and geographical unity; and the inculcation of an inchoate but radical dissident Armenian youth. Priests and even secular teachers, imperial authorities charged, reinforced ideas of Armenian singularity—driven by Armenia’s status as the first Christian nation—to promote greater cohesion and “patriotism” among the students.

Aside from theological accents, Armenian schools also focused on the well-trodden myths of the nation’s metahistory, highlighting the exploits and triumphs of distant kings and military commanders, and reminding students of Armenia’s past territorial glory, when the nation “stretched from sea to sea.” Former governor of Yerevan province, A. A. Freze, summarized Caucasus officials’ stance, warning that Armenian “parish schools inculcate in the youth a spirit of intolerance, inflated understandings of the Armenian nation and its future, a spirit of resistance to all that, which is not directed at the unification and strengthening of Armenians; these schools are the disseminators of counteraction against the government’s integration efforts.”⁹⁶³

Armenian youths enjoyed a variety of educational options until the mid-1880s. Divided between the jurisdictions of the Education Ministry and the Armenian Church, as well as a few privately sponsored institutions, a growing number of schools provided scholastic opportunities for students from both wealthy and poor families. Growing literacy was a key component in Russia’s modernization of the South Caucasus, and imperial agents assigned particular importance to education’s role in maintaining a loyal populace. In February 1880, the Caucasus viceroy reiterated to Alexander II the political aims of local pedagogy: “[Teaching] must be

⁹⁶³Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, ll. 55-55ob.

directed in such a way that education serves not only the advancement of the spiritual development of the national masses, but also as an instrument (*orudie*) of political unification of this region with the [Russian] government.”⁹⁶⁴ It is hardly surprising, then, that the autocracy’s strategy to curb Armenian nationalism targeted Armenian parish schools.

On 16 February 1884, Tsar Alexander III issued several demands of the Armenian parish schools of the Caucasus. Parish schools were defined as “One and two-course institutions of general elementary learning, which are attached to churches and monasteries, and maintained either exclusively with church funds or with the assistance of the laity.”⁹⁶⁵ Effectively transferring the control of these schools to the Education Ministry, the fiat stipulated that henceforth Armenian schools must offer Russian language instruction, relinquish control over the curriculum, report data to the ministry, and seek official approval of all decisions regarding the hiring and termination of teachers.⁹⁶⁶ Russian authorities, moreover, now reserved the right to remove “unreliable” teachers. The new law prohibited, among other suspect pedagogical tools, the use of maps of ancient Armenia or hagiographies of ancient kings.⁹⁶⁷ Maps, in particular, had become common items seized from suspected radicals in the mid-1880s, suggesting that at least some Armenian nationalists linked their national identity to the territorial vastness and antiquity of the Armenian land.⁹⁶⁸ When used in conjunction with foreign-published textbooks, these

⁹⁶⁴GARF, f. 678, op. 1, d. 687, l. 27.

⁹⁶⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, l. 6ob.

⁹⁶⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, l. 45.

⁹⁶⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1895, op. 93, d. 1130, l. 23.

⁹⁶⁸Christopher Ely has made a similar argument for the role of land and imperial geography in the formation of a national identity in the Russian case. See Christopher Ely, *The Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002). Miroslav

suspect pedagogical tools were found to be “clearly and quite strongly aimed at the education of the pupils in a sense of national separatism and hostile attitudes toward the existing order of administration,” as Caucasus head Dondukov-Korsakov reported to Interior Minister Tolstoi.⁹⁶⁹

When in 1885 the Echmiadzin Synod failed to comply promptly with these demands, citing the recent death of the patriarch and the temporary absence of leadership before the election of a new Catholicos, Caucasian officials shut down 500 schools, where 900 teachers had taught 20,000 pupils.⁹⁷⁰ Tsarist agents justified their actions by arguing that Armenian ecclesiastical authorities had resisted state educational policies since the previous decade. In November 1873, a law covering the entire Russian empire had required every school to teach the Russian language, and, if it offered history and geography, to teach Russian history and geography (in Russian). In 1885, Russian authorities contended that Armenian clerics’ protests against the 1873 policies had resulted in the introduction in July 1874 of new regulations requiring the Armenian Church to submit periodic reports about its educational activities, such as the opening and closing of schools, and the hiring and backgrounds of all teachers.⁹⁷¹ Russian officials charged that, despite an eventual compromise whereby the Catholicos retained most of the authority over the schools, Armenian ecclesiastical leaders refused to cooperate and did not provide the required information. Thus, with the real and perceived proliferation of Armenian

Hroch has highlighted the role of geographical divisions in the formation of nationalism. See Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

⁹⁶⁹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 196, l. 16ob.

⁹⁷⁰Ronald G. Suny, in Hovannisian, 129-30; and also Ovanesov and Sudavtsov, *Voenno-administrativnaia deiatel’nost’ armian*, 183.

⁹⁷¹*Novoe obozrenie*, 2 March, 1885.

nationalism, compounded by a history of Armenian resistance to Russian interference in education, the state took its most radical step yet by closing the parish schools in 1885.

Despite the “total resistance” of the Armenian Church to state interference in its schooling practices, the parish schools reopened in 1886 following the royal petitions of Patriarch Makarii.⁹⁷² Yet tightened surveillance over teachers, curriculum, and even students ended Armenian hopes for a return to the relative liberty of the pre-Alexander III order. For the rest of the decade and part of the 1890s, several additional steps brought to bear the full weight of the government’s authority. In March 1889, a new law required all teachers of the Russian language, history, and geography in Armenian parish schools to hold a special license, *uchitel’skii tsenz*.⁹⁷³ Any teacher found working without such certification after five years would be removed from his or her position. In March 1891, Tsar Alexander III issued a special warning to the Armenian Church to obey this and other laws or face new restrictions. To drive home his message, the tsar granted the local Caucasus education curator (*popechitel’ uchebnogo okruga*) and the head of the Caucasus civilian administration authority to close any schools that deviated from prescribed regulations, without the preliminary consent of ministers in St. Petersburg.

Such wrangling over the control of the Armenian parish schools would spill into the final decade of the nineteenth century, when in 1894 and 1895 Patriarch Mkrtych petitioned for an extension to the 1889 regulations regarding teaching licenses. The ministers of education and the interior, in conjunction with the Caucasian administration, used this example of what they interpreted as Armenian Church’s dawdling to expand the state’s grip on the Armenian schools. In November 1895, the tsar’s ministries ordered that only schools directly supported by the

⁹⁷²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, l. 45.

⁹⁷³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, ll. 45ob-46.

Armenian Church and the donations of its members were subject to the rules of 1884, with all other Armenian schools falling under the same general regulations as all schools in the Caucasus.⁹⁷⁴ Education Minister Ivan Delianov determined that, according to this calculation, the number of schools subject to the 1884 law dropped significantly, making it easier to staff them with state-approved, licensed teachers. Before his death in November 1894, Alexander III supported these measures, underlining in one report, “make no concessions to the Patriarch in the schools matter,” and scribbling “approve” near a passage that proposed placing all Armenian schools under the authority of the Caucasus education administration.⁹⁷⁵ By March 1896, as a result of the new requirements, 160 previously approved schools shut down.⁹⁷⁶

Although cooperation and adaptation were not uncommon Armenian reactions to the closing of the parish schools, the community mainly responded with both overt and furtive resistance. Patent opposition came from the new Catholicos of Echmiadzin, Makarii, who in 1885 argued that the education of Russian Armenians corresponded to broader geopolitical interests of the Romanov empire.⁹⁷⁷ Erudite Russian Armenians promoted the tsar’s political interests not only within Russia, contended the patriarch, but also in Turkey, India, and beyond. At the same time, covert resistance took diverse forms. Within months of the first closings in 1885, privately funded underground schools popped up throughout the region.⁹⁷⁸ As Russian authorities took to the pages of regional newspapers to announce and explain their actions,

⁹⁷⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, ll. 47-48.

⁹⁷⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, l. 48.

⁹⁷⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, ll. 57-57ob.

⁹⁷⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 196, ll. 17ob-18.

