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TRAVEL OF COUNT DE VOGÜÉ TO KUTAISI

In 1891, *The Tsar and His People or Social Life in Russia* was published in New York (Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, New York, 1891, pp 1-435). One of the authors of the book was a French diplomat, traveler, orientalist, archaeologist, philanthropist, and literary critic, a descendant of an old French aristocratic family, Count Marie-Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé's (1848–1910). Prior to the publication of the book, the Count published articles with the same title in 1889–90 in the famous New York journal “Harper’s Weekly”. Count de Vogüé tells us about his journey in the Russian Empire and, as mentioned above, dedicates the whole chapter to the Caucasus. This part of the book is important for us, because the author provides interesting information about the Georgia of that time.

Count de Vogüé visited many cities and regions of Georgia (Tbilisi, highland regions, Imereti, Samegrelo, etc.). This paper will focus on the part of de Vogüé’s work where the Count tells the story of Imereti and Kutaisi. Not only has this book not been translated into Georgian, but also it is completely unexplored, and the story of Count de Vogüé’s journey to Georgia is still unknown to Georgian readers. The only exception is the works of Otar Nikoleishvili, who was the first to dedicate research to the travels of Count de Vogüé (O. Nikoleishvili, *Essays on the History of Georgia*, Part I, pp.62–71 Kutaisi, 2017; O. Nikoleishvili, *Information about Kutaisi by French diplomat – Count Marie-Eugene Melchior de Vogüé*, Kartvelian Heritage, XXI, Kutaisi, 2017).

Last year, my article *Count de Vogüé’s Journey to Kutaisi* was published in Akaki Tsereteli State University journal „Moambe” (2020, № 15). The main part of the article was dedicated to the translation of the part of the book that describes Kutaisi (pp.130–139). For the first time, the reader was given the opportunity to get acquainted with the story told by the traveler.

Before further discussion, it would probably be interesting for the reader to become acquainted with the short biography of Count de Vogüé. He was

born in Nice, France, on February 25, 1848, into the family of Victoire Raphael de Vogüé and Henriette Anderson. He participated in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. He was wounded in a battle near Sedan¹ and spent eight months in captivity in Magdeburg; his younger brother was killed in the same battle. After the end of the war, Eugene was awarded a military medal; at the same time, he began working in the diplomatic corps of the Third French Republic, first in Constantinople, in the Ottoman Empire as an attaché at the French Embassy, and then in Egypt. From 1875 to 1882, Count de Vogüé served at the French Embassy in St. Petersburg. During this period, he traveled to Russia, including the Caucasus. In 1878, the count married Alexandra Anenkova, the sister of General Mikhail Anenkov (1835–1899), with whom he had three children: Henry (1879 –?), Raymond (1881–1926) and Felix (1882–1946). In his day Eugene Melchior was famous for bringing the literature of Russian writers to French readers in his book “Le Roman russe” – The Russian Novel (1886). His introduction of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Tolstoy revealed to new readers the intellectual and spiritual richness of the Russian soul. Count de Vogüé died in March 1910, in Paris, after a short illness.

This book is even more interesting because of the illustrations created by the famous American artist Thure de Tulstrup (1848–1930). Thure was born in Stockholm on April 4, 1848. Father Magnus Tulstrup was a lieutenant general, and his mother, Hedvig Kristina Akrell, was the daughter of a prominent military figure, Lieutenant General Carl Akrell². Thure’s grandfather Akrell was a talented artist and designer, Thure’s father Magnus, was a very talented artist too; perhaps, it was from them that he inherited his talent for painting. In a family of high military rank, of course, Thure’s career was predetermined, as it was impossible for the son of the king’s minister to become an artist. From 1861 to 1865, he attended the Karleburg Military School. He was later enlisted in the Stockholm Artillery Division. Later, he served in Algeria, under the command of Marshal McMahon. In 1868, he was appointed as a junior lieutenant and took part in several expeditions. In February 1871, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and later to the rank of captain. Tired of fighting in 1872, Thure gave up his military career and traveled to a whole new world: Canada. He only stayed there for a few years and started working as a cartographer. He gained a good reputation for this activity, but received a better offer from Boston and sent his sketches to “The Daily Graphic” in New York, where he was hired in 1874. From 1876 to 1880 he worked for Frank Leslie’s illustrated newspaper, and from 1880 he began working for the well-known “Harper’s Weekly”.

1 City in the Ardennes department, France. On September 1–2, 1870, the French army suffered a heavy defeat at the Battle of Sedan. Emperor Napoleon III surrendered to the Prussians.

