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WESTERN TRAVELLERS IN THE CAUCASUS. GEORGIA'S HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS: HOTELS, INNS & TAVERNS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The Road to Tbilisi

Of all the roads to Tbilisi, the best documented in nineteenth century travelogues is, predictably enough, the Georgian Military Road, the former bridle-path upgraded to accommodate a carriage and eight horses, and generally facilitate communications and army movements. The busiest thoroughfare in the Caucasus, it was seen by Westerners as a major achievement of civil engineering, as within Russia itself, proper roads were virtually non-existent. Celebrated by illustrious literary and artistic names, it found a permanent place in the writings of Griboyedov, Pushkin, Lermontov, and others. Travellers' amenities were on a level seldom encountered on the less frequented routes of Transcaucasia; and the post-stations are often described in some detail by wayfarers. Known as "palaces", as they were built and appointed to receive the Tsar, the inns had large, well-furnished rooms, with mirrors and sofas, and tea could be drunk by an open window affording a splendid view over the black bulk of Mount Kazbek (Belyaev 1882: 396).

The traveller heading for Tbilisi would usually pass through the northern stronghold of Vladikavkaz where, in the days before it acquired its own "Hotel de France", a lodging was maintained inside the fortress at the expense of the Crown, this courtesy being supplemented by the board and services of the colonel in residence (Bélanger 1834: 305). All life's commodities were available and, although provisions were highly priced, there was good wine from Mozdok to drink (Armstrong 1831: 74). The next lap of the journey led through the gorges of the Terek and Darial, where the post-station was a substantial stone building, with a veranda, bow windows, and a billiard room. It displayed a somewhat incongruous array of delicacies.

“Downstairs the rooms are furnished only with square stools and the usual wooden bedstead. The *salle à manger* is usually large, with, in one corner, a cupboard containing a motley collection of delicacies, mostly liquid... I have seen in a row Veuve Cliquot, Chateau Lafitte, Allsopp’s Pebb Guinness Stout and Old Madere: there is very seldom more than one bottle of each. The champagne is generally five roubles, and the English beer one rouble 15. A few boxes of sardines and a plate of stale cakes form a set-off to this tempting array. The samovar and the tea are always forthcoming; borsch, or cabbage soup, a national dish in Russia, is usually to be had very quickly; and sometimes a beefsteak will be cooked if ordered; but, as often as not, there is nothing more solid than eggs in the house” (Freshfield 1869: 181).

Proceeding south through Balta and Lars, where the government hostel was reputedly excellent (Armstrong 1831: 75), the next major station was Kazbek. General Kazbek, “a mountaineer who formerly rendered great services to Russia, and now keeps the peasantry in order. . .” often entertained diplomatic missions, and for the visit of Moritz von Kotzebue his kitchen staff put on “an Asiatic dinner, principally consisting of rice-porridge and mutton” (von Kotzebue 1819: 35). The family lived on one side of a quadrangular fort, while opposite “a suite of excellent rooms [was] set apart for the reception of travellers of distinction.” The same high level of hospitality for travellers was maintained by the general’s household after his death. When Robert Ker Porter arrived the chatelaine, who was indisposed at the time, “ordered refreshment to be spread for me, which consisted of dried fish, some small pieces of roast meat, excellent bread and butter, and, after all, some as excellent coffee” (Ker Porter 1821). When some ten years after Ker Porter’s visit, the poet Alexander Pushkin dined there with a friend, the cuisine was as excellent as ever. There was also an open invitation to go shooting wild game. Throughout the nineteenth century, travellers take note of the menu offered, ranging from tasty wild boar and roast venison to *tur* chops and trout from the Terek. Horses were cared for at the inn behind the church. The Kazbek taverners kept up their high stand¬ards over the years, serving hot meals on request - excellent Kotlety à la Russe and creditable steaks, “a pleasant change from the cold meat diet of the previous day” (Buchan Telfer 1876), and tasty luncheon dishes of trout and fried eggs, washed down with white Kakhetian wine. According to Maxim Maximich in Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time*, after lunching at Kazbek one could, by riding at a fast gallop through the Terek and Darial gorges, drink tea at Lars and reach Vladikavkaz in time for supper.

After the comforts of Kazbek, where a good supper and beds were available, the post-house at Kobi was disappointing. Prices were high. The wood to make a fire for boiling a kettle cost three roubles, and the stove was apparently seldom lit. Later in the century, the Kobi post-master was “as usual, tipsy” (Freshfield 1869:

443), or else such a dour fellow that travellers preferred to move on. The more fortunate Dr Wagner managed to while away the time until evening in shooting wild fowl, for which the neighbourhood offered excellent opportunities (Wagner 1856: 216). Although the post-house at Keschaur was a miserable place, good humour would be restored by the warm fire and steaming kettle at Kreuzberg (*Krestovaya gora*, Mountain of the Cross) station; moreover, there was always a bed for the night at the self-styled "palace" of Mleti, which an English alpinist held to be one of the most frequented and best provided on the road (Freshfield 1869: 443).

Pressing on south, at Pasanauri, an American traveller found there was not even wood for a fire; the only beds were the floor, or the lath base of two wooden bedframes (Ditson 1850). Two miles from Ananuri, Ker Porter was delayed by a four-day quarantine, and had to stay in a guesthouse overgrown with fungi and "other weedy nuisances". Clustered at the foot of a fortified mound, the village of Ananuri was situated in an attractive position at the confluence of two torrents (Freshfield 1869: 182), and local people sold the pelts of wild animals by the roadside. Within easy distance of Tbilisi, Dushet was also a pretty village (Ditson 1850: 348), where a Russian visitor remarked on "some handsome faces, albeit black-eyed and vociferous. The women knitting stockings in their doorways reminded me of the small Jewish towns of White Russia" (Verderevsky 1857: 212). On a favourable day, one could count on a supper of bread, cheese and cold sausage (Ditson 1850: 348), though Prince Alexis Soltykoff found that the eggs were stale, and the bread of inferior quality and full of sand, the chicken saturated in nauseous fat, floating in a liquid redolent of the graveyard (Soltykoff 1851). Guests of high social ranking were likely to receive preferential treatment: when a party of grandees turned up, a traveller from Alsace was served a bowl of detestable raw cabbage floating in hot water, and chunks of tough and gristly buffalo meat in lieu of the roast lamb and Borshch he had been promised (Koechlin-Schwartz 1879). Towards the end of the century, Oliver Wardrop could still attest:

"All the stations on this road are equally comfortable; in many of them are bedrooms, a dining-room, a ladies' room, and one can get white bread and European food. Those who have travelled the post-roads in Russia will readily understand my surprise" (Wardrop 1888).