⁹⁷⁸Suny, in Hovannisian, 129-30.

alongside the official notices appeared advertisements offering private lessons in Armenian history, literature, and geography.⁹⁷⁹

More irksome for Caucasus authorities were the pamphlets discovered in Tiflis in April 1885, denouncing the closing of the Armenian schools as “shameful abuse” (*pozornoe nasilie*).⁹⁸⁰ “The Russian autocracy with its customary despotism closes our schools,” lamented the pamphlets, warning that the parish schools have formed an unalienable component of the Armenian Church since its inception.⁹⁸¹ Likening the parish schools to the sacred altar of the church, the letters reminded readers that “from our past we have two sacred things left: the national church and the national schools.” The pamphlets accused the tsarist regime of declaring war on the Armenian nation: “Alexander III the Despot destroys to its foundation the Armenian school; the tsar of a giant state declares war on a tiny nation. But why are we surprised [?]” The author charged the government with wooing small nations into Russian subjecthood, only to retract gradually these concessions and take away their rights: “What the Russian despots did to the Georgians, they are now doing to us, Armenians.” By comparing the plight of Armenians to that of other tsarist subjects, the pamphlets connected the current crisis to the suppression not only of the Georgian church and language, but also to the attempted Russification of Ukrainians and Poles. “With bayonets and spurs, you, Russian despots, were unable to force the Poles to forget their language, your campaigns against the Little Russian [Ukrainian] tongue likewise had completely counterproductive results,” charged the Armenian letters.⁹⁸² The authors urged

⁹⁷⁹See, for example, *Novoe obozrenie*, 2 March 1885.

⁹⁸⁰GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1885, op. 81, d. 25, ch. 13, l. 1.

⁹⁸¹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1885, op. 81, d. 25, ch. 13, ll. 3-3ob.

⁹⁸²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1885, op. 81, d. 25, ch. 13, l. 6ob.

greater self-reliance: “Let every Armenian family represent a special Armenian school. . . . From now on, we ourselves will be our own only hope, from now on we will not trust other, especially Russian, governments, and when we, as true Armenians, carry out our holy duty, then, believe, Armenians, victory will be on the side of the righteous. Victory will be ours.”⁹⁸³

Menacing Faith

The conflict over the parish schools was but the most prominent manifestation of tensions between St. Petersburg and Echmiadzin in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the preceding decades, the late imperial era marked the deterioration of the Russo-Armenian political bond based on religious kinship. From the imperial to the regional capital, fissures appeared. In December 1883, for example, Yerevan authorities alerted St. Petersburg to a change in local Armenian churches’ practice of worship: priests no longer removed their miter or kneeled as a sign of deference for the royal Romanov family, as they had done since 1833.⁹⁸⁴ This change, the police emphasized, could have come about only with the sanction of the Echmiadzin leadership, apparently demonstrating the existence of “solidarity between the leaders of the Armenian agitation and senior Armenian clergy.”⁹⁸⁵ The Yerevan GZHU’s annual report to the Department of Police in January 1884 echoed these accusation, charging senior Armenian clergy with engaging in “antigovernment” machinations. Yerevan Bishop Sureniants was accused of being a “notable member of Armenian patriots (*Azga-ser*), but the main center of

⁹⁸³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1885, op. 81, d. 25, ch. 13, ll. 7ob-8. A twenty-three year old Armenian from Elizavetpol’ was arrested for distributing these pamphlets, but the source of their printing was never discovered. The Tiflis police tracked other anti-government challenges in 1885, such as pamphlets found on local barracks declaring that “We don’t need the emperor who does evil to us, we don’t need the army that kills us, we don’t need the government that robs us – we need not a monarchy but order.” See GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1885, op. 81, d. 25, ch. 13, l. 15.

⁹⁸⁴GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 53-55.

⁹⁸⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 55.

separatist aims [is the] Echmiadzin monastery, where Bishops Manguni and Nerses are distinguished [and] active members.”⁹⁸⁶ Armenian priests’ publications also attracted the state’s scrutiny in the mid-1880s, with numerous bans and investigations launched both by local Caucasus officials and their superiors in St. Petersburg.⁹⁸⁷

Yet the geopolitical need to maintain influence over Ottoman Armenians often outweighed these domestic concerns. In the early 1880s, the autocracy focused on accruing the goodwill of the sultan’s Armenians by affirming the ecclesiastical bond between the Russian and Armenian peoples. In the spring of 1883, for instance, the Russian consul in Erzurum, A. Denet, urged St. Petersburg to assist the venerable Armenian monastery Surp Karapet.⁹⁸⁸ The tsarist diplomat asked his superiors to donate an ornate chandelier as a sign of Russia’s goodwill. In stressing Surp Karapet’s importance to Western Armenians, Denet compared it to the Russian reverence for similar monasteries, which “for the people are not just holy sites that serve as a source of divine benevolence, but also the embodiment of the idea of its national identity (*samobytnost*’).” Such a prominent position in Ottoman Armenians’ national lore made this sacred abbey a unique tool for advancing Russian political interests, Denet insisted, emphasizing that “any attention we pay to such a valuable place for the Armenian people cannot but arouse in them a burning [sense of] sympathy and gratefulness.”⁹⁸⁹ The Foreign Ministry agreed that such a sign of friendship would “in the greatest sense contribute to the revival of sympathy toward us

⁹⁸⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1884, op. 80, d. 88, ch. 2, l. 24ob.

⁹⁸⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 182, ll. 10-48.

⁹⁸⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, ll. 13-16ob. The Surp Karapet monastery, reportedly founded by Gregory the Illuminator in the fourth century, was one of the most revered sites of Armenian pilgrimage until its destruction during World War I.

⁹⁸⁹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, l. 15ob.

among the majority of the Armenian people,” and determined that “a sign of the [tsar’s] attention to a holy Armenian place will produce among them quite positive impressions.”⁹⁹⁰

When foreign missionaries made inroads among Western Armenians, Alexander III’s bureaucracy shelved its grievances against Echmiadzin to join forces. In September 1887, the Constantinople patriarch alerted his Echmiadzin counterpart to the plight of Armenians in several Anatolian regions, whose condition had been exacerbated by famine and large-scale fires that had swept through parts of Zeitun province.⁹⁹¹ The Constantinople patriarch stressed that Catholic and Protestant missionaries had increased their activity—with notable success—taking advantage of local Armenians’ economic predicament. The Echmiadzin patriarch turned to the Russian governor of the Caucasus, Prince Dondukov-Korsakov, who shared the two Armenian prelates’ concerns, writing to the Interior Ministry that he wished to “maintain warm relations with the senior ecclesiastical leadership of the [Armenian] Church.”⁹⁹² Interior Minister Tolstoi likewise confirmed to Alexander III that this action “completely corresponds with our interests in the east.”⁹⁹³ However, on the whole, Alexander’s reign curtailed Armenian religious autonomy.

In the spring of 1883, the autocracy reformulated its policy toward the election of the Echmiadzin Catholicos, explicitly prioritizing Russian state interests above all other considerations.⁹⁹⁴ To ensure the “direct oversight and influence of the government” over future patriarchs, the new regulations called for the number of votes from Ottoman Armenian

⁹⁹⁰RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, l. 13ob.

⁹⁹¹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, ll. 23-32.

⁹⁹²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, ll. 27-27ob.

⁹⁹³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, l. 30ob.

⁹⁹⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 196, ll. 3-3ob.

representatives to be reduced, fearing the leverage of “the Constantinople Armenian national council.”⁹⁹⁵ In April 1885, Makarii, the Nakhichevan-Bessarabian archbishop, was elected Echmiadzin Catholicos by a margin of one vote.⁹⁹⁶ Despite official notices that, if elected patriarch, Makarii had promised not to “hesitate to sacrifice [his] life to save his nation from the Russian yoke, for the time has come to reestablish the Armenian Kingdom,”⁹⁹⁷ the new prelate initially pleased his Russian benefactors with harangues against the impact of nationalism on the Armenian communities of the South Caucasus and admonitions against independence.

Yet tensions soon arose between Makarii and Dondukov-Korsakov over the closing of the parish schools. The Russian governor later complained to the tsar that “despite Makarii’s undoubted personal reliability (*blagonadezhnost’*) and his friendliest and heartfelt relations toward me, I nevertheless was unable to turn him onto a strictly legal course.”⁹⁹⁸ The closing of the parish schools aroused recurring petitions, complaints, and resistance from Echmiadzin, “disappointing” local Russian officials. Makarii’s “remarkable intransigence” (*udivitel’noe uporstvo*) in the parish schools matter eroded what remained of the tsarist state’s constructive modus operandi toward the Armenian Church and, by extension, much of the laity.⁹⁹⁹ In fact, the

⁹⁹⁵GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, ll. 8-9.

⁹⁹⁶GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 9.

⁹⁹⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 68.

⁹⁹⁸GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 9.

