

Emancipation, Modernization, Riot:
Tbilisi's *Amkrebi* and Russian Imperial Rule (1801-67)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the history of Tbilisi's *Amkrebi* in the first sixty-odd years of the nineteenth century. *Amkrebi*, craftsmen and trader organizations comparable to European guilds, had dominated production and distribution within Tbilisi throughout the Middle Ages and up until the end of the eighteenth century. With the introduction of Russian rule in the city in 1801, the organizations gradually lost their influence over the next few decades. This has lead scholars of labor history of Tbilisi to envision *Amkrebi* history of this period as one of linear, steadfast, and inevitable decline and the organizations themselves as pitiful remnants of the past acting as roadblocks on the city's way to modernization and capitalist economy.

The principal aim of this thesis is to emancipate *Amkrebi* and their history from these reductionist and deterministic narratives. With an attempt to bridge the New Imperial History of Russia and New Labor History paradigms, I emphasize the intricate ties between *Amkrebi* and history of empire and modernization in Tbilisi. The thesis focuses on the daring and influential modernization project pursued by the viceroy Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov in Tbilisi between 1844-1853. In light of Christian G. Devito's concept of Labor Flexibility, I argue that the labor force and social services provided by *Amkrebi* where an integral and indispensable part of this project.

Finally, I revisit the issue of the reasons behind *Amkrebi* decline. Through analyzing a crucial event in the organizations' history, the *Amkari* Riot of 1865, I show that *Amkrebi* still enjoyed tremendous influence in Tbilisi in this period. Crucially, they lost their power not simply due to changing economic realities in the city, but as a result of a prolonged political struggle with Tbilisi's municipal and imperial administrations.

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Contents

Introduction	6
Literature Review	9
Theoretical Framework	13
Sources	14
Chapter 1. Before Vorontsov – <i>Amkrebi</i> prior to the Establishment of Russian Imperial Governance and the First Half of the nineteenth Century	16
1.1 The History, Structure and Functions of <i>Amkrebi</i> Until the End of the nineteenth Century	16
1.2 The Effect of the Establishment of Russian Rule on <i>Amkrebi</i> (1801-1844).....	23
1.3 Conclusion.....	26
Chapter 2. Mikhail Vorontsov’s Designs for Modernizing the Caucasus and Organized Labour in Tbilisi (1844-1853).....	28
2.1 The Double Conundrum – the Two Objectives Of Vorontsov’s Administration and the Two Goals of his Modernizing Projects	30
2.2 Labor Flexibility, <i>Amkrebi</i> and “Russian and Foreign” Workers in the context of Vorontsov’s Design.....	36
2.3 Conclusion.....	41
Chapter 3. The <i>Amkari</i> Riot and its Aftermath.....	42
3.1 The Riot.....	43
3.2 The Investigation.....	49
3.3 The Aftermath	54
3.4 Conclusion.....	57
Conclusion.....	59
Bibliography	61
Primary Sources	61
Secondary Sources	66

Introduction

The middle of the nineteenth century marks a period of dramatic transformations in the history of Georgia in general, and of Tbilisi, the country's current capital and the then-seat of the viceroyalty of the Caucasus, in particular. The hardline and negligent policies of previous Russian imperial administrations had alienated much of the Georgian nobility and population. A new Viceroy, Prince Mikhail Vorontsov (r. 1844-1853) was now charged with enacting a different approach to imperial governance, based on considering native customs and practices as well as accommodating local interests. Vorontsov also initiated a set of comprehensive efforts aimed at modernizing and Westernizing the economic and social life of Tbilisi.¹

In this thesis I analyze the modernization and westernization project of Vorontsov in an attempt at bridging the New Imperial history and labor history perspectives. I focus on how Tbilisi's *Amkrebi*, craftsmen and traders organizations with structures and functions reminiscent of medieval European guilds, resisted the influence of and were influenced by the changes introduced by Vorontsov.² The loss of *Amkrebi*'s influence throughout the nineteenth century has lead scholars researching the labor history of Tbilisi to portray *Amkrebi*'s history in this period as one of inevitable and unremarkable decline and the organizations themselves as mere obstacles on the city's way to modernization and the emergence capitalist economy. I will focus on two key historical moments of this period: the appointment of the first viceroy of the Caucasus, Mikhail Vorontsov in 1844 and the *Amkari* Riot of 1865 that served as grounds for promulgation of new regulations on *Amkrebi*. I will show that rather than being sidelined by the new economic and political realities, *Amkrebi* adapted to and, in certain cases, took

¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

² *Amkrebi* is the Georgian plural of *Amkari*. I will use this form when referring to multiple *Amkrebi*. When referring to the entirety of *Amkrebi* operating in Tbilisi or this type of organizations in general, this form will be used interchangeably with the singular *Amkari*.

advantage of these transformations. This thesis argues that *Amkrebi* played a significant role in and contributed to imperial designs of modernization and economic development.

***Amkrebi* and Vorontsov's Project of Modernization**

First established, by some estimates, in the ninth century, *Amkrebi* were modelled after Arabic *asnafs* and later Persian and Ottoman institutions of comparable type. Somewhat similar to the medieval European guilds, *Amkrebi* united traders and craftsmen according to their trades.³ As Having rigid, hierarchical structures and strict operational procedures, by the mid-nineteenth century the associations had gained significant economic and political powers in the Tbilisi. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, through dividing the city into exclusive trade zones, discouraging competition between their members, and effectively manipulating prices, *Amkrebi* managed to obtain a virtual monopoly on production and distribution.⁴

This economic influence put *Amkrebi* at odds with parts of the Russian imperial administration in the city. As I will show in the second and third chapters, many Russian officials, including ones in St. Petersburg, considered the economic influence of the associations an obstacle to the development of the city. Furthermore, this sentiment was shared by the city's native elites, including the elected mayors and the wealthier merchants, some of whom repeatedly advised and urged viceroys to curtail the powers of or outright ban the associations.⁵

Moreover, the modernizing project, on its part, also threatened the position that the *Amkrebi* had held in the city. With Georgian nobles increasingly entering Russian service, many of them moved their residences to Tbilisi to be closer to the seat of governance. An important part of Vorontsov's initiative was to accommodate this now urbanized nobility with European-style

³ Karlo Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saukuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkrebi in Georgian Cities of the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries]* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1984).

⁴ Davit Gvritishvili and Shota Meskhia, *Tbilisis Istoria [History of Tbilisi]* (Tbilisi: Sablitgami, 1952), 128-130.

⁵ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 90.

institutions and Europeanized lifestyles. Consequently, his rule saw the establishment of Tbilisi's first public library and Opera House and the restoration of the city theatre. Additionally, the Viceroy's palace regularly hosted pompous receptions where Georgian aristocrats would dance to Italian tunes dressed in accordance to the latest trends of Parisian fashion. These changing mores and appetites of Georgian nobility, as well as Tbilisi's growing number of Russian residents, increased the demand for skillful artisans capable of working and tending to the public works projects as well as locally producing and maintaining European goods. Consequently, several colonies of European, mostly German, workers were established in and around Tbilisi. As I argue in chapter two, these workers formed a competition for *Amkrebi* and weakened their grasp on the economy of the city.⁶

Importantly, the settlement of European workers in the Tbilisi governorate was encouraged by the imperial administrators. As I discuss in chapter two, at least in the case of Vorontsov, this was not done with an explicit intent to challenge *Amkrebi*. Having studied the history and workings of the organization, the viceroy maintained – justifiably – that *Amkrebi* provided many essential social services, including disability allowances and support for the families of their deceased members, and, thus, had a beneficial effect on the city's social life. Therefore, as Vorontsov's correspondence with authorities in St. Petersburg testifies, he tried to promote the migration of foreign workers to Tbilisi through institutional arrangements that would not encroach on *Amkrebi* rights and privileges.⁷ His successors, however, came to view the associations in a more negative light and used stringent methods against them. Tensions between them and the cities' imperial and local elites grew steadily, culminating in the *Amkrebi Riot* in 1865, an event I examine in the third chapter.⁸

⁶ Ibid., 93-94.

⁷ For a correspondence between Vorontsov and officials in St. Petersburg see *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Komisii [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission]*, Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariat of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus), 53-58.

⁸ Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisi Istoria [History of Tbilisi]*, 141.

Literature Review

Amkrebi were largely absent in nineteenth-century accounts of the history of Georgia. An underclass composed mostly of ethnic Armenians, *Amkari* members were shunned by the “gentry nationalism” that had dominated the Georgian intellectual milieu in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹ In juxtaposition to the romanticized image of predominantly ethnic Georgian peasantry, urban, mostly Armenian traders and craftsmen were seen as an alien element.¹⁰ The so-called *Mesame Dasi* (the Third Group), young Marxists who rose in the 1890s in opposition to the discourses of the previous generation, also overlooked the role of *Amkrebi* in the economic and social development of Georgian cities. In a programmatic article for the movement, Noe Zhordania, then a prominent member of the group and later the head of government of the First Georgian Republic, argued that pre-Russian and pre-capitalist production in and trade, even in Tbilisi, was meager and hardly noteworthy and that the significant economic activities in the city appeared only in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the influx of foreign capital and the emergence of new forms of labor relations. Further, following a rather dogmatic interpretation of the developmental model of historical materialism, Zhordania and his peers considered *Amkrebi*, due to their guild-like structure, a feudal phenomenon that would inevitably be rendered obsolete by the rise of industrial capitalism and the subsequent proletarianization of workers.¹¹

The first attempt at exploring the history of *Amkrebi* came in 1906, with the publication of

⁹ See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

¹⁰ A striking illustration of this disregard can be found in the concept of *Khidchatekhiloba* [Broken Bridge] championed by the most prominent of the gentry nationalists, Ilia Chavchavadze. In the novella *Otaraant Kvrivi* Chavchavadze argues that Georgian society is dysfunctional because the nobility and the peasantry have become estranged from each other and calls for the reconciliation of these classes. Notice that this vision omits the lower strata of city-dwellers. See Ilia Chavchavadze, *Otaraant Kvrivi [Otaraant Widow]* (Tbilisi: Universali, 2019 [1887]).

¹¹ Zhordania elaborates his views on the economic history and future of Georgia in Noe Zhordania, “Kartveli Khalkhi da Natsionalismi” [Georgian People and Nationalism], [1908],” in *Kartuli Memartskheneobis Krestomatia [Anthology of Georgian Leftism]*, ed. Irakli Iremadze et al. (Tbilisi: Tbilisis Fabianuri Sazogadoeba/ Shen Demokratiistvis, 2015), 28–46.

Zakaria Chichinadze's *Tbilisi Ambokheba anu Didi Bunti* (The Tbilisi uprising or the Great Riot).¹² The volume recounts the story of the so-called *Amkari* Riot of 1865, a general strike of Tbilisi's craftsmen that resulted in a major clash between the workers and Russian military forces. Writing at the time of the backlash against the 1905 Russian revolution, Chichinadze attributes the reasons for the uprising to the excessive taxation and infringements on worker's privileges by the municipal government, not the members of the Russian administration in Tbilisi or Georgian nobles. The latter are depicted extremely favorably by Chichinadze, who credits princes Niko Chavchavadze and Grigol Orbeliani with ending the rebellion in a peaceful manner, by simply convincing the workers to lay down their arms and get back to work. This distorted image of an idyllic class reconciliation notwithstanding (Orbeliani's persuasive power was in fact augmented by the regiment of Russian troops that he led against the workers), *Tbilisi Ambokheba* is still a valuable source on the 1865 Riot. Basing his account not only on the official proceedings, but also on the recollections of the participants of the Riot, Chichinadze reveals the citywide scope of the uprising and its multi-trade character.¹³

Chichinadze, known mostly for his writings on the national history of Georgia, returned to *Amkrebi* in 1927, with an article on the support networks that *Amkrebi* organized in Tbilisi. Here he showed how the *Amkari* leaders, *Ustabashebi* distributed dues collected from members to provide for disabled craftsmen and the families of deceased ones. In the same decade, Svanidze explored *Amkari* history in "old Georgia" without specifying the period to which this designation refers to or offering a coherent analysis of historical transformations that the *Amkari* system underwent.¹⁴ The most interesting work on *Amkrebi* in this period, however, came not from a scholar, but a poet. Ioseb Grishashvili's semi-fictional *Dzveli Tfilisi*

¹² Zakaria Chichinadze, *Tbilisi Ambokheba Anu Didi Bunti [The Tbilisi Uprising or the Great Riot]* (Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1906).

¹³ See *ibid.*

¹⁴ Aleksandre Svanidze, *Amkrebi Dzvel Sakartveloshi [Amkrebi in Old Georgia]* (Tbilisi: Eroba, 1920).

Literaturuli Bohema [Literary Boheme of Old Tbilisi], a love-letter to the multi-confessional and multi-ethnic, erratic, mystical city that the author felt was disappearing in front of his eyes, dedicates long passages to urban craftsmen and traders and their culture.¹⁵ The glossary of terms denoting different trades in the city, the descriptions of the processes of production, the detailed, if romanticized, account of various *Amkari* customs and rituals in the book served not only as an inspiration, but also as a major source for later academic inquiries into the labor history of Tbilisi.