Tbilisi Impressions

Travellers' impressions of the Georgian capital vary over the centuries. Back in 1768, the oft-quoted Abbé Joseph Delaporte considered that its handsome architecture and immaculate stone-built marketplaces put the edifices of his native France to shame. As Jean-Pierre Moynet, Alexandre Dumas's artist friend, exclaimed some hundred years later: "Tiflis est certainement une merveille!" (Moynet 1860:

319). Over that period, Tbilisi had undergone radical transformation. After the city had been ransacked by the Persians in 1795, priority was given to the construction of administrative, governmental, military and ecclesiastical buildings. A traveller's imagination might well be captured by the Asiatic decrepitude of the old town that had survived the Persian onslaught, and now constituted "a collection of low hovels half buried in the hill" (Ditson 1850: 299); but in the first two decades of the nineteenth century foreigners generally evince little enthusiasm for the city. Stopping off on his journey from India to London in 1819–20, Captain Thomas Lumsden declared that "there is but little in the town deserving of notice" (Lumsden 1822). While the young captain of horse artillery may have lacked aesthetic sensitivity, that can hardly be said of the painter, Sir Robert Ker Porter who, though enthralled with the mountain peaks, felt oppressed by the situation of the city and by "the horrible dungeon-impression of Asiatic dirt and barbarism". Instead of bright colours, gay minarets, painted domes, and gilded trellis work, he beheld flat-roofed houses of dun brick, stone, or mud, with paper windows not even oiled for greater transparency; every house and building seemed to share the dismal lure of the surrounding heights. Nor did he find Georgian music and dance to his liking. Robert Lyall, who visited Georgia a couple of years later, had read Ker Porter's book, and endorsed this view: Tbilisi, he wrote, is "one of the meanest and most disagreeable towns I ever saw" (Lyall 1825).

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, hotel business in Tbilisi was barely in its infancy. The first such enterprise was launched by Jean-Paul, a native of Provence and former grenadier of Napoleon's Grande Armée (Gamba 1826: 52). Having been made prisoner by the Russians, he served for several years as the chef of a Russian general in Georgia. Then, as the climate clearly suited him there, he decided to start up his own catering business; this is presumably the place at which Thomas Lumsden dined with his companions – "a good tavern, kept by a Frenchman". Two Frenchmen, however, were less fortunate. Journeying overland to Pondicherry in 1825, vicomte Desbassayns, its newly nominated governor, and the young naturalist, ethnographer and orientalist Charles Bélanger, who was appointed to organize a botanical garden in that colony, stopped off in Tbilisi on the way. Upon enquiring about accommodation, Bélanger was directed down a narrow alley to a hostelry run by his fellow countryman, reputedly the only such facility in town. The room was spacious but exposed to the east winds. Without beds or chimneys, it boasted just one table, a few chairs, and two wooden sofas draped in carpets, on which the guests had to pile all their coats and furs to keep out the cold. They decided to brave it out, and whilst accepting the French consul's invitation to dinner, they declined his offer to find them superior lodgings (Bélanger 1834: II 200).

Travelling via Persia and Afghanistan to join his regiment in North India in 1829, Lieutenant Arthur Conolly broke his journey in Tbilisi, and appears to have lodged at the same address, which he describes as “a tumbledown house kept by a French sutler, who had set up as an inn-keeper”. Around this time, a German landlord opened a rival establishment; but judging by the report of two young American missionaries, who had crossed Anatolia to Tbilisi in the summer of 1830, competition did little to improve standards. The Reverend Eli Smith and his companion had hoped to lodge privately. Regrettably, “the same cause which had ruined the taverns by depriving them of patronage had filled every disposable room, and none could be procured”. Another problem was posed by “the police authority of quartering strangers, especially if officers, as most Europeans are, in any house it chooses”. “In a city possessed so long by Europeans – they continue – we had hoped for convenient accommodation, and had anticipated with some pleasure the luxury of a good bed at least”. Meanwhile, they found prices exorbitant. Their first choice, on account of its convenient location, was the French taverner’s joint.

“Its dirty floors, looking as if they had never felt the effects of water, gave us, at our entrance, no very promising earnest of the rest of its conveniences; but extreme fatigue and the lateness of the hour made us hope that the beds would be better […]. Hardly was I snugly laid in mine however became it seemed more like a bed of nettles than of down. A whole army of bloodthirsty enemies attacked every assailable point and forced me immediately to seek for quarters at the centre of the floor, the only place of refuge. Our rooms proved, in fact, absolutely inhabitable, and we were obliged to seek new lodgings.” The German hostelry, to which they duly moved, was free of bedbugs, but plagued by cohorts of fleas and swarms of flies. By night, at least,’we obtained some respite; for the darkness put the flies to sleep’” (Smith 1833: I 203).

During his week-long sojourn in Tbilisi, young Lieutenant Conolly enjoyed “the very polite attentions for which we remain indebted to that excellent gentleman, the Chevalier Gamba, French consul” – who, after living more than fifteen years in Georgia, was often instrumental in finding accommodation for foreign travellers. The party-loving lieutenant was of sufficient social standing to enjoy the “entrée” at government-house. He had arrived too late in Tbilisi to be present at the ball given for the Turkish pashas captured during the recent war, but managed to attend a grand entertainment, “given to the army by the Georgian merchants of the city”. In short, during his stay in Tiflis, he was so well received by Paskievich and the Russian officers, so “hospitably entertained by the different chiefs to whom we were introduced, and, in short, amused ourselves so well that we were sorry to depart” (Conolly).