⁹⁹⁹Dondukov-Korsakov wrote that with his open opposition to the closing of the parish schools, Makarii adopted the antigovernment position of the Armenian nationalists. Specifically, Makarii was accused of resisting government orders by formulating his own regulations for the Armenian parish schools, which not only made no mention of the tsar's decree on this subject but also ignored the schools' subordination to the local educational body (*uchebnomu vedomstvu*). Makarii's regulations granted various rights and privileges to the schools, such as their own stamp, the power to appoint curators (*popechiteli*), and the right to hire and fire teachers without the consent of outside (that is, Russian) authorities.

combination of Makarii's resistance and the continued subversive actions of lay Armenians opened a new chapter for Russo-Armenian ties. The imperial subjecthood and personal characteristics of the Catholicos became secondary considerations for Russian policy, overshadowed by the activities of the secular nationalists and fear of foreign interference. An irritated Dondukov-Korsakov concluded in one report:

Apparently, the cause of such strange behavior must be discovered not in the subjecthood of the elected person to our or another government, nor in the patriarch's personal traits, but rather exclusively in that difficult situation . . . in which the patriarch finds himself surrounded by the intrigues of the Armenian intelligentsia that is hostile toward us, as well as in the persistent pressure of foreign powers.¹⁰⁰⁰

This acknowledgment hardly implied a change of policy, and the state continued to use Echmiadzin to recalibrate the political orientation of the Armenian diaspora.

The Armenian patriarch of Constantinople occupied an equally important role in Russian considerations. When Ariutin Vekhabedian, archbishop of Erzurum, was elected patriarch in early 1885, a Russian diplomat from the Constantinople embassy reported to Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikolai Girs that Vekhabedian's selection "can be considered fortunate for us," given that from his days in Erzurum the Armenian priest had corresponded actively with the Russian government, declaring himself to be a "zealous guardian of Armenian interests in the East, who at the same time values good relations with Russian agents."¹⁰⁰¹ The autocracy sought to

¹⁰⁰⁰GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, ll. 9-9ob.

¹⁰⁰¹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 4-4ob. Vekhabedian's election encountered problems when the sultan delayed his confirmation of the new Constantinople patriarch. Although the Porte was aware of Vekhabedian's rapport with the tsarist government, the delay was ostensibly caused by rumors that Vekhabedian was a Muslim apostate who had been born into a Muslim family and even circumcised according to Muslim rite, making him a renegade of the faith. Although he was eventually confirmed patriarch, Vekhabedian resigned in October 1887, citing the Ottoman government's interference and resistance to his authority. The Russian embassy in Constantinople kept a close watch over this "crisis," warning the MID of the potential repercussions for the Ottoman Armenian community.

capitalize on the rivalry between the prelates of Constantinople and Echmiadzin. As Dondukov-Korsakov advised the tsar in 1890, “in time it will be beneficial for us to take advantage of the aspirations of the Constantinople and Sis patriarchs to secede from Echmiadzin, in order to turn the Catholicos into a blind instrument of our goals (*slepoe orudie nashikh tselei*).”¹⁰⁰²

To be sure, the 1890s witnessed a new, more acrimonious dynamic between St. Petersburg and Echmiadzin. No government edict contributed more to this circumstance than the 16 March 1891 regulations for the punishment of Armenian clergy.¹⁰⁰³ Aiming to target low-ranking Armenian priests who “avoid carrying out the demands of the government,” or who are “harmful to the state and civil order,” Alexander III granted authority to Caucasus officials and the Interior Ministry to exile and imprison Armenian clergymen without the consent of the Echmiadzin Synod or the Catholicos. Russian imperial agents could use Armenian monasteries and “other places,” within and outside the Caucasus, as penitentiaries for this purpose.¹⁰⁰⁴ Outside the Caucasus, the Interior Ministry determined the length of sentence and location of imprisonment, whereas inside the region the head of the Caucasus civilian administration made those decisions. Exiled priests were placed under local police supervision, prohibited from carrying out public worship or private religious services, and banned from meeting with outsiders without the consent of the police. In explaining the new law to one governor, Interior Minister Durnovo wrote that it was made necessary “as a result of the Armenian clergy’s

¹⁰⁰²GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 10.

¹⁰⁰³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 15-15ob.

¹⁰⁰⁴When Caucasus governor Sheremet’ev sought Echmiadzin’s assistance in compiling a list of regional monasteries to be used to house convicted priests, he encountered resistance from Patriarch Makarii, who argued that such steps could not be taken without his consent. Sheremet’ev responded by threatening to lock up priests not in monasteries but in ordinary prisons. See RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 51-53.

observed evasion of fulfilling the laws and orders of the government,” and that it “has been deemed desirable especially at this time, when among our Armenians a straying (*brozhenie*) is noticed, which is aroused by the political movements of their compatriots in Turkey.”¹⁰⁰⁵

Regional Russian officials enforced the new law with alacrity. One of its earliest casualties was Yerevan province priest Ter Vartan Vartanov, whom police accused of collecting among local villagers large sums of money (4,500 rubles from one village) to support young men crossing the border to join “units of Armenian volunteers rebelling against Turkish authority.”¹⁰⁰⁶

Imperial officials imprisoned or banished other Armenian clergymen in the 1890s throughout the Caucasus, Kars province, and in internal Russian provinces. One Armenian priest from Kars, Ter Petrosiants, was arrested for receiving from known Armenian revolutionaries books banned by the censors, an offense for which he was exiled to Lenkoran for a year.¹⁰⁰⁷ In Yerevan, the priest Krikor Ter Nersesiants was charged in April 1891 with recruiting young Armenians to fight in Turkey, not only supplying them with horses and clothing but also paying each man 20 to 25 rubles.¹⁰⁰⁸ In Zakaspiiskaia province, an Armenian priest named Ter Vaskanov was “removed” after declaring during liturgy, “His Majesty the Emperor is not our tsar, but the Russian tsar.”¹⁰⁰⁹ Such cases continued for the duration of Tsar Alexander III’s reign

¹⁰⁰⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 17-17ob.

¹⁰⁰⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 27-27ob.

¹⁰⁰⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 30-30ob and 54. Ter Petrosiants aroused particular indignation on the part of Russian police, who not only charged him with harboring Armenian nationalistic aspirations, but also vented that his home contained “no portrait of the Tsar Emperor and in general had nothing that would suggest that this Armenian priest is a Russian subject,” while maps of ancient Armenia and past kings decorated his home.

¹⁰⁰⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 36-37.

¹⁰⁰⁹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, ll. 58 and 72.

and into the rule of imperial Russia's last tsar. In one example from 1896, Yerevan priest Grigor Ter-Avakov was banished to Kutais province for "political agitation among Armenians."¹⁰¹⁰

Related developments in the Armenian diaspora again compelled the autocracy to reshape its policies. Unlike the ostensibly subversive activities of low-ranking priests, a new challenge for the state emerged from the Echmiadzin patriarch's seeking to work within the imperial system. In February 1894, Patriarch Mkrtych informed Interior Minister Durnovo about the recurring pleas for aid reaching Echmiadzin from Ottoman Armenians.¹⁰¹¹ Driven from their homes by famine and receiving no assistance from Turkish authorities, Armenians of Van and Erzurum vilayets (Ottoman provinces) dispatched representatives to Echmiadzin to beg the Armenian patriarch for assistance. Arguing that "when people starve to death, even political considerations give way to Christian benevolence," Mkrtych cited the comparably liberal policies of Alexander II—"the emancipator of Eastern Christians"—who permitted Eastern Armenians in 1880 to collect donations for their Ottoman compatriots.

Several senior tsarist officials debated this request, weighing the potential benefits and consequences of permitting Eastern Armenians, under Echmiadzin's leadership, to collect donations for Western Armenians. When Durnovo sought Caucasus military commander Sergei Sheremet'ev's opinion, a new iteration of state policy emerged. A stern administrator who even forbade Armenians to collect alms for the poor without his approval,¹⁰¹² Sheremet'ev did not rush to reject Mkrtych's request but made clear that Armenian political and social initiative would not be tolerated. Sheremet'ev argued that the donation campaigns "can hardly be

¹⁰¹⁰RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, l. 205.

¹⁰¹¹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, ll. 34-35ob.

¹⁰¹²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 206, l. 137.

considered appropriate in the political sense, given that the Armenian clergy, as well as the secular intelligentsia and especially the teachers of Armenian parish schools, most likely, will not fail to take advantage of this campaign as a convenient opportunity for tendentious agitation among the Armenian population of national-patriotic feelings.”¹⁰¹³ Moreover, Sheremet’ev warned that consenting to this proposal would be detrimental to tsarist interests because it would place the initiative with the “quite popular among Armenians current leader of their clergy.”