The work that set this stage for these new, comprehensive accounts of *Amkari* history perfectly exemplifies this shortcoming. In 1947, Georgian historian of Armenian origin, Leon Melikset-Begi published a collection of archival materials related to the *Amkari* Riot of 1865, the principal source for the third chapter of this thesis. However, despite these shortcomings, volumes by Teimuraz Beridze (1951), Davit Gvritishvili and Shota Meskhia (1952) and Karlo Kutsia (1987), among others, have established fundamental facts about the pre-nineteenth century history of *Amkrebi* and set the parameters for future debates.¹⁶

Besides local Georgian scholarship, Ronald Suny offers an interesting, if brief, discussion of the political power of *Amkrebi* in his magisterial *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.¹⁷ Describing in sketch the structure and role of *Amkrebi* in medieval as well as nineteenth century Tbilisi, Suny assumes that “as the city grew and trade with the outside world increased, the guilds’ monopolies and regulations, their control of production quality and quantity, and their determination to set prices acted to restrain economic innovation and expansion”.¹⁸ Moreover,

¹⁵ Ioseb Grishashvili, *Dzveli Tfilisis Literaturuli Bohema [Literary Boheme of Old Tbilisi]* (Tbilisi: Sakhelgami, 1927).

¹⁶ See Teimuraz Beridze, *Da Agmotsenda Tbilisi [And Tbilisi Flourished]* (Tbilisi: Sablitgami, 1951); Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisis Istoria [History of Tbilisi]*; Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saukuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkrebi in Georgian Cities of the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries]*.

¹⁷ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

while commenting on the viceroy Aleksandr Bariatsinskii's decision to not abolish *Amkrebi* due to his the organization would simply be rendered obsolete by infrastructural and industrial developments, Suny concludes that statistics on *Amkari* activities in the 1860s and the 1870s seem to have proved the viceroys right.¹⁹ I will revisit these assumptions, along with the linear Soviet narrative of decline by arguing that *Amkrebi*'s loss of relevance and influence was a result of deliberate political decisions by authorities, rather than an "inevitable" outcome of economic progress.

Important recent work has been done regarding the broader context of my research, the imperial project of modernization and Europeanization in Georgia in the nineteenth century. Paul Manning and Adrian Brisku have analyzed processes of construction of the national idea in this period and the fashioning of a new, European identity for Georgia by the members of the Georgian *intelligentsia*.²⁰ Mikail Mamedov gives an account of the formation and evolution of the idea of Russian *mission civilisatrice* in the Caucasus throughout nineteenth century.²¹ Hubertus Jahn has explored the theme of this mission in Russian imperial self-representation in the Caucasus based on Vorontsov's bronze statue erected in Tbilisi.²² In another interesting case-study, Jersild and Melkadze show how the imperial ideology and emerging nationalist sentiments played into tensions around the Tbilisi library and theatre.²³ Most of this valuable research, however, focuses on the cultural, symbolic and ideological aspects of these developments and on the discussions among the members of Georgian intelligentsia on the issues of the national culture and identity. Consequently, on the one hand, the period from the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Paul Manning, *Strangers in a Strange Land. Occidental Publics and Orientalist Geographies in Nineteenth-Century Georgian Imaginaries* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012); Adrian Brisku, *Bittersweet Europe: Albanian and Georgian Discourses on Europe, 1878-2008* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2013).

²¹ Mikail Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission to Defensive Frontier: The Russian Empire's Changing Views of the Caucasus (1801–1864)," *Russian History* 41, no. 2 (September 26, 2014): 142–162.

²² Hubertus F. Jahn, "The Bronze Viceroy: Mikhail Vorontsov's Statue and Russian Imperial Representation in the South Caucasus in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Russian History* 41, no. 2 (September 26, 2014): 163–180.

²³ Austin Jersild and Neli Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi," *Kritika* 3, no. 1 (2002): 27–49.

mid-1840s to the late 1860s that I have chosen for my study, lacking in the grand debates of the later decades, has frequently been overlooked. On the other hand, the material and economic underpinnings and effects of the project of modernization have been overshadowed and the agency of the lower strata of the population - neglected.

Theoretical Framework

My research focuses on the period of twenty-odd years between the beginning of Vorontsov's rule and the violent uprising of the *Amkrebi*. The analysis is primarily guided by the new imperial history and the concept of labor history, the latter as elaborated by Christian G. De Vito in the broader context of the new labor history.²⁴

Though the new imperial history is still being redefined and is still in the making, as Marina Mogilner puts it, its research agenda and theoretical perspective can be understood as „a cognitive turn in empire studies“. ²⁵ Divorcing itself from classical accounts of Russian state-centered historiography which neglected agency of non-state actors and saw the empire as a centralized and rational body, the new imperial history puts the emphasis not on the question of *what*, but rather on the exploration of the *how* of the empire.²⁶ This shift of the focus to the situatedness, entanglements and lived experiences of actors, gives me the possibility to explore the question under study as multiple “imperial situations”. According to Gerasimov and others, imperial situations and their intrinsic “polyglossia” are characterized „by the tensions, incongruity, and incommensurability of the languages of self-description“. ²⁷ However an

²⁴ Christian G. De Vito, “Labour Flexibility and Labour Precariousness as Conceptual Tools for the Historical Study of the Interactions Among Labour Relations,” *Historical Materialism Book Series* 148 (2018): 219–240.

²⁵ Marina Mogilner, “New Imperial History: Post-Soviet Historiography in Search of a New Paradigm for the History of Empire and Nationalism,” *Revue d'études Comparatives Est-Ouest* 45, no. 2 (2014): 25–67, 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35–36; 45.

²⁷ Ilya Gerasimov et al., “New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire,” in *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, ed. Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander

emphasis on the polyglossia and diversity of the empire does not imply a romanticized glance on the empire and its multiverse. Rather, it means looking at productions of difference and inequalities within it. In this regard the new imperial history presents imperial difference and multilayered diversity as an object of study, thus offering new insights into the larger context of this thesis: Russian imperial history beyond its narrations as a centralized and rationalized empire.²⁸

My research on the economic and political struggle between Tbilisi's elites and *Amkrebi* studied under the research perspective of the new imperial history will contribute to the debates around the project of modernization in Georgia by, on the one hand, exploring their material effects, and on the other hand, by discussing them not only from a top-down, but also a bottom-up perspective. Further, it will advance the understanding of the role the *Amkrebi* have played in the politics of Tbilisi in the nineteenth century.

Sources

The principal challenge of my – as, indeed, of any - historical research is posed by the sources I can rely on for analysis. The archives of the primary objects interest of this thesis, the *Amkrebi* corporations have been destroyed a century ago and are completely missing even from secondary accounts.²⁹

This has forced me to study *Amkrebi* based on official sources on the organizations, that is, from a secondary but no less direct and insightful perspective. Of these, thankfully, there are plenty. Several important collections of sources on the workings of Russian imperial

Semyonov (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3–32, 23.

²⁸ Mogilner, “New Imperial History: Post-Soviet Historiography in Search of a New Paradigm for the History of Empire and Nationalism”, 49.

²⁹ On the fate of *Amkrebi* archives see Paata Gugushvili, “Amkruli Khelosnobis Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of *Amkari* Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia],” in *Ekonomikis Institutis Shromebi*, Vol. 7 (Tbilisi, 1953), 313–385, 367.

administration in Georgia, including 40 volumes of Vorontsov's personal archives and the *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii*, containing official correspondence and decrees of the office of the viceroyalty are available as collected volumes and in digitalized formats. For my research I have also used two major newspapers published in Tbilisi at the time, *Kavkaz* and *Zakavkazski Vestnik*, collected and digitalized by the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

Additionally, I have located a collected volume of *Materials for the history of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot'* published in 1947.³⁰ The volume contains a collection of archival materials of all key events and actors surrounding the events of 1865 *Amkrebi* Riot. These materials, together with available secondary sources including important demographics, statistics, and other relevant information have allowed me to study the events prior, during and after the Riot of June 1865.³¹

All in all I have collected and studied for this thesis various sources: printed media, collected volumes, letters, and acts by the key actors for my research, thus enabling me to approach from multiple and different angles the role, structure and agency of *Amkrebi* in Tbilisi in the first sixty-odd years of the nineteenth century.

³⁰ Leon Melikset-Begi, *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvlis" Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot']* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr Shss Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947).

³¹ See for example Gugushvili, "Amkruli Khelosnobis Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of Amkari Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia]"; Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisis Istoria [History of Tbilisi]*.

Chapter 1. Before Vorontsov – *Amkrebi* prior to the Establishment of Russian Imperial Governance and the First Half of the nineteenth Century

In the present chapter I explore the emergence and development of *Amkari* culture in Tbilisi from its roots in the middle ages to the onset of Russian rule in the city in 1801, and then through the transformations it underwent in the first half of the nineteenth century. I will argue that in the nineteenth *Amkrebi* retained the important social and economic functions they had served in the city in earlier periods. Further, their development was expedited by the fact that with the abolition of the Kartl-Kakheti monarchy by the Russian empire, *Amkari* members were released from serfdom. Consequently, by the mid-nineteenth century, *Amkrebi* represented a dominant force that both the imperial authorities and local bourgeois elites had to contend with. Therefore, they also served, despite heavy opposition in Tbilisi as well as from St. Petersburg, as one of the pillars of Viceroy Mikail Vorontsov's ambitious modernization project that I will discuss in Chapter 2.

1.1 The History, Structure and Functions of *Amkrebi* Until the End of the nineteenth Century

Alternative accounts trace the history of craftsmen and traders corporations in Tbilisi back to either the ninth, seventh or sixth centuries. Opinions also vary on the origins of and principal motivations behind their formation. Kutsia argues that these kinds of organizations were necessitated by the encroachment on the city-dwellers rights "by the feudal aristocracy", Gvritishvili and Meskhia emphasize the role of international trade relations with the Caliphates and the Byzantine Empire where such institutions were prominent, while Gugushvili sees their

establishment as a “natural” outcome of the urban and economic development of Tbilisi.³² While debates around these issues are yet to be settled – not in this thesis, however – it is clear that already by the eleventh century craftsmen and trader assemblies possessed organized structure and considerable influence on the economy and governance of the cities of modern-day Georgia, including Tbilisi. In the interim between the abolition of Arab rule over the city and its incorporation in the kingdom of Georgia (1040s – 1122), Tbilisi was governed by a council of *berebi* (elders), prominent craftsmen and traders.³³ However, Georgian chronicles of the time, as well as those of later medieval periods, do not offer a name for the corporations that the *berebi* led. The Persian-derived *Amkari*, appearing first in the late seventeenth century, as well as *Asnafi* and *Tabuni* are relatively later terms.³⁴

In general, little is known about craftsmen and trader corporations of Tbilisi in between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries and this part of history might well be forever lost to us. In this period Tbilisi was pillaged, ransacked and burned to the ground more than a dozen times. Consequently, historical sources from this period are in short supply, especially those pertaining to the lower, non-aristocratic strata of the population. This compels scholars to speculate about the labor history of Tbilisi based on scarce archeological findings, indirect mentions in legal statutes and passing remarks in rare and hard to locate accounts of occasional travelers to the city. The consensus among Georgian historians is that craftsmen and merchant corporations maintained a constant presence in Tbilisi throughout the hardships of the period, had considerable influence on the city’s economy and still facilitated international trade with the Ottoman and Safavid empires and, in rare cases, even with Muscovy.³⁵

³² See Gugushvili, “Amkruli Khelosnobis Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of *Amkari* Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia],” 345-346; Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisis Istoria [History of Tbilisi]*, 74; Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saukuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkrebi in Georgian Cities of the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries]*, 24.

³³ Ivane Javakhishvili *Sakartvelos Ekonomiiuri Istoria [The Economic History of Georgia]*, Vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Elektronis Stamba Tsignebis Gamomtsemel Kartvel Amkhanagobisa, 1907), 24-25.

³⁴ Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saukuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkrebi in Georgian Cities of the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries]*.

³⁵ Javakhishvili, *Sakartvelos Ekonomiiuri Istoria [The Economic History of Georgia]*, 35-45.

A clear picture of *Amkari* activities, their structure and functions in Tbilisi emerges from the late seventeenth century. The residents of Tbilisi united into *Amkrebi* based on their trade. In the beginning of the eighteenth century this included only relatively high-skilled professions. Unskilled workers, like the loaders or water-carriers, and eventually, by the end of the nineteenth century, beggars started forming their own *Amkrebi*. The organizing principle, and at the criterion for admission into *Amkrebi* was craft.

As Gvritishvili and Meskhia note, there were several different organizations for workers of the same trade in Tbilisi. However, rather than competing with each other, they divided the city into exclusive trade and productions, thus maintaining a firm monopolistic grip on urban economy.³⁶

Amkrebi operated through rigidly hierarchical, albeit participatory structures in the seventeenth century. The head of the union, called either *Amkarbashi* (head of *Amkari*), *Ostati* (master) or *Ustabashi* (head of masters), was elected by its members.³⁷ Furthermore, this position was temporary except in rare cases and consequently would cycle between the members. However, with the gradual encroachment of the royal power over the rights of city-dwellers and artisans in the eighteenth century this democratic process was abolished and *Amkari* leaders were being appointed by the king's officials. Opinions on when *Amkrebi* were deprived of the right to choose their *Ustabashi* vary. The *Amkrebi* Statute of 1799, issued by the king of Kartl-Kakheti Giorgi the twelfth claims this as a royal prerogative. However, whether this decree simply codified already existing procedure or established a new one, is unclear. Kutsia supports the former hypothesis, while Gvritishvili and Meskhia seem to think that greater royal control over *Amkrebi* was made possible by the weakening of the organization in the aftermath of Agha

³⁶ Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisi Istorია* [*History of Tbilisi*], 78.

