

From Julius Klaproth to Friedrich Bodenstedt: German scholars of the 19th century discovering the Caucasus

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When European science began exploring the space of the Caucasus in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it found itself before an extraordinarily diverse array of languages and ethnic groups among which it set out to classify the differences and similarities in order to recognize a coherent system. These coherences were constructions aiming to understand and therefore to justify Russian dominance. Paradoxically, this work was primarily carried out by Germans in the service of Russia. The work of these, mostly Orientalists, travelers consisted in establishing typologies, but also in contextualizing them within a historical process beginning in Antiquity and leading up to the Russian occupation. Transfers through time among the dominant religions or ethnic groups which left their mark on the history of the Caucasus are superimposed upon the exchanges and passages between one given culture and another. In their concern with legitimizing the Russian Empire's hold over the Caucasus, these German travelers also presented the Russians as heirs to Caucasian culture. In the same way that the Georgians are a bit Tartar, the Cossacks are a bit Circassian. These travel writings reveal more a pattern of circulation than a typology.

When Catherine of Russia decided in 1767 to send members of the Academy of Sciences throughout all parts of her Empire in order to describe the inhabitants, the characteristics, and the products of each region, the Caucasus and Georgia fell within the share of Johann Anton Gldenstdt (1745-1781)¹, of Riga, who journeyed throughout the country between 1769 and 1775. His death prevented him from publishing the results of his work, which were edited in a first volume by Pierre Simon Pallas (1741-1811), a Berliner who was a member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, in 1787 and 1791, and another edition was seen to by Julius Klaproth (1783-1835), another Berlin native, in 1834. Gldenstdt's enterprise,

¹ Julius von Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus und nach Georgien unternommen in den Jahren 1807 und 1808*. Halle und Berlin, In den Buchhandlungen des Hallischen Waisenhauses, 1812-1814, p. 2

which would be cited regularly by all his successors, corresponds to a traditional mode of exploration of the Russian Orient thanks to German scholars in the service of the Russian state. After Güldenstädt, it was the German adventurer Jacob Reineggs (1744-1793) of Eisleben, who voyaged across the Caucasus several times in the 1780s and was able to obtain privileged contacts through his conversion to Islam, assembling notes that he would not publish himself, but which would be published after his death. The next stage is represented by Simon Pallas, the great explorer of Siberia, who traveled into the southern regions of the Empire in 1793 and 1794, having passed through the southern Caucasus but concentrating on the line in the northern Caucasus that corresponded to a military surveillance cordon overlooking the region. After Pallas, the Pole Jan Potocki (1761-1815), known to history for his *Manuscript found at Saragossa*, traveled through the Caucasus in 1797-1798 and assembled notes. The writings from his travels were assembled and published after his death by the German Orientalist Julius Klaproth, who was in Potocki's debt for having taken him under his protection and encouraged him to move to Paris in order to study with him and follow his work on the Orient. We find Julius Klaproth himself traveling the Caucasus in 1807-1808. He used the writings of his predecessors as sources for his own remarks, among which were the documents of Christian Aron Lehrberg (1770-1873), of the Russian Academy of Sciences, on the history of Russia, and who was from Dorpat.² We must also mention the voyage to the Caucasus by the Dorpat/Tartu Professor Friedrich Parrot (1792-1841), who was to climb Mount Ararat with the Armenian poet Khatchatur Abovian (1809-1848) in 1829. Or still the 1826 journey to the Caspian and into the Caucasus by the Professor in Wilna and Dorpat Eduard Eichwald (1795-1875), who recounts episodes of the Russo-Persian war.

Friedrich Bodenstedt (1819-1892), who was a private tutor in the Galitzin family in Russia in 1840 before arriving in the Caucasus in 1843 to teach at the Tiflis lyceum, is part of a long tradition of Germans in Russia curious about the mysterious world of the Caucasus³. He willingly drew inspiration from this type of German travel and scholarly writing which attained its classical form with his own writings. He devoted at least four works (*The Peoples of the Caucasus* [*Die Völker des Kaukasus*], *A Thousand and One Days* [*Tausend und ein Tag*], *Memories of My Life* [*Erinnerungen ausm einem Leben*], *Mirza Schaffy*) to this region that fascinates him and which he approaches not so much as an explorer as a pupil eager to learn languages (he already knew Russian and made efforts to acquire Tartar, Georgian and Persian), and to

² We might also draw attention to Gustav von Ewers (1781-1830), rector of the University of Dorpat, who placed at Russia's origin not the Varangians but rather the Khazars.

³ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus und ihre Freiheitskämpfe gegen die Russen*, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag Hermann Johann Keßler 1848, p. VII.

enrich German poetry with the poetry he discovered in the Caucasus. He thought of himself less as an explorer than as a translator, notably of the works of Mirza Schaffy (1796-1852), but also of German poetry into the languages of the Caucasus. The Germans of Russia developed a science of the Caucasus in the service of the Empire which would take about fifty years to take shape and which corresponded as much to Russian interests as it did to German ones.