But Sheremet’ev suggested not rejecting the patriarch’s request unconditionally. Because Russian officials had previously allowed such collections for Ottoman Armenians, their total prohibition could galvanize the population and incite renewed tension with senior Armenian clergy. Instead, the Caucasus governor proposed acquiescing to the request with the stipulation that donations be collected only in Armenian churches and, crucially, that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rather than the Echmiadzin monastery and its representatives, be charged with distributing the alms to Western Armenians. The tsarist government would appear altruistic in its assistance to the starving Armenians, while simultaneously stripping the initiative of the Eastern Armenian clergy by taking charge of the donations’ distribution. Sheremet’ev’s proposal met with approval from Durnovo and Minister of Foreign Affairs Girs, who forwarded their plan to the tsar, securing royal permission for it in April 1894.¹⁰¹⁴

The level of acrimony between the Armenian Church in Echmiadzin and Russian officials reached unprecedented levels in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. What had previously been a symbiotic partnership firmly grounded in ecumenical solidarity and parallel aims had turned into a political conflict. Russian officials linked the rise of nationalism

¹⁰¹³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, ll. 38ob-39.

¹⁰¹⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 131, ll. 43-44.

both to the Armenian Church's senior leadership and to its low-ranking clergy. Former governor of Yerevan province, A. A. Freze, was unequivocal in 1892: "There is no doubt that the Armenian clergy took, and continues to take, the most lively and active part in the Armenian national-political movement."¹⁰¹⁵ Given the Armenian faith's primacy to the nation's identity and Echmiadzin's centrality in Armenian secular affairs, the empire's pursuit of the Armenian Church marked the nadir in Russo-Armenian ties of the pre-Soviet era.

Evolved Perceptions and Responses

The real and imagined rise of Armenian political self-initiative and nationalism altered a centuries-old Russian understanding of who Armenians were, what their close association with Russia provided to the empire, and what this meant for tsarist policy in the South Caucasus and beyond. From Caucasus officials to the tsar and to the periodical press, Russian reactions to the deterioration of Russo-Armenian relations shed light on the final iteration of imperial Russia's evolved perception of its Armenian subjects.

At the start of Alexander III's reign in 1881, nearly 730,000 Armenians populated the Caucasus.¹⁰¹⁶ By 1890, through natural growth and immigration the number had risen to 890,000,¹⁰¹⁷ reaching nearly one million by the end of the century.¹⁰¹⁸ Among the South

¹⁰¹⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 222, l. 55.

¹⁰¹⁶GARF, f. 652, op. 1, d. 236, l. 24. All but 26,000 of these Armenians lived in the South Caucasus, primarily in Yerevan province. Just 17,000 Armenians remained in Kars province by 1881.

¹⁰¹⁷GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 7.

¹⁰¹⁸*Bratskaia pomoshch' postradavshim v Turtsii Armianam* (Moscow: I. N. Kushnerev & Co., 1898), 254. The Armenian population in the Caucasus by 1898 is cited here at 985,460.

Caucasus administrative region's (*Zakavkazskii krai*) population of nearly 4,700,000 people,¹⁰¹⁹ Armenians had made conspicuous advancements in various social, economic, and even political spheres. Indeed, by the 1890s, Dondukov-Korsakov warned the tsar that Armenian economic progress threatened to marginalize Georgians and other national groups. Armenians' "pursuit [of land] is so strong, that into their hands will fall all estates of the impoverished Georgian nobility if the government does not come to the [Georgians'] rescue," cautioned the Caucasus governor.¹⁰²⁰ Dondukov-Korsakov also pointed out that "there is no doubt that Armenians have done much for the revitalization of the province's economic life and industrial expansion, and in this regard we ought to use them (*imi nuzhno pol'zovat'sia*), but we should not leave out of sight their simultaneous pursuit of other aims, [nor should we] forget that for their personal gain Armenians do not stop at far from irreproachable (*bezuprechnymi*) measures."

This manifestation of the hackneyed "Jews of the Caucasus" aphorism for Armenians had been a staple of the Caucasian social milieu for generations,¹⁰²¹ but its increased use by the tsarist political elite signaled a shift not only in the Russian social perception of Armenians but also in their political situation vis-à-vis the tsarist nationalities policy. Fellow senior officials mimicked Dondukov-Korsakov's sentiments. The head of the Holy Synod, for example, advised the Interior Ministry that "the Armenian nation possesses, like the Jews, a special ability to control the market, to take into its hands industry and trade, removing all others, and to act

¹⁰¹⁹GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 4. Just 97,000, or 2 percent, of this number were Russians, mostly sectarians, such as the *dukhobory* and *molokane*. The Georgian population constituted the region's largest Christian national minority, at 1,170,000. The majority of the rest were various Muslim peoples.

¹⁰²⁰GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 7.

¹⁰²¹A local Caucasian proverb warned: "A Greek will cheat three Jews, but an Armenian will cheat three Greeks." See Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 148.

through deft intrigue in an environment that has insufficient strength to combat or resist it.”¹⁰²²

The Yerevan GZhU echoed this sentiment, reporting to Petersburg that Armenians, “possessing the natural tendencies of their Semitic race, are engaged exclusively in acquiring profit.”¹⁰²³

The Russian political elite’s growing use of this conception of Armenians, analogous to the one employed to marginalize Jews, evinced tsarist officials’ new perception of the Armenian diaspora. Whereas in the early decades of the century Russian imperial agents, seeking to expand the tsarist empire through direct Armenian cooperation, had lauded Armenians’ economic success and celebrated it as a mark of Christian resilience in hostile environments, now the official understanding of Armenians had changed dramatically. Although Armenian peasants maintained loyalty to the tsarist state, the intelligentsia and merchantry were deemed to “present no satisfactory guarantees of political reliability.”¹⁰²⁴ Armenians’ political prominence in regional affairs compounded their potential threat. Authorities were vexed, for example, by the fact that of the Tiflis Duma’s 70 vote-wielding members, 54 were Armenian, rendering the South Caucasus’s premier city essentially “an Armenian center.”¹⁰²⁵

Tsarist officials took the first steps to curb the consequences of Armenian political “straying” in September 1883. Authored by Dondukov-Korsakov, they were a response to Interior Minister Orzhevskii’s warning about the “undesired straying of the Caucasus’s Armenian population, which . . . can later become harmful for the state order, having inculcated

¹⁰²²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 50.

¹⁰²³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1884, op. 80, d. 88, ch. 2, ll. 18-18ob.

¹⁰²⁴GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 7.

¹⁰²⁵GARF, f. 1099, op. 1, d. 587, l. 8.

in the maturing generation a sense of separation from the general interests of the state.”¹⁰²⁶ To combat the rise of subversive Armenian movements, the Caucasus governor called for several interrelated policy changes. First, in a foreshadowing of the parish school demands to be issued by the tsar in a few months, Dondukov-Korsakov urged placing Armenian schools under the jurisdiction of the Education Ministry.¹⁰²⁷ Second, he suggested instituting “strict supervision” over private Armenian societies, including benevolent and philanthropic organizations. Not only would local authorities be able to shut down such groups, but they also were to receive monthly financial reports from the groups. No new Armenian organizations in the Caucasus were to be permitted. Third, Dondukov-Korsakov demanded that Armenian civil servants henceforth not be assigned to regions with large Armenian communities and that Armenian bureaucrats in sensitive locales be gradually transferred away.¹⁰²⁸ Finally, tighter press censorship was necessary to ensure the political reliability not only of internally printed Armenian publications but also of those imported from abroad.

Upon the tsar’s orders, thirteen ministers and senior officials examined Dondukov-Korsakov’s proposal. Their responses illustrate not only the diversity of the Russian political elite’s opinions on this subject but also the degree to which Armenians had become indispensable to the bureaucracy of the Romanov empire. The Minister of State Properties, for

¹⁰²⁶GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 8.

¹⁰²⁷GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 15ob-16. In a separate letter to the MVD, Dondukov-Korsakov stressed that it was imperative to take advantage of the current absence of an Echmiadzin patriarch to carry out the transfer of the Armenian schools’ oversight to the tsarist government.