³⁷ Interestingly, *Amkrebi*, a Persian and Arabic-influenced organizations operated mostly by Armenians in a nominally Georgian city, employed Ottoman *Usta* (master) and *Bashi* (head) in their terminology. This is yet another testament to the transcultural nature of the corporations.

Mohammad Khan's invasion (1795).³⁸

There is a greater consensus regarding the emergence of the defining, and arguably the most peculiar characteristic of *Amkrebi* – the serf status of its members. Gvritishvili and Meskhia, Kutsia and Gugushvili all agree that by the seventeenth century the merchants and tradesmen of Tbilisi had already lost their freedom and were listed as either royal or church serfs.³⁹ Up until the eighteenth century, the serfdom was comparatively less restrictive for *Amkari* members and was enforced by tying them to Tbilisi and their occupations, obligating them to provide certain, clearly defined and regular services and pay early dues. According to Zakaria Chichinadze, later on the obligations grew more cumbersome, as the princes and clerics started demanding more of *Amkari* members' time and greater, irregular payments.⁴⁰ However, throughout the two centuries, and even after the royal decree of 1799 *Amkrebi* were free to pursue trade and production at their own discretion and without any outside interference. Only the *Ustabashi* had the power to decide on these matters.⁴¹

Ustabashi's powers and responsibilities, specified in charters that every *Amkari* composed for itself were manifold. All arguments between *Amkari* members were settled by him. Further, he mediated relationships with other *Amkrebi*. He also had to keep atmosphere within the *Amkari* calm and friendly and distribute the *Amkari*'s common funds help its sick members, for the burial of deceased craftsmen if families were unable to afford the costs and make sure that all members attended the funerals. These funds were collected through monthly dues paid by all *Amkari* members.⁴²

³⁸ Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saukuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkrebi in Georgian Cities of the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries]*, 356; Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisis Istoria [History of Tbilisi]*, 103.

³⁹ Gvritishvili and Meskhia, *Tbilisis Istoria [History of Tbilisi]*, 110; Gugushvili "Amkruli Khelosnobil Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of Hamkari Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia]", 359; Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saukuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkrebi in Georgian Cities of the Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries]*, 109-110.

⁴⁰ Zakaria Chichinadze, "Amkrebisgan Khelosanta Da Musha-Kargalta Patronobil Tsesebi [Hamkari Customs for Supervising Craftsmen and Workers]," *Mushis Shroma* 30 (1921): 2-13.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

Crucially, *Ustabashi* also oversaw one of the most important activities of *Amkari*: acquiring and training apprentices. *Amkari* members had to receive permission from their *Ustabashi* to adopt an apprentice (*Shegirdi*), masters (*Ostati*), but also their apprentices (*Shegirdi*). Any master had a right to employ apprentices. Their number was not limited, but a master could adopt an apprentice only with the *Ustabashi*'s permission. Charters of many *Amkrebi* in Tbilisi forbade masters from winning over other masters' apprentices. Age restriction for apprentices varied according to trade. Masters specializing in trades requiring hard physical labor – smiths, tanners, etc. – would only employ persons older than 13, while others – weavers, tailors, etc. – adopted 9 or 10, sometimes even 8 year-olds.⁴³

Learning periods also varied in different trades, ranging from 3 to 6 years. Interestingly, municipal legislation intervened in *Amkari* internal affairs, obliging the master to act in good faith towards his apprentice, teach him the trade and anoint him as a master upon finishing his training. The *Ustabashi* had to make sure that no one was kept as an apprentice for longer than what was needed for his training. Apprenticeship was free of charge. The learning fee was replaced with a special due, called *Sakhalate* that an apprentice would pay to his teacher after being appointed as a master.⁴⁴

Along with aiding the master in his work, an apprentice did chores at the workshop and at the master's house. For his service, an apprentice received a weekly reward, called *Shegirdana*. *Shegirdana* was not mandatory and its amount was based wholly on the master's good will.

After finishing his training, the apprentice would be examined by other member of *Amkari* and if he passed the test, would be anointed as a master. Anointments were held once a year, during the special celebration, *Amkroba* at the end of April and beginning of May. There were cases,

⁴³ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁴ Maia Ninidze, Ketevan Ninidze, and Irakli Shurghulaia, *Khelosnoba Da Sametsarmeo Unarebi Sakartveloshi: Traditsia, Istoria, Kultura* [Craftsmanship and Production Skills in Georgia: Tradition, History, Culture] (Tbilisi: Intelekti, 2015), 22-23.

especially when the competition between *Amkrebi* grew fierce, when a newly appointed master was not granted this right and was kept as an assistant to his master. Such craftsmen were called *Ostatis Amkhanagi* or *Kargali* and were not equal to masters in status or income. Only a few *Amkrebi*, however, pursued this practice.⁴⁵

Ustabashi also possessed significant punitive powers. First of these was a fine, called *Ioli*. If the craftsman refused to pay the fine, *Ustabashi* would lock his *Duhan* until the fine was paid. More severe form of punishment was cutting all contact with the craftsman. Other *Amkari* members would not talk to or conduct any business with the disgraced member. If even this did not make the misbehavior oblige, *Ustabashi* would ask other *Amkrebi* of the city to also boycott him. The last, most severe form of punishment was expulsion from the *Amkari*, complimented with public condemnation.

As an administrative leader, *Ustabashi* was freed from working on his trade. Due to this, he was reimbursed by his *Amkari* and was entitled to a part of the members' income. This fee was called *Ostatis Sargo*. Further, he was assisted in his duties other executive in the *Amkari* hierarchy. His deputy, called *Mamasakhlisi* or *Agsakali* was elected indefinitely. He assumed *Ustabashi*'s duties in case of the latter's absence. *Mamasakhlisi* also attended argument-settling and master anointments and received payments for this.

Igitbashi or *Iasauli* was appointed by the *Ustabashi* himself for a period of one month. *Igitbashi* acted as a herald for *Ustabashi*, delivering his decisions to *Amkari* members or other *Ustabashi*. *Igitbashi* was paid for his service by the *Ustabashi*.

Khazinadari was also elected indefinitely by *Amkari* members and was responsible for the finances of the organization. He distributed *Amkari* funds only with *Ustabashi*'s permission. *Amkari* received revenue from fines paid by its members, fees for being anointed as a master

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

and for license to work independently.⁴⁶

As previously mentioned, in the seventeenth century *Amkari* were exclusively craftsmen unions. However, with the resurgence in international and regional trade in the eighteenth century, Tbilisi's merchants also started forming their corporations. Their *Amkari* differed from craftsmen organizations in many regards.

Similarly to craftsmen unions, merchant unions had their charters, called *Pirobis Tsigni*, that outlined their organizational structure. These charters had to be approved by the king. The charter of the *Amkari* for grocers, for example consisted of 12 paragraphs. According to this charter, all groceries coming to Tbilisi should have been bought by the *Amkari* and later distributed to its members. *Amkari* members were forbidden from competing with each other on prices. Those disobeying the charter would be excluded from the organization.

Merchants dealing with international trade formed different types of organizations. The whole process of foreign trade was headed by the *Vachartukhutsesi*, but specific trade operations, conducted mostly via camel caravans, were led by *Caravanbashi*. As the caravans had to cover long and dangerous routes, merchants chose to travel in big groups, sometimes even consisting of more than a hundred persons. Due to the same reasons, the merchants hired heavily armed guards to accompany them.⁴⁷

The royal administration tried to keep the trade routes safe and create beneficial conditions for international trade. Special royal caravanserais were set up on the roads for this purpose. These caravanserais offered travelers free accommodation.

Amkari grip on Tbilisi's economy was deeply entrenched. Every *Amkari* of Tbilisi was assigned its own district, neighborhood or street. Craftsmen of the same trade and merchants selling the same goods grouped together. The Tbilisi *Bazaar* was divided in the same manner. This system,

⁴⁶ Ibid, 28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

persisting in Tbilisi till the end of the nineteenth century, limited competition between *Amkrebi* of the same trade and made it easier for *Ustabashebi*⁴⁸ to control their organizations.

Along with these privileges, *Amkari* assumed important social functions in Tbilisi. During epidemic outbreaks, when most of the inhabitants fled Tbilisi, *Amkari* members consider it their sacred duty to stay in the city and bury the dead. *Amkrebi* often acted as sponsors and organizers for public celebrations – military triumphs, royal processions and religious holidays. Importantly, *Amkari* were obligated to form citizen militia during wartime.

By the end of the eighteenth century *Amkari* internal structure, as well as their role in the city's economic and social life were firmly formalized. *Amkrebi* fully controlled production and trade in Tbilisi and provided both their member and the city's citizens with important social services. However, there were important differences between *Amkrebi* and similar organizations in Europe, including the direct royal interference into internal affairs of the corporation. More important was the fact that members were not freemen. As Suny notes, *Stadtluft* did not make Tbilisi's artisans and merchants *frei*, and all workers and tradesmen were serfs of either the king, the queen or the church, limiting the income, productivity and economic efficiency of the *Amkrebi*.⁴⁹ This situation, however, would drastically change after the abolition of the Kartl-Kakhetian monarchy and the establishment of Russian rule in Tbilisi in 1801.

1.2 The Effect of the Establishment of Russian Rule on *Amkrebi* (1801-1844)

The narratives on the history of *Amkrebi* follow the same tired pattern: one of straightforward and inevitable decline. As noted in the introduction most of the research on *Amkrebi* was done within the confines of highly dogmatic Soviet Georgian academia, with authors projecting

⁴⁸ Similarly to *Amkari/Amkrebi*, I will be using the Georgian plural of *Ustabashebi*

⁴⁹ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 87.

Marxist models of labor history on the developments in Tbilisi. Gugushvili, for example, dedicates half of his article on the “destruction” of *Amkari* craftsmanship in Transcaucasia to what he understands a Marxian notion of “feudal” guilds becoming gradually obsolete with the advent of industrial capitalism in Western Europe. Then he simply assumes that this analysis is also applicable to Tbilisi’s history and that *Amkari* were forced onto a similar trajectory by Russian introduction of capitalistic modes of production to the city.⁵⁰ Beyond the obviously problematic transposition of European developments into a radically different context, it is unclear, for example, what he “rise of industrialism” refers to in this context, considering that, as Gugushvili himself notes, even by 1904 78% of good in Tbilisi was produced by small workshops employing 5 to 8 workers.⁵¹

More importantly, Gugushvili’s analysis, as well as that of Gvritishvili and Meskhia overlooks the remarkable longevity and resilience of *Amkrebi* and their influence in Tbilisi. The corporations played an important part in the politics of the city in the 1840s. At least they were powerful enough to stage a rebellion that had to be squashed through a sizeable military intervention and survived, albeit with diminished numbers and membership, up until Georgia’s incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1922.⁵²

Crucially, these narratives overlook the fact that *Amkrebi*, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, rather than weakening, in fact grew in strength under Russian rule. With the abolition of the monarchy in 1801, many *Amkari* members suddenly found themselves emancipated from royal serfdom. This accorded them greater freedom in their productive activities and the ability to engage in regional and international commerce more effectively. Safety guaranteed by Russian troops and newfound access to European markets also

⁵⁰Gugushvili, “Amkruli Khelosnobis Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of *Amkari* Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia],” 319-327.

⁵¹ Ibid., 362.

⁵² Ibid., 382.

contributed to their prosperity. By the 1830s, traders from Tbilisi would visit the Leipzig fair, purchase European industrial goods and make a hefty profit by reselling them in Georgia and Persia. These developments are clearly evidenced in official statistics. *Amkari* membership steadily rose between all surveys conducted in Tbilisi by Russian officials, almost quadrupling in the period of 1835 to 1865, from 1266 to 5525.⁵³

Amkrebi also maintained part of their monopolistic grip on the economy of the city. Production and trade in the city were still divided into exclusive zones and wholesaler-reseller connections still followed the patterns established before the eighteenth century. The council of Tbilisi, composed of local dignitaries and wealthy merchants, petitioned Vorontsov several times to outright ban *Amkrebi* to free the city from their monopoly in 1840s and 50s.⁵⁴ Tellingly, Vorontsov repeatedly and vigorously resisted such efforts.⁵⁵

The reasoning, as given by Vorontsov himself, lay in the fact that by the middle of the nineteenth century *Amkrebi* still provided their members and broader population of the city with many essential services.⁵⁶ Supporting the widows and disable former workers, organizing public festivities, even forming militia during the Crimean war of 1850s, still remained among their duties.

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that rather than trying to persevere through simply sticking to old ways, *Amkrebi* actively adapted to the city's new realities. A major survey commissioned by viceroy Mikhail Romanov in 1865 lists, among others, *Amkrebi* for Piano repairmen, cigar

⁵³ Ibid., 361.