Travel literature often refers to the splendid banquets laid on at government house, though the menu of sour stews, thin slices of nasty bread and mediocre wine was not always to the Western palate. General Rosen's guest list was studded with aristocratic names; yet his French chef was most of the time drunk, and palace catering suffered as a result. According to Vladimir Sollogub, Tiflis in the 1850s was still an Eastern city, and life at the Viceroy's palace retained, for all its splendour, a certain patriarchal simplicity. The Viceroy, English-educated Mikhail Semyonovitch Vorontsov, reputedly had the best chef in Tiflis. A visiting American, George Leighton Ditson, was invited to dine at the palace. Treated to "the usual stimulants to a Russian dinner [...]: aqua vitae, pickles, bread and dry bolognas", he found only the Persian and Turkish dishes to his liking. He did, however, enjoy the opportunity to mix in aristocratic circles with counts and countesses, and hobnob with the likes of Prince Dadiani and princess Belutoff. It is perhaps no surprise that he subsequently dedicated his travel book to Vorontsov (Ditson 1850: 45, 305).

The poet Lermontov, who came to Georgia in 1837, complained that the best hotel in the capital was "a miserable tavern kept by a Jew" (Kelly 87). Others came to realize that Tbilisi in no way resembled the city of their dreams. Friedrich Parrot, professor of natural history at the University of Dorpat, was similarly disillusioned; his main interest lay however in agriculture. Tbilisi underwent hardly any major changes until around 1845. The *Kavkazski Kalendar* for 1846 lists two hotels: Moskovskaya, belonging to V. Krylov, in Erevan Square, and the St Petersburg Hotel in Golovin prospect. In 1847, the same compendium also mentions Hotel Warsaw, owned by one Chmielewski, presumably a Pole, and Zaltsman's establishment on the Sands (na Peskakh); there were also restaurants run by Diubek, Feliet (Feuillet?) in Erevan Square, Shilkevich (Szyłkiewicz) and Grivnak. The American Ditson mentions five hotels, two of which "were quite good", though only one had a spare room (Ditson 1850: 300). The 1852 edition names Zaltsman's, Hotel Warsaw, Hotel St Petersburg in Ataman Street, and Hotel Italia, owned by Carlo Moriggi on Golovin Prospect. Seven Russian eateries (traktir) are also listed; restaurants include Jean-Paul's in the German Colony, Adam Merkle's in Prince Sumbatov's house in Erevan Square, and Kharin's in Tamamshen's theatre building, also in Erevan Square (*Kavkazski Kalendar'* 1846, 1847, 1852).

By the middle of the century, hotel facilities began to show a marked improvement. Travelling between Russia and Turkey in the mid-1860s, Viscount Pollington was well pleased with the Opera in Tbilisi, where *Ballo in Maschera* was playing, and he was favourably impressed with the Hôtel de l'Europe "kept by an Italian and a Frenchman in partnership, and really a miracle of cleanliness for this country: the eating good, though everything preposterously dear" (Savile 1867: 125). Douglas Freshfield, for his part, was delighted to find that:

"Our host and his wife were French, and that the house was filled up in European style. The bedrooms were large and amply furnished, and the beds had good spring mattresses, instead of being (as usual in Russia) mere sofas with hard leathern cushions, and a sheet spread over them. Moreover, the master of the hotel was also the head-cook, and many of our dinners would have done credit to a restaurateur of the Palais Royal" (Freshfield 1869: 98). His aristocratic compatriot, Lord James Bryce, also refers to this establishment.

Meanwhile another titled Westerner, Baron Max von Thielmann, secretary to the Imperial German embassy at St Petersburg, had discovered the Hôtel du Caucase, only a stone's throw from the theatre where, he was gratified to note, two visiting companies happened to be performing at the time. He praised the hotel's good management, likewise its cuisine, but judged the charges to be exorbitant – three or four times higher than the notoriously expensive hotels of Switzerland. A seasoned traveller, the Baron then ventured with his party into the wilds of Svanetia.

Descended from an eminent Alsatian family of manufacturers, traders and industrialists, and a member of the government of the French Third Republic, Alfred Koechlin-Schwartz came to Georgia as a tourist in the 1870s, travelling with his wife and a party of friends via Kazan, Siberia, Astrakhan and Derbend. Like Baron von Thielmann, he chose to stay at the Grand Hôtel du Caucase; its French owner, whom he describes as a former *chef de cuisine dans le pays*, ran it "as well kept as possible by Caucasian standards"; and he highly commended the catering: "la cuisine est excellente, ainsi que le vin". In Tbilisi, he noted, the hairdressers, milliners and dressmakers were all French, while Grand Duke Michael's Palace caused him to exclaim: "on se retrouve en pleine civilisation européenne". Koechlin-Schwartz had a talent for sketching and, with his eye for the picturesque, it was the old Tbilisi houses that appealed to him most. They never stood in a straight row ("elles n'ont jamais connu d'alignement"), and there were no two alike. The frustrated artist finally exclaimed: "mais tout cela est trop beau pour être traduit sur une toile" – it was all too exquisite for mere art to convey to canvas. (Koechlin-Schwartz 1879).

Progress or no, hotel breakfasts did not meet with universal appoval. The former British consul at Kertch, Clive Phillipps-Wolley, sat on his Tbilisi balcony, "with my glass of tea and that leathery ring of bread they call a 'bublik', which forms the regular breakfast of the Russian" (Phillipps-Wolley 1881). Douglas Freshfield spent his evenings in the gardens of the German quarter, known as 'Mon Plaisir' and 'Sans Souci' (Freshfield 1869: 445). A few years later, Oliver Wardrop commended the "Sakartvelo gardens, where the good people of Tiflis often dine in vine-covered bowers by the riverside", further mentioning the French restaurant d'Europe, opposite the Palace, and three other Tbilisi hotels: Kavkaz, Rossiya, London.

A friend had recommended the Hôtel de Londres to the young reporter Alexander Macdonald, who found its charges disproportionate to the facilities it offered and tried his luck elsewhere. In his own words, after some searching

"We happily stumbled on the 'Hotel du Caucase', on the main street of the new part of the town, from which it was entered by an entrance between two of the shops over which its front part, comprising its large dining-rooms and buffet, were built. The bedrooms and suites were in the rear, opening out on two wide and tastefully-decorated verandahs round the three sides of the oblong courtyard, but one flat above it. The apartment placed at our disposal was at the upper cross end of the first verandah, and was comfortably, if not elegantly, furnished as bed and sitting room. The only look-out from it on one side was across the verandah into the courtyard opening. On the other side our view was shut in by the gloomy background of the precipitous, rocky heights to which we have already referred. Still this isolation made it a capital place to sleep in and acting under this impression we spent our first afternoon in the enjoyment of this much-needed and longed-for luxury" (Macdonald 1893: 286–287).