¹⁰²⁸GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 16-16ob. Dondukov-Korsakov intended to extend this measure to other non-Russian bureaucrats of the region, due to his conviction of the “harmful consequences bred by the execution of official duties by natives (*tuzemtsy*) in places of their personal and property interests.” See GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, ll. 18ob-19.

example, hesitated to endorse the proposal and questioned its reasoning, asking for further evidence and clarification.¹⁰²⁹ The Holy Synod's Chief Procurator cautioned that "Armenians are distinguished by their ability (*sposobnost'*) and cleverness (*bystrota v sobrazhenii*), which is why it is not surprising that those looking for competent bureaucrats end their search with Armenians."¹⁰³⁰ Rather than expelling all Armenian bureaucrats, he recommended reassigning them to secondary positions within the regional administration, ensuring their continued function but taking away much of their influence.¹⁰³¹ The State Comptroller unequivocally declared that its eleven Armenian-heritage employees in the South Caucasus posed no political risk and would not be removed.¹⁰³² The Finance Minister advised against a rushed removal of current Armenian officials in the Caucasus.¹⁰³³

Despite such dissent, the formidable Interior Ministry supported the proposed restrictions. In response to questions from surprised officials about the newly suspect Armenians, the MVD issued a spirited defense of the measures. "That such aims indeed exist," insisted the ministry, "that the number of believers in the Caucasus in the idea of Armenians' national independence constantly increases, and that this movement interacts with the . . . movement of Asia Minor Armenians—none of this is subject to doubt."¹⁰³⁴ The ministry maintained that, given the

¹⁰²⁹GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 41.

¹⁰³⁰GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 48ob.

¹⁰³¹However, the Holy Synod's head, who made frequent comparisons between the supposedly subversive activities of Armenians and Jews, also suggested that the "currently unlimited rights of Armenians" be reduced through a tighter control of their press, which fans harmful ideas.

¹⁰³²GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 51.

¹⁰³³GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 45.

¹⁰³⁴GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 43ob.

“constantly fortifying” and “prominent” position Armenians had attained in the Caucasus, the government could not afford to overlook their political self-initiative. The growing economic advancement—“which was the main stimulus of the notion of Armenians’ independent existence”—gave them unparalleled influence over regional society, and it was the government’s duty to prevent this influence from penetrating into the administrative and official spheres through Armenian-heritage civil servants, argued the Interior Ministry.¹⁰³⁵

Yet the very backlash against Armenians signaled their important social, economic, and political position in late imperial Russia. Despite the souring of the top-level dynamic, Eastern Armenians experienced no large-scale violence, unlike their compatriots in Turkey or such tsarist subjects as Jews.¹⁰³⁶ In fact, the collective Russian perception—more among the public than state officials—continued to see Armenians as *Rossiiskie*, that is, Russia’s own subjects.¹⁰³⁷ The rise of Armenian nationalism and professional revolutionaries had blighted the constructive atmosphere of the earlier decades, but Russian society by and large continued to coexist with their Armenian neighbors and also to sympathize with the plight of Ottoman Armenians.

From increased scholarship on Armenian antiquity to private Russian campaigns for the support of the sultan’s Armenians, Russian society embraced Armenians as *Rossiiskie*. After large-scale massacres of Ottoman Armenians in the mid-1890s, a Moscow-published book,

¹⁰³⁵GARF, f. 102, 3rd d-vo, 1883, op. 79, d. 700, l. 44.

¹⁰³⁶For contemporary anti-Jewish pogroms, see John Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Michael Aronson, *Troubled Waters: Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1990).

¹⁰³⁷Who qualified as “Russian” in the pre-Soviet era was a notoriously fluid understanding, in which Armenians experienced the full spectrum of identities ascribed to them by state officials. For an overview of the category of “aliens,” see John Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of ‘Aliens’ in Imperial Russia,” in *Russian Review* 2, vol. 57 (1998): 173-90. For a broader analysis, see Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

entitled *Brotherly Help for the Armenian Victims in Turkey*, rallied tsarist society for aid.¹⁰³⁸ It not only condemned the “inhumane slaughter by Turks in 1894 of 10,000 peaceful Armenians in Sasun” but also celebrated Armenians’ antiquity and cultural contributions. In a subsequent volume, about 120 Russian, Armenian, German, French, and English contributors presented a wide range of support for the Armenian cause. The famed Russian archeologist Nikolai Marr summarized his excavations at Ani, the ancient Armenian capital, emphasizing its rich cultural heritage.¹⁰³⁹ An obituary of Prime Minister William Gladstone repeated the late statesman’s proclamation that “to serve Armenia is to serve civilization,” while Lord Byron’s assertion that “Armenian is the language to speak with God” underscored the contributors’ accent on Armenia’s Christian identity.¹⁰⁴⁰ Other Russian publications in the 1880s echoed such sentiments, highlighting the mutual benefits of the Russo-Armenian encounter. Historian Victor Abaza declared that “In the moral sense, Armenians in the East rendered one of the greatest services to the Christian world, having remained the steadfast bearers of Christian light, under the most unequal multi-century struggle with pagans and Muslims.”¹⁰⁴¹ Another author lionized Armenians as Russia’s “true sons, [who] dedicated themselves to her benefits and interests.”¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰³⁸*Bratskaia pomoshch' postradavshim v Turtsii Armianam* (Moscow: K. O. Aleksandrov, 1897). A second edition was released the following year: *Bratskaia pomoshch' postradavshim v Turtsii Armianam* (Moscow: I. N. Kushnerev & Co., 1898).

¹⁰³⁹Nikolai Marr, “Ani, stolitsa drevnei Armenii,” in *Bratskaia pomoshch' postradavshim v Turtsii Armianam* (Moscow: I. N. Kushnerev & Co., 1898), 197-222.

¹⁰⁴⁰There were also analogous West European English-language publications, such as Malcolm MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896).

¹⁰⁴¹Viktor Abaza, *Istoriia Armenii* (St. Petersburg: Tip. I. N. Skorokhodova, 1888), v.

¹⁰⁴²I. Ia. Aleksanov, *Kratkaia istoriia Armenii s pribavleniem ocherka “Armiane v Rossii”* (Rostov: Tip. A. I. Adamkovicha, 1884), 107.

Nevertheless, the contemporary political climate left little room for such romanticizing. If Russo-Armenian religious kinship had *ipso facto* cemented the tiny nation's ties with the Russian empire in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Armenians no longer presented the same guarantees of political reliability and social benefits that had once made them essential colonizers. When disaffected Ottoman Armenians sought shelter in Russia in the late 1880s, the state's responses made clear that such sentiments no longer impacted imperial policy, evincing the final evolution of the tsarist state's perception of Armenians.

In April 1888, Minister of Foreign Affairs Girs brought to the tsar's attention Erzurum Armenians' "indignation, entirely justified by the Porte's complete disregard of the responsibilities regarding Armenians that it has assumed as a result of the Berlin Treaty's article 61."¹⁰⁴³ Girs enumerated the myriad ways in which Turkish authorities and locals neglected and abused Armenians in Erzurum vilayet, citing the reports of the Russian consulate. When Ottoman officials adjudicated cases in favor of Kurdish villagers who had raided and destroyed several Armenian villages, desperate local Armenians contemplated emigrating from Anatolia to Russia. In light of the prohibitive financial and political obstacles to such a drastic move, the besieged community chose to stay put but to convert to Orthodoxy.¹⁰⁴⁴ Seeking the establishment of Russian schools and the arrival of Russian priests, the community saw salvation only in direct Russian involvement, analogous to the English protection of Turkey's small Protestant Armenian communities. This initiative spread beyond Erzurum to neighboring Armenian settlements in Anatolia, including regions bordering Kars province.

¹⁰⁴³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, l. 28. Girs's entire report is on ll. 28-33.

¹⁰⁴⁴RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 22ob-23.

A suspected leader of the disaffected Erzurum Armenians, a man called Tatos, denied both to Ottoman authorities and to the local Armenian eparchy any intention to convert to Orthodoxy, but soon he appeared at the Russian consulate to ascertain the position of the tsarist government.¹⁰⁴⁵ The Consul General, T. Preobrazhenskii, discouraged Armenian resettlement into Russia, warning Tatos of the obligations they would face in their new homeland, including taxes and military service. Instead, the Russian diplomat urged Erzurum Armenians to form a more cohesive front through which, using legal means, to present their concerns to the Ottoman government.¹⁰⁴⁶ Undeterred, Tatos insisted that “the condition of the 10,000-Armenian population of Erzurum vilayet is so dire, that only in resettlement in Russia does it see salvation, and should the imperial government consent, Armenians will eagerly accept all demands of Russian law.”¹⁰⁴⁷ Preobrazhenskii reported to St. Petersburg that nine Armenian villages from Erzurum alone, representing approximately 1,800 people, had joined in this request to relocate into the South Caucasus, although Tatos had omitted any mention of a conversion to Orthodoxy.