⁵⁴ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 89-90.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁶ "Tozhe, Kn. Vorontsova k St.-Skr. Butkovu [Letter from Prince Vorontsov to State Secretary Butkov], No. 274, February 18 1851," in *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission]*, Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariate of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus, 1885), 53-55; "Tozhe, k. Kn. Chernishev [Letter to Prince Chernishev], No. 499 April 2 1852," in *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission]*, Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariate of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus, 1885), 55-58.

makers and even photographers.⁵⁷ These Western crafts were obviously traditionally unknown to Tbilisi's workers, and the fact that they now engaged in them not only individually, but through collective enterprises testifies to their willingness and ability to take advantage of new opportunities. Merchant *Amkrebi*, on their part, fiercely and often successfully competed with their Russian counterparts over the lucrative business of supplying Tbilisi and Georgia with European goods.⁵⁸

These considerations point to the need of recentering *Amkari* into the position in the history of Tbilisi that both Marxist and developmentalist narratives deprive it of. Rather than withering remnants of the past, they present themselves as active contributors to the city's future. And rather than being crushed by the new realities of Russian rule and slowly emerging laissez-faire capitalism they appear to have flourished under them. More importantly, in the middle of the nineteenth century *Amkari* formed the cornerstone of Tbilisi's urban culture, facilitating societal cohesion, welfare and economic development. Consequently, they would find themselves in the center of the grandiose modernization projects that would soon follow.

1.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I challenged the conventional historiographical narratives on Tbilisi's *Amkrebi* in the nineteenth century. I argued that rather than losing their social standing and economic functions, *Amkrebi* played an important role in social and economic life of Tbilisi in the first half of the nineteenth century. In order to substantiate this argument in this chapter, I first explored the structure and organizational form of *Amkrebi* prior to the Russian rule and emancipation of serfs in 1801. As described in this part *Amkrebi* structure was purely based on craft up until the eighteenth century. However, this structure changed with development of

⁵⁷ Gugushvili, "Amkruli Khelosnobis Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of Amkari Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia], 362-364.

⁵⁸ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 91.

international trade and consequent rise of the economic power of the merchants, who started to form their own corporations. The establishment of Russian rule and the abolishment of serfdom gave the *Amkrebi* more possibilities to engage in international commerce. The rise in *Amkari* membership between 1835 and 1865, and especially development of new craft skills show that *Amkrebi* were not only actively involved in the economic life of the city but also adopted themselves to the grand modernization and westernization projects through acquiring skills and producing goods demanded by the new, ‘civilized’ and ‘European’ ways of life of mid-nineteenth century Tbilisi. The most ambitious of such projects, one initiated by Mikhail Vorontsov, and *Amkrebi*’s role in it, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2. Mikhail Vorontsov's Designs for Modernizing the Caucasus and Organized Labour in Tbilisi (1844-1853)

Prince Mikhail Semenevich Vorontsov, the namestnik [viceroy] of the Caucasus (1844-53) is often presented as the decisive figure in the history of Tbilisi in the nineteenth century. Everyone from nineteenth century Georgian nationalists to twenty-first century historians credit him for turning the city from a provincial backwater into a modern, European hub of vibrant public, economic and cultural life.⁵⁹ According to these narratives, Vorontsov's rule marked a period of drastic transformations in the city's history. Further, the story goes, Vorontsov and his administration came up with a grand design and a set of innovative policies aimed at achieving these transformations and their policies were the main if not the only contributors to the changes that occurred in Tbilisi in the period of Vorontsov's rule. I will problematize the notions that Vorontsov's reforms and initiatives represented a dramatic break with prior developments in the city, and that his administration was the only group interested and involved in modernizing Tbilisi at this time. However, the claim that the viceroy was trying to mold Tbilisi into his liking is beyond doubt. Vorontsov had an extensive and well-documented plan to modernize and Europeanize the city and set out to put it into practice vigorously, in certain cases micromanaging even the details of its execution.

The first part of this chapter will be devoted to understanding and reassessing – beyond celebrated narratives – the policies that Vorontsov and his administration pursued. Rather than focusing on the outcomes of these designs and then retroactively projecting certain rationalities

⁵⁹ Akaki Tsereteli, a major figure in the Georgian nationalism of the nineteenth century, has dedicated a lengthy poem, titled *Varantsovi*, to the viceroy. Here he highly praises the viceroy's respectful disposition to Georgian culture and his efforts at developing Georgian cities. See Akaki Tsereteli, "Varantsovi [Vorontsov]," *Mnatobi*, no. 1 (1935): 110–139. For a more recent account of Vorontsov's crucial role in reshaping Tbilisi's cultural, social and economic life, see Jersild and Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi," 27–49.

on them based on these outcomes, I will let the empire and its officials “speak out”, as it were, and emphasize the role of different actors. In other words, I will present and discuss these policies in similar terms with those who conceived and executed them. For this end, I will primarily analyze relevant excerpts from the two newspapers issued during Vorontsov’s rule – *Kavkaz* and *Zakavkazskii Vestnik*. With both having been founded by Vorontsov himself and published by his chancellery under his supervision I perceive them to be voicing Vorontsov’s and his administrations’ positions regarding the matter. This perception will be further validated by cross-examination with the other body of my sources – Vorontsov’s personal and official correspondence with his superiors at *Kavkazskii Komitet*, a body charged with overseeing all matters related to Russia’s Caucasian holdings. I will determine how the *namestnik* conceived of Tbilisi and, especially, its Europeanness and how he envisioned the city’s more modern, more European future.

In the second part of the chapter, using the same sources, I will narrow my focus to see how organized labor – both the local laborers, united in *Amkrebi* and the recently arrived Russian and European workers – figured in the plans for modernization. In light of the concept of labor history discussed in the introductory part of the thesis, I will inquire how the *Namestnik* and his administration viewed Tbilisi’s various groups of workers and their role in the contemporary and future society of the city. Further, I will explore how they incorporated or planned to incorporate these groups into their project of modernizing Tbilisi.

I will conclude by summarizing my findings and their relevance for a more nuanced assessment of Vorontsov’s rule, his modernizing efforts and policies on the one hand, and for the broader argument of my thesis on the other.

2.1 The Double Conundrum – the Two Objectives Of Vorontsov’s Administration and the Two Goals of his Modernizing Projects

One publication that would not credit Vorontsov with elevating Tbilisi to the status of a European city was, surprisingly, *Kavkaz*. The editorial of the second issue of the newspaper attributes this accomplishment to one of his predecessors, General Yevgeny Golovin, the Commander-in-chief of the Caucasus from 1837 to 1842. Already during his rule, the editorial claims, Tbilisi had developed into a “fully European city”.⁶⁰ More interesting for our purposes is what the authors of the editorial saw as signs of Tbilisi’s newly found Europeaness – its novel public attractions and recreational amenities. According to the authors, before their encounter with Russia, Georgians, “a lively, careless and joyous people”, had been engaging in rather primitive and monotonous forms of leisure.⁶¹ As women did not attend male gatherings and would not involve men into theirs, Georgian men had little motivation to make their pastimes more sophisticated and diverse, wrote the authors. Thus, public celebrations, “as understood by Europeans” did not exist in Tbilisi prior the establishment of Russian rule. The writers attribute such importance to this absence that the primary achievement they praise Golovin for – above even the introduction of such crucial amenities as pavements, drainage system and streetlights – is elevating Tbilisi’s social life by hosting extravagant receptions and establishing numerous social clubs.⁶²

These familiar and expectable orientalist tropes of noble savages to be civilized and their hidden women to be brought to light by their enlightened imperial masters are still connected with and point to two main goals of Vorontsov’s modernizing project which I will

⁶⁰ Obshchestvennie Uveselennia V Tbilisi [Public Entertainment in Tbilisi],” *Kavkaz*, January 2, 1846, 1-3.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

explore further.⁶³ One was transforming the mores and aspirations of Georgian nobility; and the other - making Tbilisi more attractive to potential Russian and European visitors and immigrants.

The rationale behind these objectives lay in the legacy of previous administrations. For all the praise heaped upon him by *Kavkaz*, Golovin's rule was a monumental failure. As Sunny notes, Golovin and the special envoy to the Caucasus, Baron Pavl Hahn initiated a set of massively unpopular hardline economic and social policies in Georgia. The two men, dismissive of the history, culture and customs of the Caucasus, sought to simply transplant the laws governing mainland Russian provinces in the region. In the Georgian context, this meant prohibiting the usage of Georgian in state bureaucracy, disregarding the national and religious distinctions within the territory when devising new administrative entities and depriving local authorities, *mouravebi* and *agha* of their power. Hahn managed to further enrage the local aristocracy by claiming that the eighteenth century Law Code of Vakhtang VI stated that there had never been serfdom in Georgia. Finally, Golovin obligated peasants from Guria, a province in the West of Georgia, to plant potatoes and pay taxes in hardly available to them Russian Roubles, leading to a peasant Riot in the region in 1841. Having alienated all classes of Georgian population, Golovin was granted a 'leave' in 1842. After a brief provisional government, Vorontsov was recommended on a newly established position of the Viceroy of the Caucasus by a *Kavkazskii Komitet*, a state commission on the situation in Georgia. As the whip had clearly not served the empire well, Vorontsov was charged with enacting a more liberal and conciliatory approach, one taking into account and respecting local practices. It was

⁶³ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye explores the origins and development of Russian orientalist discourse on the Caucasus in his 2010 volume. However, the book does not delve into how Georgia and Georgianness figures in this discourse. See David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Explorations of Russian imperial imaginary with greater emphasis on the South Caucasus can be found in Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

expected of him to win over the disgruntled nobles and thus consolidate Russian rule over Georgia.⁶⁴

Further, Golovin's downfall finally laid bare the infeasibility of a longstanding imperial strategy regarding the Southern Caucasus. As Mikail Mamedov explains, at least since the rule of Aleksey Ermolov, the Governor of the Caucasus from 1816 to 1827, Russian officials have been planning to turn the region into an economically dependent colony.⁶⁵ In an economic model characteristic of many European colonies, the Caucasus was to supply Russian industry with raw materials, while on its part purchasing products of this industry. However, as an author in *Kavkaz* admitted in 1848, the Russian economy was simply not developed enough to absorb all the natural resources and agricultural production of the region and in turn supply it with sufficient amount of industrial products.⁶⁶ This economic framework was made even less tenable by the lack of proper transit infrastructure between Russian mainland and its Caucasian holdings. Due to these two failures – authoritarian governance and a colonial economic model – Vorontsov was facing a double conundrum. He had to, on the one hand, reach an understanding with his subjects, particularly the Georgian nobility, on the other hand, reconceptualize Georgia's role, and place within the empire.

Both Vorontsov's private correspondence and publications in the newspapers reveal that the two goals of his modernizing project were developed in response to and were meant to address the two overall objectives of his governance. In fact, the very existence of these publications was part of Vorontsov's efforts to reintroduce Georgia and the Caucasus to the Russian public and recast it in a new, more favorable light. Importantly, even while being distributed almost completely within the Caucasus – a few copies were being sent to the

⁶⁴ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 73-74.

⁶⁵ Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission to Defensive Frontier".

⁶⁶ "Vnutrennie Izvestia [Internal News]," *Kavkaz*, January 9, 1846, 2-4.

Zakavkazskii Komitet and to the Public Library in St. Petersburg – the newspapers sought to reach broader imperial audience. The editorial of the first issue of *Kavkaz* declares the newspaper’s intentions very clearly: first, to educate the Russian public on the history, demographics and culture of the Caucasus; second, to explore the commercial and industrial possibilities in the region; and, finally, to thus reveal the true value of the region for the empire.⁶⁷ For these ends, it regularly featured lengthy overviews of particular issues – from the traditional Georgian new year’s festivities to the biographies of notable leaders on the territory of Azerbaijan – related to the present and the past of the region.⁶⁸ Especially significant is that the administration’s view, as elaborated in later issues of the newspaper, disrupted the former colonial economic framework proposed by Vorontsov’s predecessors. The Caucasus was now seen valuable not only for its natural resources, but also the proactive, productive potential of the region and its inhabitants. At different times *Kavkaz* argued that Armenians were “naturally endowed merchants” and with proper education and support could facilitate profitable trade with Persia and the Ottoman empire; that as an ancient cultural center, Tbilisi attracted artists, scientist, traders and tradesmen from all over the neighboring regions; and that the relatively underdeveloped state of Georgian agriculture and manufactural production made the country an excellent venue for new capitalist enterprises.⁶⁹ In conjunction with the newspaper’s insistence on Tbilisi being fully European, the new attractions that sprung up in the city during Vorontsov’s rule – several theaters, a public library, even an Opera house – and his constant concern for providing for Tbilisi’s Russian and European inhabitants, the administration’s narratives and initiatives often look like a drawn-out and elaborate sales pitch

⁶⁷ “Ot Redaktsii [Editorial],” *Kavkaz*, January 5, 1846, 1.

⁶⁸ I. Romanov, “Novi God U Gruzin [New Year in Georgia],” *Kavkaz*, January 19, 1846, 2; “Raznie Izvestia [Various News],” *Kavkaz*, January 12, 1846, 3.

⁶⁹ “Novaia Opitnaia Ferma v Tbilisi [The New Experimental Farm in Tbilisi],” *Kavkaz*, June 15, 1846, 3-4; “Doroga Ot Tbilisia Do Vladikavkaza [The Road From Tbilisi to Vladikavkaz],” *Kavkaz*, August 16, 1847, 2; “Khozaistvennie Zapiski Iz Putevikh Zapiskov Po Kavkazu [Commercial Remarks From the Travelogue About the Caucasus],” *Kavkaz*, January 14, 1850, 3-4.

for potential investors and visitors. In essence, Vorontsov, with his modernizing efforts, was aiming at transforming the Caucasus from an outback province interesting only for its natural resources to a commercial and industrial link between three empires with a vibrant, multicultural and European Tbilisi as its capital.