Macdonald expresses a distinct preference for "marks of civilization" and other modern amenities in Tbilisi, the numerous shops, theatres, studios, cafés, bookstores and "the good supply of comfortable carriages plying for hire" to be found in the new, Russian district. He clearly felt less happy about the native quarter, where he discovered "all kinds of shops, and apparently all kinds of men, with a variety of animals and beasts of burden, and in such numbers as often caused as big a block as that which at certain hours delays the traffic over London Bridge" (Macdonald 1893: 288). Its streets, he found, were narrow, tortuous and confused in the Oriental style.

A mere three years later, the views of Walter Harris, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, differ quite radically. He regretted what he saw as "the entire absence of the Continental system of *cafés*; search far and wide, there is nothing that answers to the idea of the *café* of France and Europe in general" (Harris 1896: 42–43). On the other hand, he had warm words of praise for "that most excellent hostelry, the Hôtel de Londres, over which Madame Richter and her son so ably preside, and which well bears out its reputation of being one of the most comfortable hotels, not only in Russia, but almost in the world. And none knows better than the traveller how much of his pleasure depends upon the quarters he finds to lodge in" (Harris 1896: 45). Otherwise, he found little of interest in "civilized Tiflis", preferring to stroll down the narrow arcades, admire "the great ill-built caravanserais, with their overhanging balconies of painted and carved wood", which were neither Persian nor Russian, and in the district of the bazaars to relish that "very Ba-

bel of nations and languages, such as must delight the heart of the traveller” (Harris 1896: 46–47).

In the provinces

For travellers who chose to leave Tbilisi for the provinces, a familiar sight on the roads was the clattering, cumbersome arba that Georgians, Lesghians, Ossetians and Circassians found best suited to the rugged mountainous terrain, and used on family journeys, on pilgrimages, and for the conveyance of wineskins. In more conventional mode, a foreigner might take the *diligence* at Vladikavkaz, or what Freshfield refers to as a *paraclodnaia telega*, or hire a Russian-style tarantas. Baron Haxthausen had only a short stay in Tbilisi before travelling on to Armenia.

“After procuring from the Governor the requisite papers, I hired a Russian tarantas, a convenient carriage, suitable for bad roads. But on this occasion, I was prettily taken in by a German saddler, who gave me such a rickety vehicle, though externally polished up, that we broke down more than half-a-dozen times on the journey, and lost not only money, but what was worse, time. The German workmen have in general throughout the Russian provinces a reputation for great skill and honesty” (Haxthausen 1854: 175).

Vehicles apart, the first obstruction on the journey might be the road itself; sometimes, as when the chevalier Gamba attempted to travel between Tiflis and Telavi, it was impassable for a britzka. Indeed, according to Alexandre Dumas, a postal road in the Caucasus meant no road and no horses. In the middle of the century, however, a Russian prince was able to praise the splendid road from Tbilisi to Erevan, built by one Colonel Espejo, a Spaniard in Russian service (Soltykoff); and Freshfield reported that the viceroy had ordered the construction of roads to Kutaisi and Erivan, and that the road of Darial was almost complete (Freshfield 1869: 109).

It is the Russians who appear to have adapted most readily to local conditions; and they were also more likely to “go native”. The poet Lermontov, who would leap out of a stagecoach to take a quick sketch the mountain landscape (Boborykin 1960: 103), was sighted one mid-December at a hostelry in Vladikavkaz. Clad in his military frockcoat, he sat in the company of a Frenchman sketching and singing “A moi la vie, à moi la vie, à moi la liberté,” with loud abandon (Boborykin). Lermontov admittedly parodies the excesses of this fashionable vogue in an essay entitled *The Caucasian*. Yet, for his generation, Georgia and the Caucasus provided life’s great soul-shaping adventure, liberation from formal constraints, and a wellspring of inspiration; and the poet could not fail to respond with due flamboyance. He donned Circassian garb, slung a rifle over his shoulder, ate *Tchurek* and drank

Kakhetian wine straight from the buffalo-skin, galloping across the sun-parched plain of that province, and spent the night *al fresco* to a chorus of howling jackals (*Letopis…* 1967). Less romantically, Russian peddlers and craftsmen in the 1830s started coming to the Caucasus in droves, plying their wares first in Tbilisi, then in the rural districts of Georgia. An English traveller observed one such couple drinking tea outside a dreary inn, while their two dejected horses pecked away at a little hay; they then spread a mattress on the ground next to the cart and prepared to sleep (Abercromby).

Such makeshift arrangements did not suit everyone. At the other end of the spectrum, Humphry Sandwith, an army physician present during the siege of Kars, depicts a local means of travel.

"A Turkish pasha, or English MILORDO, who loves ease and luxury, travels with an immense train of followers and packhorses, carrying about with him tents, tables, chairs, beds, a large culinary establishment, and other supposed necessaries. He sends his cook and tents three or four hours in advance, so that when he arrives at the end of his day's journey, hot and tired, he finds in some lovely valley, with a shady grove, murmuring brook, and the like, his tents all standing, his tubs of warm and cold water, his brushes and sponges, his fresh suit of clothes; and in the next tent a table spread in the wilderness, with a clean white tablecloth, and all the appetizing accompaniments of high civilization" (Sandwith 1856).

When preparing for his journey to the Caucasus, Augustus H. Mounsey, Second Secretary to Queen Victoria's Embassy in Vienna, was persuaded to take a watch, glasses, crystal wine-coolers, an English saddle, a portable bed and supplies of brandy and sherry. In retrospect, he agreed that the brandy, the bed and the English saddle, complete with holsters, saddlebag and bridles, had come in very handy. With the benefit of hindsight, however, he recommended such vital necessities as sheets, blankets, waterproof covering, portable India rubber bath, japanned iron wash basin; plates, cups and knives, also a large pocket-knife with corkscrew, a portable medicine chest, preserved meals and soups; a pith helmet, strong riding-boots and breeches, veils and spectacles for the protection of the eyes, also several linen suits for summer; and finally a fur-coat, knee-high felt-boots and numerous wool and flannel outfits for the winter (Mounsey 1872). Some twenty years later, the Honourable John Abercromby made do more modestly with saddles and saddlebags, an iron teapot and kettle, tea, sugar and saucepans. Buchan-Telfer agrees that luggage should be restricted in quantity, suggesting that an oval bath be taken in lieu of a portmanteau, fitted with a strong lock and stout straps. The most suitable clothing was a short jacket and knickerbockers with top boots or gaiters. Mr Pfaff's travelling gear included a samovar, coffee-machine, knife and fork,

a non-breakable drinking glass, and sufficient reading matter for the long delays that might occur on the way.