The spectrum of the tsarist political elite’s responses to this challenge is also valuable for what it tells us about the broader Russian understanding of Armenian theological identity. Girs rejected Erzurum Armenians’ plans, not only pointing out the unacceptability of religious conversion driven by political motivations, but also arguing that such conversion would do little to alleviate their situation vis-à-vis their Muslim overlords and neighbors, potentially causing a

¹⁰⁴⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 23ob and 30.

¹⁰⁴⁶This reflected the stance taken by Girs, who argued that the main reason behind the Porte's continued failure to implement the reforms required by the Berlin Congress stemmed from the divided nature of the Ottoman Armenian population. Armenian elites, especially those who lived in Constantinople and had connections to the Turkish government, were engaged in internal intrigues and focused on “selfish” goals, largely ignoring the plight of their compatriots beyond Constantinople.

¹⁰⁴⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, l. 30ob.

dangerous backlash by the Armenians.¹⁰⁴⁸ Moreover, Girs demonstrated greater concern for potential repercussions coming from the Echmiadzin Synod rather than the Ottoman government, which clearly would not be pleased by Russia's real or perceived patronage of newly converted Ottoman Armenians. The tsarist minister feared the "problems, which will inevitably arise among our Armenian population and the Echmiadzin clergy if we give the slightest reason to see in us a readiness to support the conversion of Turkish Armenians into Orthodoxy."¹⁰⁴⁹ Yet a different consideration played the decisive role in this debate.

Girs emphasized that the relocation of Ottoman Armenians into Russian territory contradicted broader imperial policy. The settlement, he wrote,

of the Caucasus by foreigners (*inozemtsami*) is undesired, while, on the other hand, the Christian, especially agrarian, population of the Turkish provinces bordering Russia . . . has always served as a redoubt during our wars with Turkey, and to weaken this population [by allowing them to move into the South Caucasus] would be especially dangerous because in the event of their departure the Turkish government will not fail to ensure the settlement in the abandoned places of Muslims who are hostile to us.¹⁰⁵⁰

Geopolitical state priorities had always eclipsed the desires of Armenians and other imperial subject groups, but the new emphasis on the "undesirability" of "foreign" elements, however defined, colonizing the Caucasus signaled a departure from earlier policies. True, the region's population had grown significantly since the days of the Persian wars in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and little supposedly "untended" land remained, but Russia's claims of concern for the plight of Muslim-ruled Armenians had dissipated with the tsarist state's claims to

¹⁰⁴⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 30ob-31. Girs feared that Erzurum Armenians, disenchanted by their futile conversion to Orthodoxy, would next seek Protestantism or Catholicism in a desperate search for foreign protection.

¹⁰⁴⁹RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, l. 31ob.

¹⁰⁵⁰RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 31ob-32.

moral supremacy over its imperial rivals.¹⁰⁵¹ Girs realized this well, acknowledging that “permission for Turkish Armenians to resettle in our territory can be justified only by a sense of humanitarianism (*chuvstvo chelovekoliubiia*). But in state matters, such considerations can have but a secondary influence.”¹⁰⁵²

This incident reflected a broader policy adaptation of Russian imperialism in the Caucasus and Anatolia. Since 1882, corresponding to the general breakdown in Russo-Armenian ties, tsarist agents had reduced their reliance on Armenians to settle the recently conquered Kars province, preferring in their stead Russian colonizers.¹⁰⁵³ Russian sectarians had long fortified the tsar’s dominion in the Caucasus,¹⁰⁵⁴ but their small numbers were eagerly and successfully augmented by transplanted Persian and Ottoman Armenians after each Russo-Persian and Russo-Ottoman clash in the first half of the century. However, as early as 1872, tsarist officials began to question the hitherto condoned relocation of Ottoman Christians—mainly Armenians and Greeks—to the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus.¹⁰⁵⁵ By the next decade, Dondukov-Korsakov and other imperial agents charged these settlers with “maintaining a predatory and nomadic economy, exhausting the land, and moving from place to place.”¹⁰⁵⁶ Soon after the Russo-

¹⁰⁵¹For early notions of Russian moral superiority against its imperial competitors, see Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁵²RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, l. 32. Girs’s stance found support from Dondukov-Korsakov and Interior Minister Tolstoi, who instructed the Russian consulate in Erzurum to deliver the tsarist government’s decision to the local Armenians.

¹⁰⁵³RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 34-35ob.

¹⁰⁵⁴For Russian sectarians as trustworthy colonizers of the South Caucasus, see Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁵⁵RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 34-34ob.

¹⁰⁵⁶RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, l. 34ob.

Ottoman War of 1877-78, when small bands of Armenian refugees fled from Anatolia to Russian territory, including traversing the eastern Black Sea to settle on the Russian shores of the sea, they were forcefully deported back to Turkey.¹⁰⁵⁷ The Russian government instructed its diplomats in Erzurum and Trebizond (Trabzon) to make clear to Ottoman Christians in March 1880 that unsanctioned immigration into Russia would result in their immediate repatriation. When this warning had little effect, Dondukov-Korsakov asked the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, in November 1883 and again in June 1884, to impress upon the Ottoman government the need to prevent the unauthorized crossing of the border by all of the sultan's subjects, whether Muslim or Christian. Fearing that forced deportations of Ottoman refugees would have "adverse effects on our politics in the East," Dondukov-Korsakov petitioned Foreign Minister Girs to use his ministry's resources to check the tide of migrants.¹⁰⁵⁸

There is no clear evidence to dispute Dondukov-Korsakov's justification for the transition from Armenian to Russian colonizers of the western Caucasus and Kars, but the contemporaneous rise of Armenian nationalism and the breakdown of the state's partnership with the Armenian diaspora cannot be discounted. This is especially true when the ostensible reasons cited by Russian officials are lack of proper domestic economy and poor agricultural practices among newly transplanted Armenians. The state's waning preference for foreign Armenian settlers of recently annexed domains corresponded to its newfound mistrust of the tsar's own Armenian subjects. Russian officials' understanding of who Armenians were, and what their engagement (or lack thereof) with the state's imperial ambitions meant, had solidified by the end of the nineteenth century into opposition between a metropole and its subject nation.

¹⁰⁵⁷RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, ll. 34-35ob.

¹⁰⁵⁸RGIA, f. 821, op. 7, d. 164, l. 35ob.

Conclusion

Several interrelated forces in the last decades of the 1800s unraveled the mutually advantageous Russo-Armenian affiliation. The rule of Alexander III, with its attendant political and social ramifications, merged with Armenians' growing cultural self-awareness and political self-initiative to sour the complex ties between the two sides. In that age of nationalism, the rise of a secular Armenian political movement and the autocracy's distrust of Echmiadzin led to an outright indictment of Armenian antigovernment subversion. Armenian students, teachers, priests, merchants, farmers, and refugees all found themselves on the receiving end of the state's redoubled effort to maintain the cohesion and vitality of the empire, which it saw as threatened by Armenian "straying" from once parallel interests. Even references to the "Armenian nation" (*Armianskaia natsiia*) and the "Armenian people" (*Armianskii narod*) were crossed out by state censors and replaced with "Armenian society" (*Armianskoe obshchestvo*),¹⁰⁵⁹ further eroding the once-symbiotic partnership. St. Petersburg, and then Moscow, would maintain its grip on Armenia well past the death throes of imperial Russia, until almost a century later, when an independent Republic of Armenia would emerge from the defunct Soviet Union in 1991.

The nadir in nineteenth-century Russo-Armenian relations shows that even when the autocracy confronted the cultural and political hallmarks of its subjects' identities, some groups continued to derive benefit from their associations with St. Petersburg. Even with their priests imprisoned and schools shut, Eastern Armenians collectively enjoy the type of economic and social prosperity, as well as physical security, that decades earlier had enticed their forbearers to

¹⁰⁵⁹Ovanesov and Sudavtsov, *Voenna-administrativnaia deiatel'nost' armian*, 184. It is likely that the semiotic logic behind labeling Armenians a "society" rather than a "nation" or "people" lies in the perception of a society as part of a greater whole. An "Armenian society" implied that it was a component of a larger, multinational tsarist state, as opposed to a separate entity with unique political and cultural characteristics.

relocate from neighboring lands. Indeed, foreign Armenians continued to seek a new life in the South Caucasus despite Russia's resistance to their immigration. Even during crises of nationalities policy, the state continued to work with disaffected national minorities, presenting sufficient incentive to prevent them from splintering from St. Petersburg's patronage. At the same time, however, a new bitterness permeated the Russo-Armenian encounter in the late nineteenth century. A sense of distrust and danger on the part of tsarist officials and a fear of coerced acculturation and deeper political subjugation on the part of Russian Armenians became the norm in the South Caucasus and beyond.