Importantly, there was a striking discrepancy between Vorontsov's primary interests in and plans for the Caucasus and the imperial center's priorities as related to the region. As Mamedov and Sunny explain, St. Petersburg's chief concern in the Caucasus at the time was not economic, but military: suppressing Imam Shamil's rebellion, thereby pacifying the unruly North Caucasian tribes and finally securing Russian rule over the territory.⁷⁰ Vorontsov himself was actively involved in the campaign against Shamil, leading armies against into the Daghestani mountains on several occasions. His activities on this front were closely monitored from the capital. The viceroy would regularly receive requests from the members of *Kavkazvskii Komitet*, high-ranking nobles, including the Grand Prince Constantine Nikolaevich, and, on rare occasions, from the Tsar himself asking him for updates on the progress of the operations against Shamil, the condition of military infrastructure, troop numbers and locations and the like.⁷¹⁷² The first page of all issues of *Kavkaz* was dedicated to *Visachaishchie Prikazi* and *Visachaishchie Gramoti*, the orders and decrees in the name of the emperor himself, all of which, with only a few exceptions, concerned military matters. In contrast, the Viceroy's social and economic reforms were met with little interest, inquiries or directives by his superiors. The only occasions when Vorontsov had correspondence on civilian matters with imperial officials

⁷⁰ See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 73; Mamedov, "From Civilizing Mission to Defensive Frontier."

⁷¹ See "Pismo Kn. Chernisheva K Kniazu Vorontsovu [Letter from Prince Chernishev to Prince Vorontsov], No. 1030, July 14 1849," in *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii* [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission], Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariate of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus, 1885), 45–46.

⁷² See for example, "Pismo Kn. Vorontsova k Velikomu Kniazu Konstantinu Nikolaevichu [Letter From Prince Vorontsov to Grand Prince Constantine Nikolaevich], February 15 1853," in *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii* [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission], Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariate of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus, 1885), 61–63.

were in response to his own requests for permissions to establish certain institutions or enact certain policies. This suggests that the modernizing projects were by and large the viceroy's creations, developed in order to aid with the objectives that had been set for him – or he had himself set -, rather than a part of a larger, center-driven imperial policy.

One of these objectives, as already mentioned, was winning over the Georgian nobility angered by his predecessors' policies. On this front, both *Kavkaz* and *Zakavkazskii Vestnik*, and the very same European amenities were also instrumental for Vorontsov's attempts at appeasing the estranged nobles. The newspapers tirelessly promoted Georgian culture, appealing to the aristocrats' deep-seated sense of pride for their culture.⁷³ The arrival of European artisans and artists whom Vorontsov himself had invited to Tbilisi and the influx of European luxury goods that followed his policy of reducing tariffs seems to have been well received by Georgian nobles and rich merchants. According to a report published by *Kavkaz* in 1849, around 60% of the total value of trade in Georgian came on imports from Europe, and the biggest part of these imports consisted of luxuries like Champagne and expensive clothing.⁷⁴ *Kavkaz* would also regularly list advertisement of European fineries sold around the city. Most importantly, Vorontsov's initiatives made Tbilisi more attractive to Georgian nobles and thus brought them near to him, into his capital.

As shown, Vorontsov's modernizing efforts and plans heavily depended on the actual and proposed commercial and industrial innovations. Therefore, organizing labor and ensuring labor flexibility were crucial to the success of his endeavors. In the next part of the chapter I

⁷³ For one of many examples of articles in *Kavkaz* on this issue see I. Evlakhov, "Zametki Na Puti V Mingreliu [Notes from the Road to Mingelia]," *Kavkaz*, March 1, 1847, 4-5. The editor of *Zakavkazskii Vestnik*, the Georgian Philosopher Platon Ioseliani ran a series dedicate to Giorgi Saakadze, a national hero from 16-seventeenth centuries. See *Zakavkazskii Vestnik*, Issues No. 4 to 16, 1848.

⁷⁴ "Dlia Chitaiushcheii Publiki Zakavkazskava Kraiia [For the Reading Public of the Transcaucasian Province]," *Kavkaz*, December 24, 1849, 6.

will examine how the *Namestnik* sought to address this issue through new policies and institutions.

2.2 Labor Flexibility, *Amkrebi* and “Russian and Foreign” Workers in the context of Vorontsov’s Designs

In a letter dated April 20 1851 and addressed to Alexandr Chernyshev, the minister of war of the Russian empire, Vorontsov unveiled his plan to establish an *upravlenie* (directorate) for, in his own words, “Russian and foreign” craftsmen residing in Tbilisi and asked for Chernyshev’s permission to do so.⁷⁵ The response in the name of the imperial administration came from state secretary Vladimir Butkov.⁷⁶ While generally in favor of the idea, Butkov expressed certain concerns over its necessity and the specifics of its implementation. Vorontsov responded to these concerns in a second letter, dated February 1852 and addressed to Butkov, further elaborating his motivations and intentions.⁷⁷

The recipient of Vorontsov’s first letter, the minister of war and the head of the *Kavkazskii Komitet*, Prince Chernyshev had been part of the *Kavkazskii Komitet* had been sent to the Caucasus to deal with the aftermath of the peasant Riot in Guria and was familiar with the situation in the region.⁷⁸ Furthermore, he shared Vorontsov’s general attitudes towards imperial governance, having had recommended concessions to Georgians and more respect to their customs and traditions.

⁷⁵ “Otnoshenie Kn. Vorontsova k Kn. Chernishevu [Address by Prince Vorontsov to Prince Chernishev], No. 510, April 20 1851,” in *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission]*, Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariate of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus, 1885), 51–52.

⁷⁶ “Otnoshenie St.-Skr. Butkova k Kn. Vorontsovu [Address by State Secretary Butkov to Prince Vorontsov], No. 510, June 22 1851,” in *Akti Sobrannie Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi Kamissii [Acts Collected by the Caucasus Archeographic Commission]*, Vol. 10 (Tbilisi: Publishing Office of the Secretariate of the Chief of the Civil Administration in the Caucasus, 1885), 52–53.

⁷⁷ “Tozhe, Kn. Vorontsova k St.-Skr. Butkovu [Letter from Prince Vorontsov to State Secretary Butkov], No. 274, February 18 1851.”

⁷⁸ See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 73.

Vorontsov starts his letter by explaining that most *tuzemnie* (indigenous) laborers in Tbilisi are united in the organizations called *Amkrebi*. Russian and foreign workers, according to Vorontsov, were unable to enlist in *Amkrebi* and were consequently left without proper “attention and accommodation” (“*prismotr i ustroistvo*”).⁷⁹ This claim is surprising for two reasons. First, as discussed in Chapter one, *Amkrebi* had historically united workers of various ethnicities and religions from all over the Caucasus and beyond, and, indeed, it was their ancient right and duty to incorporate newcomers of all faiths and origins to Tbilisi.⁸⁰ It is unclear why Vorontsov’s “Russian and foreign” laborers would have been unable to join these organizations. Linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as the lack of desire on their part seem the most likely explanation. Furthermore, at the time when Vorontsov was writing the letter, many foreigners coming from other parts of the Russian empire – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Daghestan – , as well as neighboring states – the Qajar and Ottoman empires – had been members of *Amkrebi* for centuries and had even established their own, ethnically exclusive organizations.⁸¹ It is clear from his remarks that on the one hand, Vorontsov considers Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Daghestanis neither Russian, nor foreigners to Tbilisi; and, on the other, his designation of “foreign” does not include Iranian, Turk or other “oriental” workers. Therefore, the ‘target audience’ of the proposed directorate were strictly Russian and European workers. As for his comments on European workers lacking attention and accommodation, they indicate that Vorontsov considered it a duty of the state to take care of its workers and facilitate and provide institutional arrangements for their well-being. They also evidence his plan to ensure labor flexibility by securing, regulating, and controlling the workforce vital for his plans. The ambiguity of the Russian *prismotr*⁸² further validates both readings.

⁷⁹ “Otnoshenie Kn. Vorontsova k Kn. Chernishev [Address by Prince Vorontsov to Prince Chernishev], No. 510, April 20 1851.”

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See Kutsia, *Amkrebi XVII-XVIII Saikuneebis Kartul Kalakebshi [Amkari in Georgian Cities of the seventeenth-eighteenth Centuries]*, 24-28.

⁸² The word can point to both attention in a somewhat nefarious sense close to surveillance and genuine, affective

Vorontsov continued by saying that he had studied *Amkrebi* and their history, finding many of their practices beneficial and thus his plans did not interfere with their activities. *Amkrebi*, as noted in chapter one, served many crucial social functions: they were responsible for granting disability allowances, for organizing and funding funerals for their deceased members and for supporting their families. However, as Butkov argued and Vorontsov reluctantly admitted, they were also monopolistic organizations with an enormous influence on Tbilisi's economy.⁸³ In the second letter, he partially validated these concerns, but still chose to come in defense of *Amkrebi*. "While *Amkrebi*, much like every ancient European guild, do possess certain monopolistic characteristics", he argued, "they have existed here for several hundred years, and like all age-old institution compatible with local customs, are dignified by their longevity, and in many regards, by the usefulness of their activities".⁸⁴ True to his commitment and overall strategy to accommodate local institutions, Vorontsov chose to maintain and work with *Amkrebi*, as evidenced in this part of the first letter.

This stance is also reflected in his next comment, where Vorontsov explained that the proposed *upravlenie* for Russian and foreign workers would be separate from *Amkrebi*. However, "indigenous" workers would also be able to join the *upravlenie*. In the second letter, he went even further, stating that foreign workers would also be able to join *Amkrebi* if so willing. Vorontsov justifies this part of his plan by arguing that such a move would preserve the beneficial aspect of *Amkrebi* - their aforementioned social functions -, while at the same time undermining their monopoly on trade and production and enabling indigenous workers to abstain from joining them. He reassured Butkov by claiming that his reform would "ensure that the institutions - both the old and the new - have all means to

care.

⁸³ Gugushvili, "Amkruli Khelosnobis Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of Amkari Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia]."

⁸⁴ "Tozhe, k. Kn. Chernishev [Letter to Prince Chernishev], No. 499 April 2 1852."

continue their activities while also curtailing any possible threat of monopoly”.⁸⁵ This part of the plan – to use the proposed *upravlenie* to curtail *Amkrebi*’ influence - seems like an afterthought, devised as a response to Butkov’s concerns over *Amkrebi*, as in the original letter Vorontsov does not mention it and is more sympathetic towards the organizations.

Still, these excerpts show that Vorontsov, a savvy and experienced politician, sought to ensure labor flexibility and impose his control over the workforce without resorting to coercive means. In one swift move he would limit *Amkrebi*’ hold on production in Tbilisi and unite European – and, possibly, even ‘indigenous’ - workers in an organization under his command. On the other hand, it is clear that he intended his plan as beneficial for both European and ‘indigenous’ laborers and was willing to grant them additional freedoms.

The first letter concludes with Vorontsov asking Chernyshev for a permission to establish the *upravlenie*. What readers fail to learn from this brief letter – spanning three short paragraphs – is why Vorontsov decided to concern himself with such a seemingly trivial matter.

The second letter sheds light on this question. In a crucial passage, Vorontsov recounts that the arrival of Russian and European civilian population in Tbilisi had resulted in a rise in demand for certain European commodities – clothes, cutlery, furniture and the like. As local artisans were not knowledgeable enough to produce these goods, the demand was first supplied by capable members of the Russian army, who relocated – some even defected – to Tbilisi in hopes of earning easy money. Vorontsov had found this unacceptable due to the concerns over military morale and had sent more than 700 soldiers, “a strong battalion’s worth of men... illegally residing in Tbilisi” back to their regiments.⁸⁶ According to Vorontsov, he had been warned that it would have been impossible to produce European goods locally without these soldiers. However, the *namestnik* boasts, he had proved the sceptics wrong – “as soon as the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

soldiers were gone”, Tbilisi had attracted around 140 “Russian and German” craftsmen.⁸⁷ The words he uses to refer to these laborers are telling. Throughout the second letter, Vorontsov calls them either *remeslenniki* (craftsmen) or *masterovye*. *Masterovye* was an important status in the Russian empire. As opposed to *rabochye* – the entry level, unskilled workers - , *masterovye* designated the highly skilled, specialized craftsmen.⁸⁸

These comments point to the role of European and Russian craftsmen in Tbilisi’s economy and unveil their true importance for Vorontsov. These workers were to satisfy Tbilisi’s new appetite for Western goods. For Vorontsov, who aimed to westernize Georgia and especially its nobility, and to attract Russian and European visitors, investors and dignitaries to Tbilisi, these goods were crucial. The Westernization of an aristocratic lifestyle was unimaginable without European fineries and projects like the construction of the opera house. This required European materials and musical instruments. Only so many of these commodities could have been imported from abroad to a city 400 kilometers removed from the nearest seaport. Moreover, in the nineteenth century imported goods rose in price dramatically and Georgian nobles had never been known for their riches. Therefore, European commodities had to be, at some point, produced locally. As ‘indigenous’ workers were of little help in this matter, Vorontsov saw attracting foreign laborers as the only option. Further, these workers were also essential for his economic plans too. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Vorontsov aimed to break with previous, colonial economic frameworks and establish the Caucasus, and particularly Tbilisi as an industrial center. Importantly, Vorontsov sought to base this on the production of not local, but European-style goods, a task obviously impossible without attracting experienced Russian and European workers. This is also why he prioritized *remeslenniki* and *masterovye* while elaborating his plans for the directorate – what

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ P. Timofeev, “What the Factory Worker Lives By,” in *The Russian Worker: Life and Labor under the Tsarist Regime*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 72–112.

he needed were not workers in general, but those capable of producing intricate European commodities. Therefore, the whole scheme of establishing the directorate was an attempt at ensuring the flexibility and availability of a specific kind of labor – highly skilled European and Russian craftsmen. To his credit, he planned to achieve this objective through non-coercive and benevolent means – by protecting said craftsmen from the monopolistic tendencies of *Amkrebi*, providing them with institutional support with the *upravlenie* and granting them a right to freely choose between *Amkrebi* and the *upravlenie*.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I offered an analysis of the initiatives aimed at modernizing the Caucasus promoted by Mikhail Vorontsov during his time as a Viceroy of the Caucasus (1844-53). Based on contemporary newspaper reports and Vorontsov's own correspondence, I revealed the primary motivations of these initiatives: restoring the trust of the local population and nobility into the Russian government; reassessing the importance and potential of Russia's Caucasian holdings.. I also explored the their main objectives: Europeanizing the mores of Georgian nobility and making Tbilisi more attractive for future foreign visitor. Further, I investigated how Tbilisi's working class figured in Vorontsov's plans. I determined that the viceroy held skilled laborers, especially of European origin as vital to both his civilizational and economic designs and devised institutional frameworks to ensure the availability of and effective control over this kind of workforce.