Tea was the only way to keep going on the journey. The Russians had evolved their own survival strategy for the Caucasian trek, taking a teapot, biscuits, and their own supplies of tea and sugar. Often choosing to bivouac, they drank more tea and used more sugar than usual, as they found that a combination of plain tea and garlic dealt with the fever as effectively as quinine. Although there had been a sugar factory in Tbilisi since the 1840s, the article was notoriously scarce outside the capital; the lump variety could be used as a novel coinage to barter for eggs, milk and a little black bread from Tatar village women. As for coffee, it was a rare item in the provinces, and sometimes quite unpalatable. The advice was to take one’s own coffee-machine. Alexandre Dumas tartly observed that the Russians left all other precautions to chance, never eating *en route*; like the Arabs of the desert, they would set out with a comely paunch, tighten their belts on the way, and arrive at their destination “avec des tailles de soubrette”.

Mr Pfaff issued a more serious warning: bread was often scarce, and an *aul* in Ossetia would at best supply only mutton, czureks and cheese. The pundits generally agreed that travel must never be undertaken in the Caucasus without a sufficiency of provisions. Prior to departure, it was both cheap and expedient to visit the Armenian Bazaar and Tatar maidan where, after the extortionate prices of European Tiflis, one could eat one’s fill at a crowded table for just a few kopecks. The sight and smell of animal carcasses decomposing in the sultry heat was repellent to some Westerners; but the markets also offered them an ethnographic feast. Fruit could moreover be bought from the Kinto boys, chickens, geese and turkeys from the Georgians, vegetables, potatoes, butter and veal from the German colonists. Salt, poultry and bread were best purchased in the Maidan. Travellers give their list of personal recommendations: sugar, cheese, tea, sausages and bread, or bread, rusks, tea, sugar, smoked sausage, ground coffee and bouillon. Tongues, chickens, butter, wine, brandy and preserved meats could be obtained from the Commissariat. Further luxuries might include tinned fruit, or a cake of chocolate. Baron Thiel–mann further advocated bouillon, and tinned vegetable and mince, “as handy on a journey as on the battlefield. An appetizing soup was produced at a speed that mystified the Russian soldier on guard” (Thielmann).

Post Stations

It would have been unwise to disregard this advice. According to Moritz von Kotzebue, some villages were nothing but a heap of molehills. Officially, travellers’ accommodation in remote provinces was provided by government posting stations, the Caucasian network being an extension of the great Imperial Russian sys-

tem, familiar to readers of the marquis de Custine. Its legitimate status gave no guarantee of efficiency, honesty or cleanliness; Dumas, for one, grumbled that one paid for all the way to Tiflis even if the facilities terminated en route at Yekaterinograd; and postmasters were renowned for their "insolence, ignorance of truth, and rapacity" (Freshfield 1869: 110). A post-house in Guria could be no more than a stable built of wattles with a small blockhouse at one end; it could even be underground, discernible only from the smoke issuing through a square hole in the roof. Officially, again, samovars and kettles were to be found in every hotel and post-house, even though no other furniture was visible. In fact, most government-houses and posting-stations provided only water and a fire – Lermontov declared his cast-iron kettle to be his only solace. Stationmasters, whose duty it was to supply wood for heating the samovar, were unobtrusive in the extreme, disinclined to press their services upon their guests, and conspicuous chiefly by their absence (Mounsey). The postmaster at Orpiri turned out to be a "brigand du premier ordre" (Freshfield 1869: 482)[1]. Some out-of-the-way stations provided two qualities of water, one being reserved for tea; at the next station the water might be undrinkable, or unavailable (Belyaev 1882: 369). Fleas afforded a further discomfort for Dr Wagner; and Oliver Wardrop was made aware of other pests.

"Orkhevi post-station was a dirty, bare room with a table and two wooden benches, the only adjunct a Samovar, the walls being decorated with official notices in four languages to warn farmers against Phylloxera, portrayed in its every developmental stage" (Wardrop 1888: 72).

There was however a pleasant surprise in store when a post-house in Georgievsk provided black bread and milk Armstrong 1831). Tins of pâté de foie and sardines might put in an unaccountable appearance; and at a station near Kutaisi, Freshfield found both beer and champagne. Viscount Pollington noted that even the humblest post-houses utilized English crockery-ware, the willow-pattern largely predominating (Savile 1867: 121). Wardrop describes his arrival in Signakh.

"I first addressed myself to the post-master, who replied that boiling water was the only refreshment that he could offer me, but held out the hope that I might get dinner in the town. I wandered up and down the streets for an hour, and then found a dirty eating-house, where I refreshed myself with vodka, eggs, wine and bread. It took three quarters of an hour to boil the eggs".

He found the Club to be the centre of social life in the town; and nicknamed the *gostinitsa Nadezhda* the "Grand Hôtel de Kakhétie" (Wardrop 1888: 80). Ussher and his party considered themselves more fortunate. One stage from Grozny, near the Terek, in an area clearly mapped as Chechen-Ingush territory:

1 Freshfield p. 482.

"We were agreeably surprised, on arriving at the post where we were to spend the night, to find that a Polish Jew, who had been burnt out at Grosna by a great fire which had taken place about a month before, had taken refuge there, and had established a kind of café. We put up with him, and fared sumptuously, contrasting the treatment we received from him with that experienced in places of more pretension" (Ussher 1865: 119).

The travellers arrived in the evening, as the herds of buffaloes and sheep were being driven through the narrow gateway in the clay walls and brushwood fortifications. The shepherds were armed to the teeth, and Cossacks ranged about on horseback.