CONCLUSION

What does this case study tell us about the nature of Russian imperialism? Historian Geoffrey Hosking famously quipped: “Britain *had* an empire, but Russia *was* an empire – and perhaps still is.”¹⁰⁶⁰ The interplay between national and imperial identities remains an important lens for understanding modern Russian history. Unlike the sea-based empires of Western Europe, Russia’s contiguous structure clouded the divisions between metropole and colony, producing spaces of hybrid identity and unclear power hierarchies.¹⁰⁶¹ Even, or perhaps especially, when Russia flaunted its ostensibly European identity vis-à-vis the *inorodtsy* (aliens) of its peripheries, the lines between “European” and “Oriental” elements remained obscured by shifting priorities, shared cultures, and evolving politics.

Historians disagree about how the Russian government and nation conceptualized its imperial domains. Alexei Miller insisted that, by the late nineteenth century, a clear understanding arose of “national Russian spaces,” including the western provinces, Siberia, and the Volga region, which contrasted with colonial holdings, such as the Caucasus and Central Asia.¹⁰⁶² Ekaterina Pravilova likewise maintained that Russian economists viewed the South

¹⁰⁶⁰Geoffrey Hosking, “The Freudian Frontier,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 March 1995, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶¹For some overviews, see Willard Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question’: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia,” in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, no. 2 (2000): 210-32; Paul Werth, “From Resistance to Subversion: Imperial Power, Indigenous Opposition, and their Entanglement,” in *Kritika* 1, no. 1 (2000): 21-43; and Alexander Morrison, “Metropole, Colony, and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire,” in *Kritika* 13, no. 2 (2012): 327-64.

¹⁰⁶²Alexei Miller, “The Empire and Nation in the Imagination of Russian Nationalism,” in Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, eds., *Imperial Rule* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004).

Caucasus and other peripheries as colonies.¹⁰⁶³ Michael Khodarkovsky has contested the applicability of such frameworks to the Caucasus, arguing that Russia “failed” in its policies toward the North Caucasus because it saw the territory not as a separate colony distinct from the metropole but rather as an integral part of the Russian empire.¹⁰⁶⁴

As this dissertation shows, St. Petersburg conceptualized the South Caucasus as a space distinct from Russia but welcomed some of its natives, such as Armenians, into its political project. Thus the state’s experience in the South Caucasus merged the Orientalist distancing between Russians and the natives with the strategic integration of Armenians into the imperial system. Owing to distinct geographical, cultural, and political factors in the South Caucasus, the autocracy recruited native allies and viewed them as (a) key to maintaining its regional hegemony. This dissertation challenges traditional dichotomies of power and resistance by illustrating how Russia relied on foreign-subject Armenian peasants and elites to colonize parts of the South Caucasus, thus rendering Armenians concurrently the agents and the recipients of European imperialism. Some of this story’s key protagonists, ethnic Armenians in the tsarist service, such as Interior Minister Loris-Melikov, served in the Romanov bureaucracy and commanded Russian troops, often against their own compatriots. The encounter between Russia and the non-Slavic Armenians demonstrates that for Russia “to be” an empire meant to expand the categories of *Russkie* and *Rossiane*, equally mistrusting and capitalizing upon its ethnic diversity. This fluidity of identities can be traced in the evolution of Russo-Armenian relations in the nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁶³ Ekaterina Pravilova, *Finansy imperii: Den’gi i vlast’ v politike Rossii na natsional’nykh okrainakh, 1801-1917* (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel’stvo, 2006).

¹⁰⁶⁴ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Despite religious kinship and parallel political designs, tensions often characterized Russo-Armenian ties throughout the nineteenth century. Tsarist agents lauded Armenian traders' contributions to the economic development of the imperial periphery but suspected their affiliations with British and French merchants in Asia Minor. The government supported the establishment of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow but prohibited the formation of privately conceived, secular Armenian organizations elsewhere. Tsarist diplomats amplified the clout of the Armenian Church in European capitals and Russian statesmen, such as Viceroy Vorontsov, befriended Echmiadzin patriarchs, but the government closed Armenian parish schools and imprisoned clergy when it detected links between the church and a rising nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century.

Yet Armenians cooperated with Russian goals through much of the nineteenth century because Russia represented a real and idealized guarantor of Armenian security and prosperity. Whether subjects of the sultan and the shah, or townspeople in Russian cities far from the Caucasus, Armenians worked with, and within, the tsarist system to attain a better life. Their dreams occasionally turned into nightmares, some of their hopes were misplaced, and zealous tsarist agents inhibited sacrosanct aspects of their material and spiritual culture. But as the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have demonstrated, imperial Russia succeeded in recalibrating the Armenian nation toward its orbit.

Of course, gradations of geopolitical "success" depend upon our understandings of imperial aims. If the tsarist officialdom sought to construct loyal and docile subjects out of ethnically other groups, then the Russo-Armenian encounter ended in failure. After a promising start marked by decades of deep cooperation, the dynamic deteriorated into a nationalist opposition that worsened over the next half-century. But if the primary goal of Russian imperial

expansion was to absorb new groups into the empire and through them increase the economic and political vitality of the state, then Russia's incorporation of Armenians delivered tangible results. Indeed, the tsarist patronage of Armenians through most of the nineteenth century brought much advantage to these subjects.

This study demonstrates that, through partnership with such subject groups as Armenians, the Romanov empire could merge foreign policy imperatives with domestic growth. Pravilova has traced the Russian dilemma between external expansion and internal development, finding that throughout the nineteenth century St. Petersburg prioritized the former at the expense of the latter.¹⁰⁶⁵ But in the Armenian diaspora Russia gained a versatile tool that required only periodic concessions for growth. Russia's encounter with Armenians shows that the "imperial factor" represented not a constraint but a catalyst for progress.

Although the cooling of Cold War animosities and the opening of the archives have deepened our understandings of St. Petersburg's methods of imperialism, certain key concepts remain controversial, reflecting as much the diversity of historical experiences as historiographical choices. While recent scholarship accents the constructive and symbiotic bonds between Russians and non-Russians, there remains a temptation to echo the accusations of early Soviet and Cold War-era scholars, who charged the tsarist empire with "imprisoning" its non-Russian national groups.¹⁰⁶⁶ The notion that non-Russian, and especially non-Slavic, minorities drew advantages from their absorption into the Romanov state remains disputed by some

¹⁰⁶⁵Pravilova, *Finansy imperii*.

¹⁰⁶⁶This was the first, official Soviet position articulated by historian Mikhail Pokrovskii in the 1920s.

authors, who emphasize the forced acculturation and political subjugation of various groups.¹⁰⁶⁷ Such circumstances represented everyday reality for many tsarist subjects, but for other groups Russian imperialism brought concrete opportunities, resources, and even liberties, as Nicholas Breyfogle, Jane Burbank, and others have highlighted.¹⁰⁶⁸

While Russians throughout the century branded Armenians as distinctly non-European “Orientals,” the government saw few incentives for their coerced assimilation or total subjugation. Instead, St. Petersburg recognized its need for the use of Armenians in its governance of the Caucasus and in foreign policy. Administration, not civilization, guided the tsarist approach toward Armenians.¹⁰⁶⁹ As Alexei Miller has argued, the state’s nationalities policy often prioritized political stability and imperial vitality over acculturation, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷⁰ While the autocracy pursued a quintessential “civilizing mission” in the Far East and elsewhere,¹⁰⁷¹ and displayed intolerance toward such integrated groups as Jews, it tolerated muted displays of Armenian cultural identity because more important priorities vis-à-vis Armenians informed its agenda. Even during the conservatism of

¹⁰⁶⁷Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁶⁸Nicholas Breyfogle, “Enduring Imperium: Russia/Soviet Union/Eurasia as Multiethnic, Multiconfessional Space,” in *Ab Imperio* 1 (2008): 75-126; Jane Burbank, “An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire,” in *Kritika* 7, no. 7 (2006): 397-431.