Chapter 3. The *Amkari* Riot and its Aftermath

In a striking development, Vorontsov's plan of establishing a *upravlenie* (directorate) for Tbilisi's workers, discussed in the previous chapter, was not realized during his rule. First, the plan was subjected to bureaucratic nitpicking at the *Kavkazskii Komitet* and by Petersburg authorities, with several officials demanding from the viceroy to ensure the future directorate's full conformity with the Russian empire's laws. Second, already in ill health and soon to retire for this reason in 1853, Vorontsov was unable to devote much energy and time to this undertaking. Most importantly, *Amkrebi* proved capable of resisting the viceroy's efforts at undermining their hold on Tbilisi's economy. As Gugushvili explains, in 1852 they successfully organized and petitioned the government against the proposed *upravlenie*.⁸⁹

Consequently, the first directorate for Tbilisi's workers would appear only in 1867, some fifteen years after it had been first proposed. The establishment of this institution was preceded, induced and indeed made possible by a crucial event in the nineteenth history of *Amkrebi* and Tbilisi, the *Amkari* Riot of 1865. From June 27 to 29 that year, *Amkrebi* staged a series of demonstrations and a general strike in the city. In retaliation, over the next two years the administration of the Viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich Romanov (1862-1882) introduced regulations aimed at curbing *Amkari* influence in the city and their institutional discretion. In this chapter I will explore the riot and its aftermath based on various material related to the event – mostly correspondence between Russian officials in Tbilisi – collected and reprinted by Leon Melikset-Beg in his 1947 volume. I will argue that contrary to the assumptions of conventional narratives on *Amkrebi* history, in the 1860s the corporations still possessed

⁸⁹ Gugushvili, "Amkruli Khelosnobil Dashla Amierkavkasiashi [The Abolition of Hamkari Craftsmanship in Transcaucasia]," 381.

significant political power that they would be deprived of not by economic development in Tbilisi but by deliberate government intervention.

3.1 The Riot

The riot was instigated by a government announcement regarding the planned introduction of new taxes in Tbilisi. These comprised an additional 25% tariff on alcohol, levies for riding, carriage and freight horses, as well as for storing building materials inside Tbilisi and for extracting clay and gypsum from the city's deposits.⁹⁰ Particularly burdensome for Tbilisi merchants and *Mikitnebi* (wine-sellers) – as their own petitions indicate – was the tariff on alcohol, which, they claimed, would effectively put most of them out of business.⁹¹

The first of these petitions came already in June and was addressed to the secretariate of the emperor. Members of wine-seller *Amkrebi*, claiming to represent “more than 3000 individuals” asked for Alexander III's benevolence and for the annulment of the proposed tariff.⁹² The promptness of this letter, the impeccably courteous, if daring tone of the writing and the very fact that lowly merchants from a peripheral city were aware of a possibility of such a communication all testify to the fact that the *Mikitnebi* of Tbilisi were well-organized and well-versed in the official procedures of their empire. Even more impressively, the letter seems to

⁹⁰ “1865 Ts. Aprilis 19. - Tbilisis General-Gubernator Gr. Orbelianis Mokhseneba Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvliadmi Q. Tbilisshi Akhali Gadasakhadebis Shemoghebis Shesakheb [April 19 1865 Report by General-Governor of Tbilisi Gr. Orbeliani to the Viceroy of the Caucasus regarding the Introduction of New Taxes in Tbilisi], N 176,” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriasatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 7–9, 7.

⁹¹ “1865 Ts. Ivliis 10. - Tbilisis Mokalaketagani Amorcheluta Arza Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvliis Movaleobis Agmasrulebel General-Adiutanti Grigol Orbelianisadmi K. Tbilisshi Shemoghebuli Akhali Gadasakhadebis Gaukmebis Shesakheb” [July 10 1865 Petition by Representatives of Tbilisi Citizens to the Acting Viceroy Adjutant-General Giorgi Orbeliani with the Request to Abrogate Proposed Taxes in Tbilisi] in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriasatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 15–18.

⁹² “1865 Ts. Ivniis -. Tbilisis Mikitnebis Arza Misamartit: ‘V Sankt-Peterburg. Stats-Sekrtarju Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva Uprinjatii [Sic] Prosheni’”. K. Tbilisshi Shemoghebuli Akhali Gadasakhadebis Gaukmebis Shesakheb [June 1865 Petition by Tbilisi Mikitnebi Addressed to: ‘St. Petersburg. The State Secretary of His Imperial Majesty to Satisfy the Request’ of Abrogating Newly Imposed Taxes in Tbilisi],” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriasatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 9–10.

have reached its target. While it is obviously impossible to confirm and highly unlikely that Alexander himself read the letter, it was clearly discussed by the highest echelons of the Russian government. First, on August 9, 1865 a telegram from the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, at the time residing in St. Petersburg, notified Prince Grigol Orbeliani, acting on his behalf in his absence, that the emperor had declined the request and asked him to notify the petitioners.⁹³ A rather lengthy report to the viceroy from the head of his chancellery, composed two months later, gave further details on the debacle that the *Mikitnebi* had caused. Apparently, the state secretary had redirected the letter to the Caucasus Committee for review. The head of the committee, count Gagarin then sent it to the viceroy, who, on his part, “presented it to the emperor”. Despite the monarch’s disapproval and the fact that Orbeliani had already notified the wine-sellers about the emperor’s decision, the head of the chancellery still found it needed to present an extensive repudiation of the petition’s demands, arguing that the wine-sellers’ claim that the new tariff would put them out of business was baseless, as the price of wine would just rise accordingly.⁹⁴

It seems that this ‘talking straight to the manager’ strategy was a good bet on part of the *Mikitnebi*, as neither of the other two petitions by Tbilisi residents regarding the imposition of new taxes has attracted even a modicum of the attention that theirs had received. The two petitions, presented to Orbeliani in July 1865 did not even warrant a passing mention in his

⁹³ “1865 Ts. Agvistos 9. - Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvlis Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzis Depesha General-Adiutant Tavad Orbelians Aleksandriidan Tbilisis Mikitnebis Arzis Ushedegod Datovebis Shesakheb Mefis Mier [August 9 1865. A Telegram from Alexandria by the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich to Adjutant-General Grigol Orbeliani regarding the Rejection of a Petition Coming From Tbilisi Mikitnebi by the Monarch] in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 39.

⁹⁴ “1865 Ts. Oktomberi. - Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvlis Mtavarmmartvelobis Ufrosis Mokhseneba Mefisnatvlis Did Mtavar Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzes (Shdr. Tbilisis Samokalako Gubernatoris Mokhseneba Tbilisis General-Gubernatoris Tanamdebobis Aghmasrulebels 1865 Ts. Sektembris 30, N811), Tbilisis Mikitnebis Arzis Ushedegod Datovebis Shesakheb [October 1865. Report by the Chief of Staff to the Viceroy Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich Regarding the Rejection of a Petition by Tbilisi Mikitnebi (See also a Report by the Civil Governor of Tbilisi to the Acting General-Governor of Tbilisi on September 30 1865, N. 1811)],” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 65–68.

report on the events following the *Amkari* riot.⁹⁵ This is somewhat understandable in the case of the later of these petitions, which is as brief as it is unremarkable: on July 12 eleven representatives of the *Amkrebi* for *Mikitnebi*, *Medukneebe* (barkeepers) and *Sirajebi* (wholesale wine traders), sent the acting viceroy a brief note with complaints regarding the future effects of the announced taxes and a request for their abrogation.⁹⁶ The earlier, July 10 petition, however, was submitted by a more influential group of *Mokalakeebi* (citizens) and *Pativsemuli mokalakeebi* (honored citizens) of Tbilisi and is more extensive and elaborate.⁹⁷ And while Orbeliani still chose to ignore it, the letter might be of interest here, as it sheds light not only on the discontent that laid the grounds for the Riot, but also on the economic circumstances in Tbilisi of the period.

The petitioners started with the claim that Tbilisi, “as widely known (...) maintain[ed] passive, rather than active trade” and did not house any industry “capable of breathing new life into the city”.⁹⁸ According to the petition, this made Tbilisi merchants dependent on “population flows to balance our trade activities”.⁹⁹ Through these rather nebulous formulations, the citizens pointed to the fact that Tbilisi exported hardly any goods outside its immediate surroundings

⁹⁵ “1865, Sektembris 25.- General-Adiutant Tav. G. D. Orbelianis Mokhseneba Kavkasiis Mefisnatvlis Did Mtavar Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzes 27 Da 28 Ivnis ‘Gamosvli’ Momdevno Ambebis Shesakheb, [September 25 1865. Report by Adjutant-General Prince G. D. Orbeliani to the Viceroy of Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich Regarding the Events Following the June 27-28 ‘Riot’], N 889,” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 62–65.

⁹⁶ “1865 Ts. Ivlis 12. - Kalak Tbilisis Sirajebis, Medukneebisa Da Mikitnebis Sazogadoebis Arza Kavkasiis Mefinatsvlis Movaleobis Aghmasrulebels General-Adiutant Tavad Orbelians [July 12 1865. Petition by the Winemerchant, Barkeeper and Wineseller Amkrebi to the Acting Viceroy Adjutant-General Grigol Orbeliani],” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 20–21.

⁹⁷ As Sunny explains, by the mid-eighteenth century, Tbilisi’s non-noble population had been stratified into a hierarchical system. Under this system, royal serfs possessing considerable wealth and willing to pay a special tax were distinguished from ordinary inhabitants of the city and granted the status of *Mokalake* that accorded them greater rights and privileges. Over time, an even more high-ranking and exclusive strata of *Pativtsemuli Mokalakeebi* had emerged. Russians mostly left these distinctions intact, with the important addition of all city-dwellers being emancipated from serfdom. See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 88–99.

⁹⁸ “1865 Ts. Ivlis 10. - Tbilisis Mokalaketagan Amorcheulta Arza Kavkasiis Mefisnatvlis Movaleobis Aghmasrulebel General-Adiutant Grigol Orbelianisadmi K. Tbilisshi Shemoghebuli Akhali Gadasaxadebis Gaukmebis Shesakheb [July 10 1865 Petition by Representatives of Tbilisi Citizens to the Acting Viceroy Adjutant-General Giorgi Orbeliani with the Request to Abrogate Proposed Taxes in Tbilisi].”

⁹⁹ Ibid.

and the city's economy was based mostly on locally producing or importing and reselling products for domestic market consumption. Throughout the whole length of Russian rule in Tbilisi up to this point, this model was rendered functional, even profitable, by military activities in the Caucasus. As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, Russia's prolonged engagement with the conflicts with the Northern Caucasian mountaineers and in several Russo-Turkish wars, necessitated almost constant military presence in the region. This ensured Tbilisi, the biggest city in the area, a constant influx of visitors and steady demand for its goods. However, with the end of the Crimean war and the dying out of conflict in the North Caucasus, Tbilisi was deprived of the main sources of its income. Consequently, as the authors of the petition testify, "the trade and all kinds of productions fell drastically" in the city, having been relegated to circulation within a "small number of remaining consumers".¹⁰⁰

These economic hardships reflect the broader loss of relevance that the city and the region experienced in the late 1850s and mid-1860s. As discussed in Chapter one of this thesis, officials in St. Petersburg had long been interested in the Caucasus due to its military importance and not much more. Vorontsov, with his projects of modernization and economic development of the Caucasus, had clearly been an outlier and his initiatives had always been met with indifference in the imperial capital. More importantly, the viceroy's successors, Nikolay Muravyov-Karsky (1854–1856) and Aleksandr Baryatinsky (1856–1862) would not share his vision. During the latter's rule, the Tbilisi theater was not restored after its burning, the public library was closed down due to cuts in funding and the activities of the Caucasus branch of the Agrarian society, established by Vorontsov, were halted. It was clear that Baryatinsky, much like his colleagues in the Caucasus Committee, saw little use for the region other than securing Russia's strategic interests. Therefore, once the military focus of the empire shifted elsewhere, the Caucasus lost the importance it had been accorded in the previous years.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

With the appointment of Mikheil Konstantinevich Romanov in 1862, the office of the Viceroy of the Caucasus, once reserved for distinguished generals and a conduit for the grandiose ambitions of a hero of the Napoleonic wars, turned into a convenient means to keep one of the many bothersome grand dukes of the empire occupied. For the very same reasons, Tbilisi, a city that had seemed destined to become the “St. Petersburg of the East” mere 10 years before that, now found itself a provincial backwater with a rapidly deteriorating economy.