The Dukhan

Although post-stations, backed by state authority, functioned in this haphazard manner, the traveller in need of refreshment might always strike lucky at a dukhan, a sort of roadside inn, pub, or *café routier*. Three-walled and open-fronted, these taverns were to be found all over Georgia from Svanetia and Ossetia to Kakhetia, sometimes several to a village, or one at every street corner; and they served as the main outlet for the gargantuan wine harvest, supplying gallon upon gallon of the liquor from the large clay Kwewri. On an auspicious day, they could provide meals consisting of Shashlyk, mutton and pork sausages; Balyk, fresh cucumbers, pastries and cheese; Tchurkchela, dried fruit and vodkas. Viscount Pollington remarks on wretched little roadside shops selling "Frend's double stout" and German matches made at Vienna for the English market with "If you want a light, I'll shine so bright" printed on the label (Savile 1867: 121).

Both the "dirty eating-house" described by Wardrop and the "kind of café" mentioned by Ussher could be seen as variants on the Dukhan. But places for travellers to lodge defy rigid categorization. Ussher depicts the "hotel" at Temikhanshura, "a small brick and plaster house, the interior of which consisted of a raki shop and one room". He proceeds to give more detail.

"The furniture of the latter was probably unique among that of inns. A small table, which once had four legs, but now somehow stood on three, was in the centre of the room; a bench, broken across in the middle, occupied one side, and was faced on the other by a barrel organ in a sad state of dilapidation. This instrument, which completed the entire plenishing of the establishment, by no means surprised us, as barrel organs, whether out of order or in working condition, are much appreciated in the Caucasus, which, seemingly, is the ultimate destination of all these instruments when worn out by hard service in Europe" (Ussher 1865: 184).

Ussher was perplexed to find no water in the house, though a large supply of ice was available. The landlord, meanwhile, drank from morning until late afternoon, sobering up in time to get drunk again by bedtime.

In nineteenth-century travel literature, the dukhan comes to acquire a quasimythical status of its own. Baron Thielmann identified the Mingrelian dukhan simply as the classical Caravanserai of the East, "a not very garni hotel where the first effluvia of civilisation have just, sometimes, reached" (Thielmann). "Only it is on a smaller scale," adds Rafael Bernoville, who then continues:

"Whereas an Arab's natural instinct for beauty brings dignity to an occasion, and chooses an attractive spot for a halt, this is seldom the case in the Caucasus, where the influence of the Orient is barely felt. The dukhan often turns its back on the river or on the horizon. Dark and airless, its narrow opening hints at an even darker back-shop, which is virtually barricaded by a row of vast flagons" (Bernoville 1875: 48).

Berno–ville was hard to please; he found the Georgian national costume ungracious, and the language hard and guttural, "an inexpressive pantomime of uncouth gesture". At Red Bridge, on the Debeday or Khram river, Dubois de Montpéreux once saw a fine, spacious brick construction with a vast caravanserai. When Florian Gille passed by twenty years later, he found a *cabaret* like every other *cabaret* in Georgia, its kitchen exposed to the four winds; great quarters of lamb and mutton were hooked to the door, waiting for a passing customer to order Shashlyk (Gille 1859: 286).

A lieutenant of the Rifle Brigade and Doctor in Law, later Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland, a dedicated traveller with a keen interest in archeology, language and folklore, the Hon. John Abercromby, who later inherited the title of 5th Baron, has penned a series of vignettes documenting the state of the road on his return journey from Kakhetia to Tbilisi. He describes a dukhan between Sabaduri gora and Satebis nuta.

"The house seemed to be built upon a midden . . .The dukhan was a one-roomed building with a counter at one side, behind, which a filthy-fingered and inquisitive boy dispensed the very limited stores of the shop, such as vodka, wine, bread and hard eggs. It was impossible to eat anything the repulsively dirty boy had touched, except the hard eggs and the inside of a piece of bread, and then only with frequent puffs at a cigarette, to drown for a moment the abominable odour of the establishment, quite as bad outside the door as within" (Abercromby 1889: 201).

In the circumstances, he preferred to eat nuts from a nearby tree for his lunch. As he pressed on to Tbilisi, the road descended sharply into a narrow defile, where the tiny hamlet of Tshvaris Chamia was situated.

“Here I had at one time thought of stopping for the night, as it was about half-way. But as the place consisted of only about six cottages and a *dukhan*, where neither hay, corn or even pasturage was to be found, I was very unwillingly compelled to move on. A man said there was another *dukhan* only three versts distant, where forage could be bought. The actual distance by road turned out to be eleven versts, though by using short cuts and walking a good deal on foot, we did it in an hour. […] At last, about 5.30 p.m., our journey for the day came to an end, for we had reached the *dukhan*, the name of which I entirely forgot to ask, making sure it was Gldani. In front of it there was a little arbour of trelliswork, containing a table and two benches. This we took possession of, being cleaner and more airy than the wayside wine-shop” (Abercromby 1889: 202–203).

As the place could offer neither food nor fodder, Abercromby marched off to buy food at the nearest village, where “all we could get were eggs and bread, for which at first they declined payment, but ultimately were prevailed upon to accept the market price”. On reaching Tbilisi, he booked in at the Hotel du Caucase (Abercromby 1889: 206).

To quote the words of Alexandre Dumas: “We were entering civilized territory; the brigands, banished from the high roads, had become inn-keepers”. In the popular folk tradition, the *mikitan* (Dukhan-keeper) was a friendly person, ever willing to help an outlaw on the run. But the mythical image is deflated by Sergo Kldiashvili in his *Svanetian Novellae*, where he writes:

“How the innkeepers grew so fat was beyond anyone’s comprehension. They lay outside the taverns, grumpy and red-faced, and eyed any customer rash enough to ask for wilted horseradish, stale lobio, vinegary wine or a hen of less than pristine freshness, with an air of supreme annoyance at being so wantonly disturbed” (Kldiashvili 1941).

The Honourable John Abercromby also concluded that dukhan-keeping could not be a highly lucrative speculation, having gleaned from the hosteller in Gldani that in winter there was very little traffic on the road, while in summer his takings ranged from 24 kopecks to two and a half rubles a day.