¹⁰⁶⁹In some regions of imperial Russia, including parts of the Caucasus and in Central Asia, Russia saw itself as delivering not Christian civilization but rather the benefits of European science. See Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁷⁰Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁷¹Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: National Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52-55.

Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55), the government granted Echmiadzin exclusive rights, such as the conversion of non-Orthodox Christians into the Armenian faith. John Klier has insisted that under Nicholas I, the autocracy targeted Jews for full-scale conversion more than at any other time in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷² In contrast, Armenians in the first half of the century experienced few analogous persecutions from the Russian state. The combination of religious kinship and parallel political interests explains this circumstance.

Thus situational circumstances informed the political encounter between the Russian state and its Armenian subjects, illustrating the Russian manifestations of the “tensions of empire” identified by Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper.¹⁰⁷³ This framework helps us understand the ostensibly contradictory statutes and policies that the tsarist empire employed toward Armenians in the nineteenth century. Far from a cumbersome yet omnipotent “prisoner of nations,” imperial Russia adapted its strategies of rule in response to evolving political realities.¹⁰⁷⁴ When the government combined restrictive control with exclusive privileges for the Armenian Church, it was responding to the more pressing needs of its foreign policy in the neighboring Eastern empires of Turkey and Persia. Despite periodic confrontations, the government skillfully adjusted its grip on Echmiadzin in return for political benefits, such as diplomatic dialogue and economic access, in countries where few Russian officials or merchants

¹⁰⁷²John Klier, “State Policies and the Conversion of Jews in Imperial Russia,” in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 92-112.

¹⁰⁷³Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, “Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule,” in *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 609-21.

¹⁰⁷⁴As Ann Laura Stoler has emphasized, “blurred genres of rule are not empires in distress but imperial polities in active realignment and reformation.” See Stoler, “On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty,” in *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006): 138.

ventured. Yet the adaptability of regulations toward individual non-Russian groups represented a hallmark of Russian imperial governance that was not unique to the Armenian case. Eastern Armenians lived within the “imperial rights regime” identified by Jane Burbank, where various ethnic, national, and religious groups received legal rights and obligations that accounted for their historical developments and cultural customs. “Russian imperial law accommodated particular social institutions extant in the population. It did not homogenize them but legalized them selectively within the whole opus of imperial legislation,” Burbank has stressed.¹⁰⁷⁵ No extant social institution played a bigger role in Armenian life than the national church.

More than a monastic institution, Echmiadzin represented the epicenter of political initiatives for the stateless Armenians. Unique in that it exercised real influence over coreligionist communities in Persia, Turkey, Europe, India, and beyond, the Armenian Church at Echmiadzin became a willing tool of tsarist foreign policy. Within Romanov borders, too, the government relied on the Armenian Church to foil the spread of Western faiths in the Caucasus, a scenario whose political implications vexed the Winter Palace no less than its dogmatic and national ramifications antagonized Echmiadzin. These circumstances place Russo-Armenian relations into the “multiconfessional establishment” framework identified by Paul Werth, where the government “granted a series of significant collective rights to recognized religious groups and rendered the foreign confessions state religions entitled to certain forms of government patronage and protection.”¹⁰⁷⁶ In exchange for his cooperation, the Catholicos relied on the tsar’s support to secure his institution’s control over the dispersed diaspora. Challenged by Armenian

¹⁰⁷⁵Burbank, “An Imperial Rights Regime,” 402.

¹⁰⁷⁶Paul Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

rivals in Jerusalem and Constantinople, the Echmiadzin Catholicos sought not to rule an independent Armenia but to submit the vast diaspora to his authority. Consequently, successive patriarchs styled themselves pope, not president. Only with the rise of a secular Armenian identity and an articulated nationalist vision in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did Armenian national interests begin to confront the prerogatives of their imperial master.

The Armenian encounter with modernity in the nineteenth century, much as it played out in other parts of Europe in that age of nationalism, yielded a complex interplay of national and imperial identities. In the 1870s among Eastern Armenians emerged a diverse Armenian nationalist movement, the most visible faction of which strove to aid the Armenians of the neighboring Ottoman empire. The Armenian incursions into Ottoman territory represented changing Armenian self-perceptions. No longer content with a passive political framework that subsumed Armenian political identity under the domestic and foreign interests of Russia, Eastern Armenians took it upon themselves to protect Western Armenians from abuse. Seeing that the promises of reform issued at the Congress of Berlin were not forthcoming, and that the sultan's Armenian subjects in eastern Anatolia continued to fall prey to irregular Kurdish militias, tsarist-subject Armenian vigilantes and activists defied Russian laws to cross into Ottoman lands.

The concept of "Armenian nationalism" in the late nineteenth century has become almost fused to the names of its most prominent representatives, the professional revolutionaries of the Dashnaktsutjun, Hunchak, and Armenakan organizations.¹⁰⁷⁷ Yet the history of less organized but equally zealous Armenian groups, especially within the tsarist empire, often eludes the historian's attention. This dissertation highlighted a particular subset of the more dilettante

¹⁰⁷⁷For an authoritative treatment, see Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

predecessors and contemporaries of the well-established Armenian nationalist parties in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They too constituted a nationalist movement.

Studying Armenian nationalism in the Russian empire challenges those modernist interpretations of imperialism that prioritize the pursuit of an independent national home. With some notable exceptions, most Eastern Armenians did not seek to secede from the tsarist empire that continued to provide a guarantee of security against the neighboring Muslim states. Instead, Armenians defied tsarist laws and attacked Turks and Kurds not in hopes of wresting an independent Armenia from its two imperial overlords but rather out of a shared cultural bond and ethnonational solidarity that sought to protect Ottoman Armenians from real and imagined abuses. Theorist Azar Gat's emphasis on the role of a shared religious identity and the recognition of a collective kinship matches Eastern Armenians' actions in the 1880s and 1890s more closely than the modernist definitions of nationalism that require a congruence of state and ethnicity—Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism—to qualify as a full-fledged movement.¹⁰⁷⁸

Tsarist officials struggled to define and defeat Armenian political and cultural self-determination, resulting in a patchwork of policies that rarely yielded the political and interethnic stability that the state sought in the South Caucasus. Internal disagreements and uncertainty among senior officials produced contradictory assessments of tsarist Armenians' political goals. This hazy perception of imperial subjects' actions parallels the contradictory initiatives among tsarist authorities that historians Theodore Weeks and Alexei Miller, among others, have identified in Russia's western borderlands.¹⁰⁷⁹

¹⁰⁷⁸ Azar Gat, *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁷⁹ Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); and Alexei Miller, *The*

Indeed, one of this dissertation's contributions to the study of nineteenth-century Russian imperialism is its emphasis on the lack of a master plan emanating from St. Petersburg. Throughout the century, senior statesmen as well as regional bureaucrats disagreed, contradicted, resisted, and misunderstood how the autocracy should approach Armenians. While ministers and administrators often displayed deft flexibility in adjusting their policies according to regional and imperial sociopolitical realities, no single vision drove Russia's encounter with Armenians. Across time and regions, the government sought stability and growth—whether the growth of its peripheral economy or external political influence—but the strategies for achieving these goals frequently remained contested and disparate. To speak of a Russian imperial project is to speak of a fluid dialogue that drew as much direction from the agency of non-Russian subjects as any state-designed blueprints.

Beyond the study of imperial Russia, the inclusion of the Armenian diaspora in narratives of empire highlights the hazard of multistate nations. At the same time as some ethnic and national minorities contributed to imperial growth, the collective identities of large diasporas competed with their political allegiances and civic obligations. Bound by cultural kinship, economic networks, and even parallel political interests, dispersed nations balanced collective interests with individual imperial demands. Every European empire that ruled a portion of a diaspora contended with these circumstances, cognizant of the concurrent opportunities and threats posed by such formations. Politically fragmented nations that claimed collective identities present important avenues for understanding the evolution of imperial methods of rule.

Ukrainian Question: Russian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003).

Armenians may have been a pawn in an imperial game, but through adroit maneuvering Eastern Armenians survived the brutal age of imperialism at the threshold of three expansionist empires to emerge as an independent state in 1991. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Eastern Armenians sought out Russia's security, profited from domestic and foreign trade beyond the Caucasus, gained access to European education and culture, and despite some Russian resistance maintained the inviolable features of their national culture, such as religion, that often mitigated the lack of political independence. In sharp contrast to the long hardship of Western Armenians, which culminated in the genocide of 1915, Eastern Armenians found the better life that their ancestors had sought. Thus the pawn remained standing after the checkmate.

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