The very fact of the imposition of new taxes and, even more so, their nature, point to this economic downfall of Tbilisi. First, as the viceroy himself admitted in a letter to Grigol Orbeliani that was later publicized and read aloud to Tbilisi residents, the municipality was in need of additional sources of income.¹⁰¹ This need was dire enough for the government to initiate a highly unpopular reform and not withdraw it in face of the first popular uprising in the city’s Russian history. The content of this reform is even more telling. Out of the four new taxes, none were related to any kind of productive industry or large-scale trade. Rather, the officials meant to secure funds from taxing the lowest level distribution of locally produced alcohol and such mundane activities as using horses for freight, building houses and extracting clay and gypsum for the latter purpose from the city’s rather meager deposits.

The severity of economic problems in Tbilisi is also evidenced by the atmosphere of doom and gloom that the three petitions convey. All three tried to convince their recipients that even a small raise in costs of business would make commercial activities in Tbilisi not simply less profitable, but entirely unfeasible. The July 10 petition in particular goes into great details to demonstrate that even in the absence of the proposed taxes, a “shopkeeper of the first order”

¹⁰¹ “Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvlis Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis Dzis Reskripti General-Adiutant Tav. Orbelianias Sakhelze 27-28 Ivniis Tbilisshi Momkhdari Ambebis Gamo [Rescript of a Letter from the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich to Adjutant-General Prince Orbeliani Concerning the June 27-28 Events in Tbilisi],” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvlis” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 22–25.

earned barely enough to sustain himself and his family after covering the cost of the business and paying the dues.¹⁰² These claims should obviously be taken with a grain of salt – as they were by officials charged with responding to them. However, a striking illustration of the economic conditions in Tbilisi can also be found in the viceroy’s proclamation to the city’s residents. In the address, he justified the new taxes by arguing that they would gather funds necessary for the city’s governance without further burdening “the poorer classes of the population”.¹⁰³ That this designation excluded everyone trading in a *Duhan*, owning a horse or building a house speaks volumes.

This is not to say, however, that either the poverty reigning in Tbilisi, or the taxes that would make it more unbearable were the ultimate or the most important factors behind the *Amkari* Riot in 1865. Rather, as I will argue, they simply set the stage and provided a pretext for an uprising that was profoundly political in its nature and goals. Further, as the commission charged with investigating the riot argued, *Amkari* members and their leaders saw themselves engaged in a power struggle with not only the imperial administration, but also the more privileged strata of citizens. I will discuss the conclusions of this commission in the next section.

¹⁰² “1865 Ts. Ivllis 10. - Tbilis Mokalaketaġan Amorcheulta Arza Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvlis Movaleobis Agmasrulebel General-Adiutant Grigol Orbelianisadmi K. Tbilisshi Shemoghebuli Akhali Gadasaxadebis Gaukmebis Shesakheb [July 10 1865 Petition by Representatives of Tbilisi Citizens to the Acting Viceroy Adjutant-General Giorgi Orbeliani with the Request to Abrogate Proposed Taxes in Tbilisi], ” 17-18.

¹⁰³ “Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvlis Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis Dzis Reskripti General-Adiutant Tav. Orbelianias Sakhelze 27-28 Ivniis Tbilisshi Momkhdari Ambebis Gamo [Rescript of a Letter from the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich to Adjutant-General Prince Orbeliani Concerning the June 27-28 Events in Tbilisi]”, 23.

3.2 The Investigation

On July 2, soon after the end of the riot, the acting Governor-General of Tbilisi¹⁰⁴ received a report from the chief of Tbilisi police, colonel Roslavlev, containing the basic facts of the occasion. Importantly, Roslavlev starts his account by stating that in the days leading up to the riot the police had observed frequent gatherings of *Amkari* members in various locations around the city, particularly near the Khodjivan cemetery and several Armenian churches. Ostensibly peaceful in their nature, Roslavlev had still found these meetings illegal, and according to his report, had resorted to “regular police procedures” to disperse the crowds.¹⁰⁵ These had normally been met with obedience by those that had gathered. However, Roslavlev still argues that these meetings had laid the grounds for the coordinated collective refusal to pay the announced excise on alcohol by all wine-sellers in Tbilisi and the planned general strike in the city on June 28.¹⁰⁶

Roslavlev’s suspicions were confirmed by a special investigative commission set up by Orbeliani on July 12. According to the July 28 report by the commission, on several occasions through June 1865, notable *Ustabashi*, including high-ranking honored citizens of the city, agitated the crowds against the proposed taxes.¹⁰⁷ A later explanatory note by Mikhail Romanov to the governing senate, based on the commission’s findings, poses June 15 as the date when such agitation first occurred. The first gathering, held in the gardens of the Khodjivan Church was attended mostly by *Mikitnebi* angered by the announced excise on wine-selling. According

¹⁰⁴ As the Governor-General of Tbilisi, Grigol Orbeliani, took on the role of an acting viceroy in Mikhail Romanov’s absence, his office was left temporarily vacant. Despite my best efforts, I was not able to establish the identity of an official who acted in Orbeliani’s stead during this period.

¹⁰⁵ “1865. Ts. Ivllis 2. - Tbilisis Ufros Policmeister Polkovnik Roslavlevis Mokhseneba Tbilisis General-Gubernatoris Tanamdebobis Aghmasruleblisadmi Amkarta ‘Gamosvli’ Shesakheb 27-29 Ivni [July 2 1865. Report by the Chief of Police of Tbilisi to the Acting Governor-General Regarding the Amkari ‘Riot’ of June 27-29], N 2364,” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 10–15.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “1865 Ts. Ivllis 24. – Barati 27 da 28 Ivni Momkhdari Areulobis Gamomdziebeli Komisiis Mushaobis Msvlelobis Shesakheb [July 24 1865 - Note on the Proceedings of the June 27-28 Riot Investigation Commission],” in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 30.

to the note, *Mikitnebi* conspired against paying the new tariff at this meeting.¹⁰⁸

At the later gatherings, *Mikitnebi* were joined by the members of others, both merchant and craftsmen *Amkrebi*. Consequently, the participants were now discussing the means to oppose not only the excise on alcohol, but *all* the proposed taxes. Importantly, the discussion moved beyond the immediate concerns regarding taxation to broader political issues. As one of the prime witnesses of the commission, the head of the municipal government Kalust Shermazan-Vartanov, testified, several prominent *Ustabashebi* were spreading false information by exaggerating the scope of the proposed taxes and were sowing dissent against public figures, particularly Vartanov himself.¹⁰⁹ In his testimonies, Vartanov also claimed that these agitators led *Amkrebi* to believe that the taxes were a conspiracy by him and other wealthy merchants from the municipal government to crush their low-level competition and monopolize the Tbilisi markets.¹¹⁰ This assumption was not baseless: as Romanov's proclamation explains, the new taxes were first proposed by a "special council composed of elected representatives of the city's residents".¹¹¹ However truthful, these suspicions still seem to have influenced the future riot and how it dispersed its violence.

The culmination of plotting at the gathering came on June 25, when *Ustabashebi* agreed to organize a general strike by closing all shops and workshops on June 28. This plan was reported by police agents to Orbeliani, who ordered Roslavlev to gather *Ustabashebi* and inform them that such an action would be considered a clear disobedience of authorities and would be

¹⁰⁸ 1868 Ts. – "Kavkasiis Mefisnatstval Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzis Pasuxi Mmartvel Senats 27 da 28 Ivnis Gamoshvlashi Monatsileta Danashaulis Shesakheb [Response by the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich to the Governing Senate regarding the culpability of Participants of the June 27-8 Riots]" in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvli" Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot']* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 87.

¹⁰⁹ "Barati 27 da 28 Ivnis Momkhdari Areulobis Gamomdziebeli Komisiis Mushaobis Msvlelobis Shesakheb [Note on the Proceeding of the June 27-28 Riots Investigation Commission], " 32-33.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Kavkasiis Mefisnatstval Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis Dzis Reskripti General-Adiutant Tav. Orbelianias Sakhelze 27-28 Ivnis Tbilisshi Momkhdari Ambebis Gamo [Rescript of a Letter from the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich to Adjuta,] 23.

prosecuted harshly. Following the order, Roslavlev summoned several *Ustabashi* to his office on the morning of June 27, provoking a gathering of a large crowd outside the building at the central Yerevan Square. The crowd, believing that police was about to arrest *Amkari* leaders, demanded their release. Interestingly, Roslavlev reports that several *Ustabashebi* were “begging [him] with tears in their eyes” to not let them out into the crowd without protection, further confirming that *Amkari* members might have thought that their leaders were implicated in the tax reform.¹¹²

In the afternoon, Orbeliani arrived at the Yerevan Square and called the crowd to disperse. After this request was denied, Orbeliani ordered a regiment of gendarmerie and Cossack troops to break up the crowd. This led to the first violent outburst of the protests. *Amkari* members started throwing rocks at the soldiers and retreated through the nearby Veliaminov street. However, rather than continuing to engage with the troops or attacking government buildings, most protesters headed straight to the city head Vartanov’s mansion. The place was robbed and ransacked, while Vartanov himself was beaten to near death, barely escaping the attackers.¹¹³ The crowd then moved to the mansion of Isaac Bajbeuc-Melnikov who had recently charged by the municipal government with collecting the new taxes. His house met a similar fate and Melnikov himself was killed. While violent outburst against a tax-collector is hardly surprising at an anti-tax riot, Vartanov being targeted is more noteworthy. Roslavlev, Orbeliani and viceroy Romanov all interpret this a sign that the rioters were resentful towards the municipal government and not the viceroy’s administration.¹¹⁴ This claim was, again, not without merit: several suspects interviewed by the commission confirm that *Amkrebi* viewed Vartanov as responsible for the introduction of the new taxes.¹¹⁵ However, it also presents a convenient

¹¹² “1865. Ts. Ivllisis 2. - Tbilisis Ufros Policmeister Polkovnik Roslavlevis Mokhseneba Tbilisis General-Gubernatoris Tanamdebobis Aghmasruleblisadmi Amkarta ‘Gamosvllis’ Shesakheb 27-29 Ivnliss [July 2 1865. Report by the Chief of Police of Tbilisi to the Acti],” 12.

¹¹³ Ibid., 12-13.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “1865 Ts. Ivllisis 28. - 27 da 28 Ivnliss Areulobis Gamomdziebeli Komisiis Dadgenileba, N 19 [Statement of

narrative for officials who were trying to convince their superiors and each other in the loyalty of their subjects.

Subsequent events both confirm and contradict this official theory. Soon after the attack on Melnikov's house, the rioters once again confronted the police and Cossacks, near the Mikhailovsk bridge. With crowds showing no interest in retreating this time and attacking the troops with stones, the regiment started shooting at them, killing one of the protesters and a bystander. The shooting finally forced the crowd to disperse, and the night as Roslavlev puts it, "went down calmly".¹¹⁶ On the next morning, however, *Amkari* members started once again gathering near the Khodjivan church. Simultaneously, a general strike was launched in Tbilisi – all shops and workshops were closed and economic activity was halted to the point that even the water carriers stopped distributing their product. With these acts, *Amkrebi* clearly disobeyed the police chief of the city, and, as Roslavlev had explicitly announced that he was acting on Orbeliani's order, the protesters stood in rebellion against the highest acting representative of imperial government in Tbilisi. Nevertheless, the way this rebellion ended suggests that the viceroy and his officials might after all not have been the primary targets of *Amkari* grievances. In response to the strike and yet another massive gathering near the Khodjivank church on the 28th, Orbeliani appointed a hereditary honored citizen of Tbilisi, one Abesalomov, as a new temporary head of the municipal government. According to Roslavlev, the latter headed to the meeting, informed the participants about the decision and convinced their leaders to "attend the ruler with remorse," which, the police chief claimed, they did immediately, arriving at Orbeliani's palace and "kissing his feet and begging for mercy".¹¹⁷ After this touching scene

the June 27-28 Riot Investigation Commission],“ in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis “Gamosvli” Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi ‘Riot’]* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 33.

¹¹⁶ “1865. Ts. Ivllis 2. - Tbilisis Ufros Policmeister Polkovnik Roslavlevis Mokhseneba Tbilisis General-Gubernatoris Tanamdebobis Aghmasruleblisadmi Amkarta ‘Gamosvli’ Shesakheb 27-29 Ivniiss [July 2 1865. Report by the Chief of Police of Tbilisi to the Acti.” 13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

the leaders of the riot went back to Khodjivank and asked those gathered at the church to head home. There was a minor clash between the rioters and the Cossacks in the meanwhile, but soon after this Abesalomov once again arrived at Khodjivank together with the acting general-governor of Tbilisi. The two announced to the crowd Orbeliani's orders to end the meeting, which they heeded. The crowds dispersed, the troops returned to their stations, and the night went "absolutely calmly".¹¹⁸ The next morning the general strike was also called off and all commercial activities resumed. The *Amkari* riot 1865 had ended.