Earlier in the century, Prince Soltykoff objected strongly to the fare on offer at a dukhan near the Aragva river: it sold wine and “a most revolting cheese, made from goat’s milk. I do not see how a foreigner could possibly eat it, although the indigenous people appear to like it very much” (Soltykoff). The Georgian inn-keeper was the very image of indolence, nonchalantly drinking and smoking as his wife tended the garden. A decade previously, Colonel Tornau had spent four years in the Caucasus as a military intelligence officer in the service of the tsar. Whilst in Sukhumi, the homesick emissary sought refuge and solace in Toganes’ congenial tavern, the only place where he could “relax in the company of Russian naval

officers and forget the miserable atmosphere of the place with a glass of Porter or Marsala" (Tornau 1864: 29).

Of all the foreign visitors, it would seem that the Russians acclimatized most readily, and responded most positively, to the wayside inns of Transcaucasia and Georgia. One writer in particular enthused about the Dukhan, finding it infinitely more desirable than its Russian counterpart, in ambiance reminiscent of drinking houses in Poland. As he writes,

"The Trans-Caucasian dukhan in no way resembles our Russian *kabak*. It is as decent, reputable and wholesome as our Russian tavern is foul, dangerous and disgusting. It is a joy for the traveller to reach the dukhan. Often it is his salvation. The dukhan has everything a traveller can possibly require, so long as he is unspoiled by the foolish luxuries of the capital. The dukhan provides cool and space and shade. True, it is often no more than a simple wattle construction, plastered inside with clay, above which peers a small patch of sky; but that is quite unimportant" (Markov 1904: 364).

In the immediate wake of the October Revolution the dukhan enjoyed an ebullient flowering, providing a sanctuary for Russian poets and artists. Once the Bolsheviks seized power in 1920, it entered a slow decline as the relic of a discredited past; when it was finally written off by the new regime, its demise spelled the end of the old era.

Kutaisi

For the average traveller, meanwhile, more salubrious arrangements were to be found to the West of Tbilisi than in the eastern provinces. Upon arriving in Kutaisi, Ussher put up at a hotel kept by a fat German. The "dirty-looking individual" he encountered in the hotel courtyard was the son of Mr Marr, a Scot, "who had many years previously established a tobacco manufactory not far from Maran, which he still carried on," and the older half-brother of the famous Nikolai (born in 1865). The youngster apparently spent most of the day drinking, and although he spoke no English at all, he was fluent in French and Italian, and acted as interpreter for the French engineers engaged in surveying part of the projected railway line between Poti and Tiflis – the contract was finally given to British engineers, and the construction carried out by soldiers. Douglas Freshfield took exception to the mistress of the Hôtel de France, referring to her as "one of a pair of harpies" (Freshfield 1869: 482). He also noted the existence of a hatter's shop offering a wide selection of local and foreign headwear (Freshfield 1869: 87), while at the photographer's, one could purchase artistic cards depicting peasant types (Freshfield 1896: 481).

Opened between 1871–1873, the Poti–Tbilisi railroad gave a boost to travel and hotel trade; yet even though he could now conveniently travel by train, Baron Thielmann had his misgivings about Kutaisis itself. Russian friends advised him against the Hotel Medea, "an unfortunate appellation if only on culinary grounds", and he and two friends checked in at the Hotel de France, run at minimal cost by le Sieur Hector, *ancien gâte-sauce parisien*. For sharing a washbasin, two wobbly beds and an ancient sofa, the travellers had to pay seven roubles a day. They also had to fetch their own water, as Hector could not be induced to leave his kitchen, and the hotel boy, "a wild-faced Mingrelian", was conspicuous mainly by his absence. A rival concern, however, the Hotel de Colchide, was praised for its cuisine. Marinated in wine before grilling, its Lamb Shashlyk was exquisite, reputedly the best in the Caucasus; it was followed by a dish of aubergines sautéed *à la géorgienne* – and "Cela, c'est un rêve".[2] The bazaar was excellent, and, at the end of the century Lynch declared that "few street scenes are more picturesque than those which are disclosed during an afternoon ramble in the Jewish quarter of Kutaisi" (Lynch).

Poti

Further West, French initiative played a major role in launching the early stages of the hotel business in the seaport of Poti. A household name among the reading classes of Transcaucasia and Georgia, Alexandre Dumas was the toast of Tbilisi, and enjoyed banqueting with a Tatar prince in an *aul*. He nevertheless considered a modicum of self-catering skills to be a *sine qua non* for the adventurous tourist. A seasoned traveller himself, he was also a crack shot, a writer on gastronomy, and a fine cordon bleu in his own right. Arriving in Poti shortly after an imperial ukaz had proclaimed it to be a town, he decided to celebrate the event with a great feast. Local conditions being as they were, improvisation and compromise were called for. Dumas found tinned beans and other vegetables in his luggage, used some lamb fillet leftovers, and shot a pig from the hotel balcony. Sporting friends delivered him a brace of pheasants, hares and a deer. Peppercorns could only be procured at the chemist's, and a jar of English pickles stood in lieu of vinegar. All in all, he concocted some ten dishes, followed by nuts, tea, coffee and vodka, and washed down by the wines of Mingrelia, Kakhetia and Guria. When touring the Russian empire, he concluded, it was as well to study the 1859 edition of *Robinson Crusoe*.

At about this time, Madame Jacquot, a Parisian who had failed to make her fortune in Tbilisi, sold her property there and hoped to be more successful by set-

2 Koechlin-Schwartz, op. cit.

ting up the first hotel in the new port of Poti; she then contracted the fever, probably from the undrained swamp at the mouth of the Rion. A few years after Dumas's visit, John Ussher presents a dismal snapshot of the place.

"In this miserable spot there is not a single stone house. Strong posts, driven deep into the black, stinking soil, support the houses, constructed of logs of squared timber, at about three feet from the ground. They are usually about sixteen or eighteen feet square by ten high, and from whatever cause have generally underneath a fetid pool of water, in which swarms of frogs discourse merrily all day and night. A long narrow street of these wretched dwellings composes the entire seaport. Nowhere is the water more than two feet from the surface – in many places the standing pools of filthy liquid show that it is on a level with or above it. The forest of alders, thick and perfectly impenetrable from the rankness and luxuriance of the underwood, comes down to within a hundred yards of the end of the solitary street, which terminates abruptly at the edge, there being no road by which a wheeled vehicle could enter from the interior. Some sixty or seventy of these log-huts constitute the town, and are inhabited by a few shop-keepers, who earn a scanty subsistence from supplying the few government employees. They one and all seemed like spectres, from the effect of the constant attacks of fever to which they are subjected. In some instances, on calling at shops, a voice from the neighbouring hut would acquaint us with the fact that the owner was at that moment suffering from the malady, and consequently unable to attend to us" (Ussher 1865: 66–67).