2 The latter took part in the Battle of Leipzig in 1813 against Napoleon.

Soon, Theure was sent to Europe to record important events; he was paid quite an attractive salary. In 1888, he was sent to Russia to pay a visit to the German Emperor in St. Petersburg. Tulstrup traveled around Russia and made numerous sketches of the daily life of the country. That was the period when the artist made sketches of the Caucasus, including Georgia (Figs. – 1,2,3,4,5). We can assume that Thure probably made many sketches during his visit to Georgia, although there are only five items published in the book. Perhaps further research will reveal them.

This section graphically describes Kutaisi and contains many important details about the city. Vogüé admires the impressive landscape, but this does not prevent him from noticing carelessness and laziness of Georgian people. Here is how he describes Kutaisi and its landscape:

“Another world – the earthly Paradise. It is now one of the most important and certainly the most ravishing town in the Caucasus. Its houses are dotted about between gardens on both banks of Rioni, in an amphitheater of lofty mountains crowned by dazzling glaciers; At the time of the year when I passed through the country this lake of verdure was literally covered with flowers. Along the roads curtains of climbing roses hung from the branches of the poplar-trees; in the gardens which surround and encroach upon the various quarters of the town, white clumps of paulownias and magnolias cast their shade over the fields of tobacco and milt; but the one dominant note in the country is vermilion; the land is overspread with wild pomegranate-trees in full bloom; whole hills present to the eye one vast dome of flame-colored red. It is the most radiant feast that my eyes have ever seen in the world, and the softest light that can fall from an indulgent sky”.

He also admires with inhabitants of this “Eden”:

“In this flowery landscape, imagine a people of gods and goddesses. The human race has retained here a perfection of form and a nobleness of bearing which it has lost everywhere else. Beauty is not the exception but the rule. From the day-laborer who breaks stones on the road up to the seigneur who is a descendant of the ancient princes, every man that you meet is a walking statue of Olympian Jupiter. The *bachlik*³, or cloak of goat’s hair, whose folds are draped in a hundred different and always graceful styles over these sculptural heads, adds still more their natural expression. Most of these Georgians have blond hair, blue eyes, a nose like an eagle’s break, and straight foreheads. No words can render the fire of their look, the proud dignity of their bearing, even when they are dressed in rags”.

3 *Bachlik* or *Bashlugh*i, the same *Kabalakhi* (notes everywhere belong to the article other).

For comparison, it would be interesting to bring information from other travelers about the appearance of the Georgian people. The famous French writer Alexandre Dumas (father) visited Georgia in 1858–1859 and wrote: “They have no idea about the beauty of the people of Colchis in Europe. Men have a particularly beautiful body structure and gait. Even a simple servant looks like a prince.”

Giuseppe Zampi, Prefect of Theatines (Catholic Monastic Order), who travelled to Georgia in 1645, also wrote:

“Nature endowed most Georgian women with such subtlety as you will never meet. I think it is impossible to catch their eye and not to fall in love with them. It is impossible to see even a more beautiful face and body than a Georgian woman.”

The French traveler Jean Chardin also visited Georgia and in 1711, his book *Travels in Persia* was published. Here are Chardin’s words:

“When I say hospitality, I do not even use the word as it is generally accepted. Georgians treat their guest so politely and with such love that we Europeans do not even dream about it.”

Another French traveler, Jacques François Gamba, tells us: Georgians are very beautiful, wise and polite. The country and especially women are incredibly beautiful. More in this part than in any other country, great restraint is needed to keep a man from falling into temptation.” Marco Polo, the Venetian merchant, explorer, and writer also gave us very interesting description:

“Georgians are beautiful, brave, brilliant fighters and warriors in battles.” I think it is no longer necessary to continue telling stories of the other writers or travelers, as all of them coincide with the words of Count de Vogüé.

I would like to mention one part of the book where the fashion and delicacy of the people of Kutaisi can be clearly seen.

“On Sunday, in the public garden at Kutaisi, where the fashionable people assemble, I could not tire of watching as they passed this population of animated statues. The men are draped in a black or brown *tcherkeska*⁴, or long tunic, which falls over their boots, and might suggest the Roman toga were it not for the cartridge pouches, and silver niello waistband from which hangs a poniard. It seemed to me that I was contemplating the ancient masters of the world gravely discussing in the forum. In the women the marmorean lines of the features hold until an advanced age, and increasing years are betrayed only by a lessening of the brilliancy of those large liquid eyes which glitter beneath the white veiling the warm paleness of their complexions.”