Importantly, the riot had ended without its ostensible goal, annulment of the proposed taxes, so much as having been discussed with the authorities. There is no indication that the new city head, Abesalomov has addressed either the taxes or the harsh economic conditions in Tbilisi in his appeal to the crowd at *Khodjivank*. The very fact of his appointment – and Vartanov's dismissal – seem to have been enough to quell *Amkari* anger. As mentioned, the imperial authorities tried to present this a proof that the riot was little more than an inner conflict between various members of the craftsmen and trader classes of Tbilisi. However, *Amkrebi* did not shy away from attacking Cossacks or launching a strike against explicit orders of the acting viceroy. Identifying a single, or even the most important reason behind a popular uprising is obviously an impossible task, particularly in the absence of materials that present the event from the rioters' perspective. More important here might well be the fact that such an uprising, and, particularly, the general strike was possible. *Amkari* leaders proved capable of persuading and/or intimidating the whole of Tbilisi into shutdown, pointing to their immense influence in the city. Crucially, this fact did not escape the officials charged with dealing with the uprising and shaping its outcome. Consequently, in the aftermath of the riot, civil and military authorities in Tbilisi introduced a range of initiatives that would curtail the political power of *Amkrebi*, forever altering the nature of these organizations and their role in the city's social and economic

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 14

life. These initiatives will be discussed in the following subchapter.

3.3 The Aftermath

The *Amkari* Riot succeeded only in slightly delaying the introduction of the new taxes. On August 17, one and half months after the originally planned date of July 1, the gubernatorial directorate of Tbilisi published notices in Russian, Georgian, Armenian and German that set forth all four of the intended taxes: 1) an additional 25% excise on alcohol; 2) a tax on riding, carriage and freight horse; 3) a tax on storing building materials inside the city; and 4) a tax on extracting gypsum and clay from the city's deposits.¹¹⁹ Abesalomov's assignment as a city head in the wake of the protest also turned out short-lived. Already on October 2, the civil governor of Tbilisi notified the head of the viceroy's administration about his decision to replace Abesalomov with one Akimov, a gubernatorial secretary who he judged a loyal servant of the administration.¹²⁰ Proportionately to the ultimate uneventfulness of the occasion, the immediate judicial retribution against its participants was relatively mild: while some fifty-two individuals were arrested in connection to the riots, only three of them, ones directly implicated in Melnikov's murder, received hard punishment in the form of a multi-year prison sentence or exile to Siberia.¹²¹ However, the imperial government also devised a broader response to the

¹¹⁹ "1865 Ts. Agvistos 17. – Tbilisis Sagubernio Sammartvelos Gantskhadeba Akhali Gadasaxadebis Semoghebisa da Shetanis Tsesis Shesakheb [August 17, 1865 Decree by the Tbilisi Gubernatorial Directorate Regarding the Introduction of New Taxes and Rules for their Payment]," in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvli" Istoriatvis* [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot'] (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 42.

¹²⁰ "1865 Ts. Oktombris 2. – Tbilisis Samokalako Gubernatoris Mokhseneba Kavkasiis Mefisnatvliis Mtavarmmartvelobis Ufross, Tbilisis Kalakis Mmartvelobashi Akimovis Danishvnis Shesakheb [October 2, 1865 Letter by the Civil Governor of Tbilisi to the Head of the Administration of the Viceroy of the Caucasus regarding the Appointment of Akimov as a Head of the Municipal Government of Tbilisi], N46" in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvli" Istoriatvis* [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot'] (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 69.

¹²¹ "1870 Ts. Oktombris 5. – Mmartveli Senatis Ganachenidan 1865 Ts. 27-28 Ivnis Gamosvliis Monatsileta da Tsamkezebelta Dasjis Shesakheb [Excerpts from the October 5, 1870 Decree by the Governing Senate on the Prosecution of Participant and Instigator of the June 27-28, 1865 Riot] " in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvli" Istoriatvis* [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot'] (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 140.

events of June 27-28 that targeted not particular culpable individuals, but *Amkrebi* as an institution and would therefore have far-reaching consequences for the organizations' future.

On August 19, 1865 the viceroy Mikhail Romanov laid out plans for the future actions regarding *Amkrebi* in his letter to Grigol Orbeliani. The viceroy noted that the simultaneous closure of all shops and workshops in the city on June 28, and their opening up the next day could not have proceeded without the knowledge and approval of *Ustabashebi*. This for him was a telltale sign of a vast conspiracy by *Amkari* leaders and their collective disobedience. Based on this judgment, he asked Orbeliani to resort to extreme means: arrest all *Ustabashi* of both craftsmen and trader *Amkrebi* and identify the ones most responsible for the riot through their questioning. Yet another sign of the viceroy's questionable competence, Orbeliani chose to sidestep this order.¹²² In his response he argued that such a decision would be, on the one hand, burdensome due to the number of *Ustabashebi* in Tbilisi, and, on the other hand, excessive, as the investigation was well on its way and already close to identifying the main culprits. However, Orbeliani dutifully informed the grand duke that he had gathered *Ustabashebi* and had "used all means to instill in them the ways of thinking and action that [the viceroy] would surely demand and expect from them".¹²³

Along with this ill-fated idea, the viceroy's letter contained a well-thought out and more consequential request. Romanov ordered Orbeliani to conduct a survey and compose a registry of all *Amkrebi* in the city and their *Ustabashebi*. The plan was intended for an effective control

¹²² "1865 Ts. Agvistos 19. – Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvli, Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzis Tserili General-Adiutant Tav. G. D. Orbelianisadmi Moskovidan Imave Sakitkhis Irgvli [August 19, 1865 Letter from Moscow by Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich to Adjunct General Prince G.D. Orbeliani on the same Matter],“ in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvli" Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot']* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 51.

¹²³ "1865, Sektembris 25. – General-Adiutant Tav. G. D. Orbelianiasi Mokhseneba Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvli Did Mtavar Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzes 27 da 28 Ivniis „Gamosvli“ Momdevno Ambebis Shesakheb [September 25, 1865 Letter by Adjunct General Prince G.D. Orbeliani to the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich Regarding the Events Following the June 27-28 Riots], N889“ in *Masalebi Tbilisis Amkarta 1865 Tslis "Gamosvli" Istoriisatvis [Materials for the History of 1865 Tbilisi Amkrebi 'Riot']* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos Ssr. Shss. Saarkivo Sammartvelo, 1947), 63.

Amkrebi's public activities. As the viceroy envisioned, only the registered *Ustabashebi* would have the right to call a meeting of *Amkari* members and even they were obligated to notify the police in advance about the time, location and purpose of the meeting.¹²⁴ A September 15 report by the acting General-Governor of Tbilisi shows that the grand duke's plan was realized within a month.

The registry was the first in the line of regulatory measures introduced in the aftermath of the riot in order to tame *Amkrebi* and their influence in Tbilisi. The first casualty of these initiatives were the trader *Amkrebi*. They were abolished by a viceroial decree in May 1867. In his response to the governing senate, the viceroy justifies this decision by claiming, justifiably, that the only purpose of this kind of *Amkrebi* was to unify sellers against the interests of their purchasers. However, his letter also indicates that the decisive role the wine-seller *Amkrebi* played in the 1865 riot also was an important motivation for the ban.¹²⁵

While not abolishing *Amkrebi*, the same viceroial decree brought all craftsmen unions in Tbilisi under direct government supervision. Romanov finally brought Vorontsov's plan to establish a directorate for craftsmen into fruition and obligated all craftsmen *Amkrebi* in the city to join it. The *Amkrebi* statute of 1867 laid down the rules for the functioning of this new directorate. It severely limited *Amkrebi*'s and their *Ustabashebi*'s discretion by setting the maximum size of a craftsmen union to 21 members and demanding from the organizations to run their proceedings in Russian and under the directorate's supervision. Appointment of new *Ostatebi*

¹²⁴ "1865 Ts. Agvistos 19. – Kavkasiis Mefisnatsvlis, Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzis Tserili General-Adiutant Tav. G. D. Orbelianisadmi Moskovidan Imave Sakitkhis Irgvlis [Year 1868 Response by the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich to the Governing Senate on the Culpability of the Participants of the June 27-28 Riots]," 52.

¹²⁵ "1868 Ts. – Kavkasiis Mefisnatsval Didi Mtavris Mikheil Nikolozis-Dzis Pasukhi Mmartvel Senats 27 da 28 Ivnis Gamosvlashi Monatsileta Danashaulis Shesakheb [Response by the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikheil Nikolaevich to the Governing Senate regarding the culpability of Participants of the June 27-8 Riots]," 94.

(masters), an age-old prerogative and privilege of *Amkrebi* also came under government control and was now only possible through the directorate's permission.¹²⁶

With these regulations, the statute effectively put an end to *Amkrebi* as independent communities of laborers. The organizations that had operated, as the Grand Duke put it, “seemingly in secret”, were finally forced to conduct their activities under the government's watchful gaze and with severe constraints. Contrary to the claims of Gugushvili, among others, there is no indication that this change in their fate was connected to their loss of economic influence. In fact, the viceroy refers to the growth in both *Amkrebi* numbers and their membership as one of the reasons why he decided to initiate the reform. Further, there is little grounds to suspect that Romanov was motivated by the need to protect the interests of either the emerging industrial productions or foreign laborers in Tbilisi. His primary concern, reiterated several times in the address to the governing senate, was the fact that *Amkrebis'* independence put them “outside any effective control of the city's authorities”.¹²⁷ In 1865 *Ustabashebi* proved, however wittingly, to the viceroy that through independence, privileges, and favorable conditions they had acquired tremendous influence in Tbilisi. In 1867 Mikhail Romanov made it clear that he was not willing to tolerate anyone having this much power in his capital.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I reconstructed the events surrounding the *Amkari* Riot of 1865. The study has revealed that beyond its ostensible reason, the proposed tax reform, the riot was driven by internal tensions between *Amkari* leaders. Ironically, the riot, an ultimate proof of *Amkrebi's* power and influence over Tbilisi, also created the opportunity for the viceroy's administration

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 93.

to finally tame the *Amkrebi* and put them under unprecedented governmental supervision. Importantly, this suggests that contrary to the conventional historiographical narratives, the disenfranchisement of *Amkrebi* and their loss of relevance was connected to the repercussions of their own political actions, rather than being an ‘automatic’ and inevitable outcome of changing economic realities of Tbilisi.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this thesis was to emancipate *Amkrebi* from historiographical narratives that imagine them as an inert and inconsequential presence in Tbilisi of the nineteenth century. “Feudal”, “archaic”, “pre-modern”, the corporations have long been seen – by contemporary imperial administrators and future historians alike - as forlorn remnants of the city’s oriental past, predestined to either wither away in the new realities of Russian-ruled Tbilisi or act as roadblocks on the city’s path to development. To challenge such reductive conceptualizations, I set out to show that *Amkrebi* had an active role in the city’s history in this period. While their political influence and monopolistic grip on Tbilisi was indeed diminished throughout the Russian rule, *Amkrebi* were still an integral part of the most influential of the modernization projects pursued in the city and still played a major role in the economic and social life of the city well into the seventh decade of the century.

For this end, in chapter one I have explored the key changes in function, structure and economic standing that *Amkrebi* had undergone prior to the establishment of Russian imperial rule in Tbilisi. *Amkrebi* had traditionally held a virtual monopoly on both production and trade within the city. As I have argued in the second part of the chapter, the establishment of the Russian Rule, abolition of the Georgian monarchy and consequent emancipation of *Amkari* members from serfdom have created highly favorable conditions for the organizations. Therefore, the corporations have largely retained their political and social, as well as economic importance during the first half of the nineteenth century and under new circumstances.

This turned them, as I have shown in chapter two, into an important part of the modernization project that Viceroy Mikhail Vorontsov launched in the 1840s. Analyzing Vorontsov’s efforts at establishing a directorate for Russian and foreign workers in Tbilisi through the prism of the concept of labor flexibility, I have argued that Vorontsov was trying to ensure the availability

of skilled technicians capable of producing Western goods in Tbilisi. However, he still saw the welfare and economic support systems that *Amkrebi* provided for the city's residents as indispensable and therefore planned to accommodate them in his designs.

The third chapter of this thesis has discussed a decisive moment in *Amkrebi* history that came a decade after the end of Vorontsov's rule, the *Amkari* Riot of 1865. Based on primary sources, I have presented the uprising as a complex event resulting from worsening economic conditions, internal tensions between *Amkari* leaders and dissatisfaction with the imperial administration. Particularly important in terms of the main argument of this thesis was the discussion of the introduction of regulations on *Amkrebi* activities in the aftermath of the riot. The analysis of viceroy Mikhail Nikolaevich's justifications of these reforms has revealed that they were primarily motivated by political, rather than economic considerations. Therefore, the facts that in 1865 *Amkrebi* had enough influence to organize a city-wide general strike in Tbilisi and that this influence had to be curbed through legislative measures supports the notion that the corporations' decline later in the nineteenth century was neither a foregone conclusion nor a natural outcome of economic developments.

These considerations intricately tie *Amkrebi* to the history of empire and modernization in Tbilisi. As chapter two has shown, neither the exercise of imperial power nor the project of modernization could afford to neglect *Amkrebi* as a political and economic force. And as I have argued in chapters one and three, *Amkrebi*, on their part, have sought out and fought for their place in the changing realities of their city. The limitations of this study did not allow for either an extensive discussion of the corporations' struggle to retain their ways of trade, production and life or for explorations of lived experiences of those engaged in this struggle. However, both present ample grounds for future research.

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