Ussher lodged at the British consulate, a two-room hut with a bench and a table serving as beds. For board, however, he resorted to the "hotel" of Madame Jacquot, who managed to convert the somewhat repellent foodstuffs hanging in the local shops into a very fair breakfast and dinner.

Urban progress in Poti was slow. Freshfield noted that the main (and only) street was flanked on either side by a large ditch, brimming with stagnant slime. There were however three hotels to choose from, and the same author found the Jacquot establishment to be clean and comfortable (Freshfield 1869: 483). Although the walls and floor of the Hotel Colchide were still bare several years later, and Mme Jacquot still suffering from the fever, a "tolerable meal" was nevertheless served to an appreciative Augustus Mounsey. The place was clearly a congenial one; and a pleasant evening was enjoyed by Baron Thielmann when he met up there for dinner with Prince Gagarin, an old acquaintance from St Petersburg, who held an administrative post at Kutaisi and had come to Poti on business. Even as time went on, a certain old Frenchman contrived to run "a very fair hotel for such a town."

Travellers' response and aesthetic perceptions cover a broad cognitive and emotional gamut. Coming to the Caucasus and Georgia on specific assignments

(diplomatic, political, military, commercial, or scholarly), the authors of nineteenth-century travelogues bring their prior expectations, nurtured by ancient myths, classical authors of antiquity, and their preparatory reading of earlier travel accounts, with which they engage in textual dialogue, contesting their facts, findings and opinions. Their writing reveals a tension between dream, imagination and reality, the need to mythologize, and the urge to demystify, to display the exotic, and respect the truth.

Read in loosely chronological sequence, these accounts point to the slow, and initially not over-promising, beginnings of the hotel trade in Georgia, which subsequently achieved international status in a relatively short time span. On balance, dirt and discomfort had not been a deterrent – at least not for upper-class Englishmen – although the less educated had problems adjusting. It is noted how Dr Cormick's servant Thomas, a Yorkshireman, and the woman-servant Mary "...sighed over the lost comforts of old England, the want of inns, and every kind of ease. They both agreed that in their present mode of life they were more like 'hanimals' than human beings" (Mignan 1839).

In the main travellers to the Caucasus were explorers, not tourists; curiosity and cognition counted for more than comfort, or the passive ingestion of culture. Hotels and wayside inns notwithstanding, the thrill of adventure and discovery, moments of epiphany, and a sense of journeying back in time to an archaic era of civilization, outweighed any disadvantages; and in this respect, the landscape acted as a powerful magnet. Dissatisfied as he was with Tbilisi, Ker Porter could not help feeling the spirit of the stupendous Caucasian solitudes awing his soul. When he declares "No pen can express the emotion which the sudden burst of this sublime range excited in my mind" (Ker Porter 1821: 45), he is stating the experience of countless other travellers. Once the first accurate maps were produced in the 1850s, and the pacification process completed a decade later, the way was open for mountaineers to enjoy the metaphysical thrill of the gaping void and proclaim the Caucasus to be the most exciting range in Europe, though less known than the familiar Alps, or even the Himalayas.

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WESTERN TRAVELLERS IN THE CAUCASUS. GEORGIA'S HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS: HOTELS, INNS & TAVERNS IN THE 19TH CENTURY.

Summary

Drawing on a wide range of French, English and Russian-language printed source material, the paper deals with the travel accounts of Western visitors to Georgia and the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. Focusing on the everyday practical experience of travel, it outlines the birth of the hotel trade in Tbilisi. After c. 1850, with the building of a railroad, "civilizational" standards began to improve, and over the years Tbilisi hotels were described as being as "good as any European establishment".

Under the heading of provincial travel, the paper addresses the issue of general supplies, provisions and self-catering, modes of transportation, the state of the roads, and the network of postal-stations, whose erratic services were supplemented by the omnipresent, albeit highly unreliable, wayside inn or *dukhan.*

Coming to the Caucasus and Georgia on specific assignments (diplomatic, political, military, commercial, or scholarly) the authors of travelogues bring their prior expectations, nurtured by ancient myths, ancient literature, and a study of earlier travel accounts, with which they engage in textual dialogue. In their sundry reflections and musings, they seldom fail to enthuse on the tourist potential of Georgia in particular, and the Caucasus more generally.

Key Words: Caucasus, Georgia, Travel, Roads, Hotels, Taverns, Dukhan.

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PODRÓŻNICY ZACHODNI NA KAUKAZIE. GRUZIŃSKIE DROGI I BEZDROŻA: HOTELE, ZAJAZDY I TAWERNY W XIX WIEKU

Streszczenie

Artykuł dr Taylor-Terleckiej, opierający się na drukowanych materiałach źródłowych w języku francuskim, angielskim i rosyjskim, dotyczy relacji z podróży zachodnich gości do Gruzji i na Kaukaz w XIX wieku. Koncentrując się na codziennym, praktycznym doświadczeniu podróży, przedstawia narodziny branży hotelarskiej w Tbilisi. Po 1850 wraz z budową linii kolejowej zaczęto poprawiać standardy, a hotele tutejsze były opisywane jako „tak samo dobre, jak każdy inny europejski obiekt". W ramach relacji z podróży prowincjonalnych artykuł porusza kwestię zaopatrzenia ogólnego, prowiantu i wyżywienia we własnym zakresie, analizuje środki transportu, stan dróg i sieć stacji pocztowych, których nieregularne usługi były uzupełniane przez wszechobecne, choć wysoce zawodne, pobocze zajazdy lub dukhan. Przyjeżdżający na Kaukaz i do Gruzji w określonych zadaniach (dyplomatycznych, politycznych, wojskowych czy naukowych) autorzy dzienników podróży sygnalizują swoje oczekiwania, pielęgnowane przez starożytne mity, literaturę i wcześniejsze relacje z podróży. W swoich rozlicznych refleksjach najczęściej jednak zachwycają się potencjałem turystycznym Gruzji i Kaukazu.

Słowa kluczowe: Kaukaz, Gruzja, podróże, drogi, hotele, tawerny, dukhan.