4 Cherkezaka or Chokha-Akhalukh is a woolen coat. Male dress of peoples of the Caucasus.

The count quotes Chardin's words:

“The blood of Georgia is the finest in the East, I may even say in the world. I have not remarked an ugly face in that country in either sex; but I have seen some that are angelic. Nature has lavished upon most of the women charms that are not to be seen elsewhere. I consider that it is impossible to look upon them without loving them. More charming faces and finer figures than those of the Georgian women cannot be painted. They are tall, easy in their movements, not spoiled by too great plumpness, and extremely slender-waisted. However few clothes they may wear, you never see any hips. What spoils them is that they paint their faces, the most beautiful of them as well as those that are less so.”

The French archaeologist perceives the existence of Georgia, Kutaisi, first of all, in the historical context, he also relies on the records of the above mentioned, well-known French traveler – Chardin – who recalls the bloody events of our history and finds similarities in the life of the French royal court. The traveler describes the royal family of the 5th Imereti⁵ Kingdom, King Bagrat IV (d.1681) and his wife Darejan⁶. Count de Vogüé recognizes in her a sister of the French queen Frédégonde⁷.

“From the little that we know of its history, Georgia offers a unique phenomenon in the Christian world. It has marched backward in relation to our civilization. Evangelized in the fourth century, before Gaul, it was comparatively prosperous and cultivated in the tenth century, at time when our ancestors were in the thick darkness of the Middle Ages. Attached to the Byzantine Empire, it reflected the final greatness of its Greek doctors; in those days Plato and Aristotele were translated into Georgian. Overpowered afterwards by the Turks and Persians, this people ingrafted Mussulman vices on Byzantine vices, and fell into the worst barbarity at the very moment when Europe of the Renaissance was entering upon modern life.”

It is important that Vogüé considers the geopolitical location of the country, its constant expansion by the empires, as the main causes not only of Georgia's difficult state, but also its cultural diversity. It is noteworthy that a special place in this opus is taken by the ruins of Bagrati and Gelati. “We see at Kutaisi the remains of its admirable cathedral attributed to the ninth century.” The author is talking about the Bagrati cathedral and mentions that it as a building of the IX century. In fact, the Bagrati cathedral was built in the X–XI centuries.

5 One of the historical-geographical part of western Georgia.

6 Here is a small mistake: Darejan was not his wife. She was his stepmother who blinded the king.

7 Frédégonde was the queen consort of Chilperic I, the Merovingian Frankish king of Soissons.

“This monument is comparable to the most imposing edifices of the Christian West, so far as we can judge from the grand arches that are still standing, and from the columns and capitals that are strewn across the ground. At the present day it is most poetical of ruins. Giant linden-trees raise their branches as high as the remains of cupolas suspended in space; broad expanses of walls are covered with foliage of fig-trees and the roseate snow of paulonias.”

Bagrati cathedral still graces the city of Kutaisi. To illustrate its beauty, I have included pictures of several artists. Peters Alexander Fedorovich (1837–1895) was the adjutant of the Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich. The latter was the governor of the Caucasus and the commander of the Caucasian army. In 1877 Peters Alexander painted the Ruins of the Bagrat temple (see picture 6). Cathedral of Kutaisi was drawn by T. Taylor in 1880 (see picture 7).

Count de Vogüé also visited one of the most beautiful medieval Gelati monastery.

“I went to visit the monastery of Ghelati, twenty-five versts to the north of Kutaisi, in the mountains. It is the object of great veneration in the country, and the national insons are connected with it. Built in the twelfth century by King David⁸, Ghelati preserves the archives of Georgian history in the frescos which decorate the walls of its churches. The style of these paintings well shows the double influence under which everything in the Caucasus has been modelled—a Byzantine influence and a Persian influence.”

Historically, Gelati was a cultural and intellectual center in Georgia. The monastery is an exemplar of the Georgian Golden Age and a gold aesthetic is employed in the paintings and buildings (see picture 8, 9). The interiors of the monastery hold mosaics in classic Byzantine style illustrating aspects of Christian belief. The largest, a 12th-century masterpiece depicting the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus, dominates the apse of the main church, and is an artwork of cultural importance in Georgia. Above the altar is situated a statue of the Virgin Mary, looking down at the baby Jesus she is holding (see picture 10).

“The monks show in their Treasure precious goldsmith’s work, *Cloisonné* enamels, old manuscripts (see picture 11) adorned with miniatures; their confused narratives summon up before us long centuries of legendary history certified by each of the stones that shelter us; and a strange sensation it is, this sudden discovery of a history that is more cryptic and more unknown than that of China. The living magnificences of nature, which, with its foliage and its blossoms, enchants the

8 David IV, also known as David the Builder. Popularly considered to be the greatest and most successful Georgian ruler in history and an original architect of the Georgian Golden Age.

crumbling buildings of the monastery, and spreads out in profusion pictures worthy of Claude Lorrain⁹ in the midst of a most admirable panorama.”

Present-day readers may not fully share the views expressed by Vogüé, but he certainly correctly assessed the development potential of Georgia from the very beginning and associated it with great effort.

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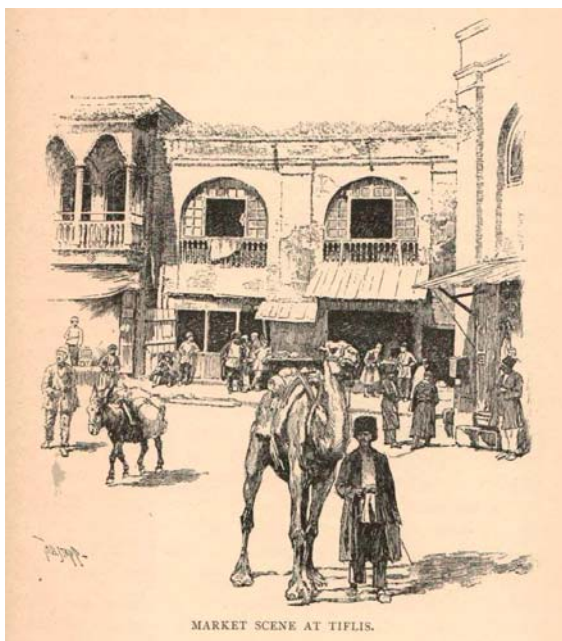
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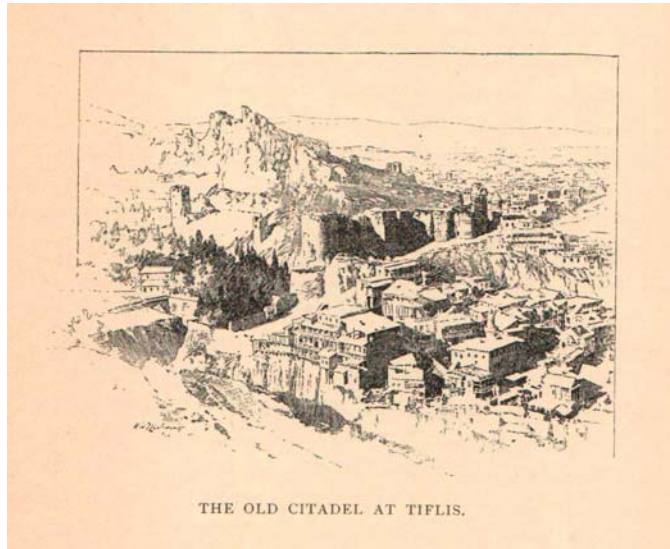
9 French painter, draughtsman and etcher of the Baroque era.



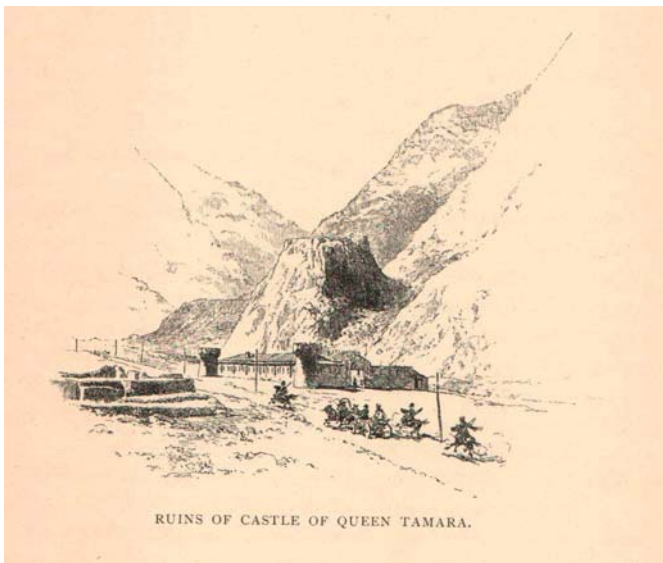
*Picture 1. Georgian Princes
Zdjęcie 1. Książęta gruzińscy
Рисунок 1. Грузинские князья*

*Picture 2. Market Scene at Tbilisi
Zdjęcie 2. Bazar w Tbilisi (Tyflisie)
Рисунок 2. Рынок в Тбилиси*

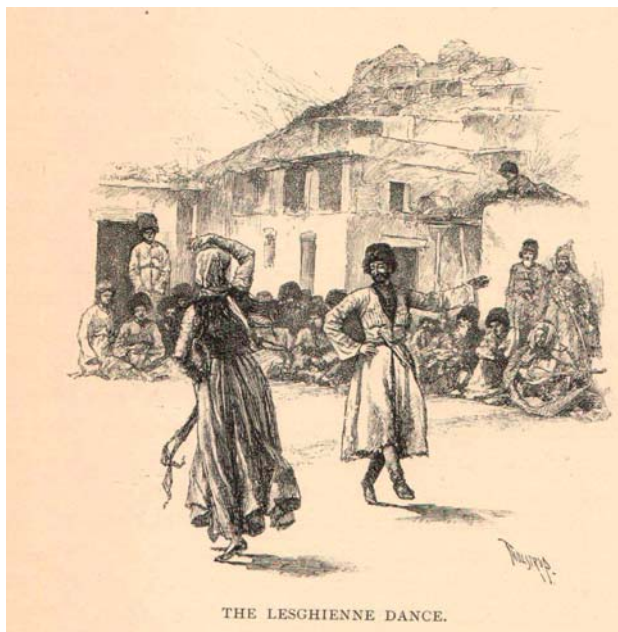




Picture 3. The Old Citadel at Tbilisi
Zdjęcie 3. Stara Cytadela w Tbilisi (Tyflisie)
Рисунок 3. Старая цитадель в Тбилиси



Picture 4. Ruins of Castle of Queen Tamar
Zdjęcie 4. Ruiny zamku królowej Tamary
Рисунок 4. Руины замка царицы Тамары



Picture 5. The Lesghienne Dance
Zdjęcie 5. Taniec lezginka
Рисунок 5. Лесгиенский танец



Picture 6. Ruins of the Bagrat temple
Zdjęcie 6. Ruiny świątyni Bagrat
Рисунок 6. Развалины храма Баграта



Picture 7. Bagrati Cathedral
Zdjęcie 7. Katedra Bagrati
Рисунок 7. Багратский собор



Picture 8. Gelati monastery
Zdjęcie 8. Klasztor Gelati
Рисунок 8. Гелатский монастырь

Picture 9. Gelati mosaics
Zdjęcie 9. Mozaiki w Gelati
Рисунок 9. Мозаики гелати



Picture 10. Gelati fresco
Zdjęcie 10. Freska w Gelati
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Picture 11. Gelati manuscript
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PODRÓŻ HRABIEGO DE VOGÜÉ DO KUTAISI

Streszczenie

Proponowana praca jest analizą relacji napisanej przez słynnego francuskiego podróżnika Eugénisa Melchiora de Vogüé, który odwiedził Gruzję w latach 1875–1882 i opublikował o niej ciekawe informacje w amerykańskiej prasie. Dzieło hrabiego nie zostało jeszcze zbadane i przetłumaczone na gruziński. Podaje w nim nieznanne informacje o ówczesnej Gruzji, co pozwala mu w nowy nieznanym sposób ukazać historię, kulturę, etnografię, styl życia, strój narodowy Gruzinów. Francuski podróżnik zwraca szczególną uwagę na opis starożytnej stolicy Gruzji, czyli Kutaisi.

Słowa kluczowe: Kaukaz, Gruzja, Kutaisi, Marie-Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, Thure de Thulstrup.

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COUNT DE VOGUE'S TRAVEL TO KUTAISI

Summary

The famous French traveler Eugène Melchior de Vogüé traveled to Georgia in 1875–1882 and published an interesting travel account of it in the American press. However, his work has not yet been properly studied and translated into Georgian. De Vogue provides interesting information about Georgia at that time. His writings allow us to re-analyze the history, culture, ethnography, way of life, traditional clothing, etc. of that time. The French traveler paid special attention to describing the ancient capital of Georgia – Kutaisi.

Keywords: Caucasus, Georgia, Kutaisi, Marie Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, Thure de Thulstrup.