When he arrived in Tiflis, Friedrich Bodenstedt tried as hard as anyone to immerse himself in the cultures of the Caucasus, although this did not make him any less attentive to the German colony from Georgia set up in the Awlabar section of Tiflis. They turned out to be Swabians, and Bodenstedt was filled with enthusiasm for these broad-shouldered, heavy fisted Argonauts of the Neckar who'd crossed the Hellespont, traversing the forest of Colchis before settling in these far-flung vineyards of Georgia⁴. These Swabians had their own hostel, Salzmann, in this city of Tbilisi whose inhabitants Bodenstedt estimated at 35,000 but where he counted about fifteen nationalities. The German colony, which bore the name "der Sand", included the best wine-makers in Georgia according to him. But there are other groups of Germans, such as the colony of Helenendorf, in the Khanat of Gandja, or Katharinenfeld, which he toured with a German officer of the Russian army. He was told sad stories like that of the daughter of the mayor of Katharinenfeld who, carried off by the Persians, joined a harem in Tabriz. Missionaries sent by the mission house of Basel tried to convert the Tartars to Protestantism.⁵ Klaproth observes that wine-making is a mode of interaction between the cultures or rather between the religions of the Caucasus: "The owners of the vineyards being Muslim, they do not want to take care of the business of wine-making and sell their harvest in kind to the Jews and the Christians. These latter make the wine, and then sell it back to the followers of Islam whose consciences were shocked at the thought of pressing the grape and fermenting its juice themselves."⁶ Katharinenfeld looks like a Swabian village, with nothing in it reminiscent of its Asian environment⁷. Bodenstedt feels however like he is the only German in Tiflis who cares about exchanges between the communities: "At this time I was the only German in Tiflis who cared about Oriental languages and I began with the Tartar language since it was the most important for exchanges with the people of the country with their multiple languages. It was possible to use Tartar to make oneself understand everywhere where Russian was no longer sufficient. Tartar was familiar to all the Persians and Armenians, and most Georgians

⁴ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Gesammelte Schriften I, Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, Berlin, Verlag der königlichen Hofbuchdruckerei, 1865, p. 114

⁵ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, Berlin, allgemeiner Verein für deutsche Litteratur, 1888 p. 281.

⁶ Julius Klaproth, *Tableau du Caucase*. Paris, Ponthieu et Cie libraires, 1827, p. 139

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

understood it at least a little. “⁸ The interlocking histories of Armenia and Georgia⁹, relations with the Persian and Ottoman Empires made it such that all these ethnic groups were present in Tiflis. Aside from the Swabians, Bodenstedt encountered another sort of German in Tiflis, the Prussian officers, generally of Baltic noble stock and directly involved in the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and of Central Asia. Their names were Grabbe, Neidhart, Kotzebue, Krusenstern, and although they are German, they are veritable subjects of the Russian Empire¹⁰. In Tiflis Bodenstadt even made the acquaintance of General Konstantin von Kaufmann (1818-1882), who was to become the first governor of Russian Central Asia but also, in his own way, a promotor of local cultures.

In his memoirs, Bodenstedt insists on the German presence in the Russian Empire in general. The Germans or not even cut off from German literary and cultural life and can even follow the latest publications at the “severinsche Buchhandlung”.¹¹ But this German presence was especially visible in the universities, which were all founded in the first half of the 19th century along the German model. This is especially true for the university of the Baltic Germans, Dorpat, which became Tartu, where the entire faculty was German. One finds a great number of explorers of the Russian Orient, from the Caucasus to Siberia, in this university. One of the most important for the Caucasus was Friedrich Parrot, whose journeys to the Caucasus centered around Armenia and Mt. Ararat. It was not, moreover, pure scientific curiosity that drove Parrot and the professors of Dorpat, but a particularly loyalty to Russia’s political strategies. Climbing Mt. Ararat had a symbolic value and Bodenstedt, even though he didn’t go to the peak, followed in the footsteps of Parrot when he toured Armenia which had just barely emerged from Persian domination and is a juxtaposition of diverse nationalities. At Erevan he met Abowian, a former monk from Etchmiadzin who had studied at Dorpat¹², had left with a good knowledge of French and German, and had met Parrot during his visit to the Caucasus. This Abowian was now a German teacher in the Caucasus. He was the only Armenian in Erevan who knew German and his only possible local interlocutor to speak German with is the commandant of Erevan, a certain Colonel von Kiel, a Baltic German¹³. From the Baltics to the Caucasus Bodenstedt emphasizes the strong German

⁸ Ibid., p. 290.

⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994. — Annie et Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Histoire de l’Arménie des origines à nos jours*. Paris, Perrin, 2012.

¹⁰ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 564.

¹¹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p.135.

¹² Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, I, p. 153.

¹³ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 298.

component to Russian colonial expansion, at least in its scientific and military dimension.

When German scholars and travelers were given the mission of studying the Caucasus, the first problem they were confronted with was that of classification. This perplexity is noticeable as early as Güldenstädt's notes, when he notices while in Georgia the Turks, Armenians, Ossetians and Jews there and he remarks that the number of these four nationalities taken together might actually be greater than the number of Georgians.¹⁴ But above all, these languages and peoples are perceived as an inextricable mix of groups among which it is difficult to define stable boundaries, or to distinguish mother-languages from dialects. Many groups are obviously the result of ethno-linguistic mixing. In order to try to get a hold on this complexity, Güldenstädt enumerated the districts and their characteristics, establishing the vocabulary register: "A collection of Mingrelian words made for the sake of comparison showed me that the language is a crass Georgian dialect mixed with many foreign words. It has the same relation to eastern Georgian as Dutch has to German."¹⁵ The Abkhaz language and the Circassian language seemed to him to have a common origin even if this latter was very difficult to see¹⁶. Wild hypotheses became very common. For Güldenstädt, the Ossetians were probably what was left of the Polovtsian population after their defeat by the Russians on the Don in the 11th century¹⁷. Lesgian languages such as Chechen were thought to be isolates¹⁸, whereas the Karabulak were migrating peoples without a clear territorial home¹⁹. This perplexity is also clearly present for Jacob Reineggs, who wonders whether the Kabardians are descendants of Gypsies²⁰, or whether the Circassians are too mixed a people to have an identifiable physiognomy²¹. The Lazi people were thought to speak a very corrupt dialect of Pontic Greek²², while the Jews were indistinct from

¹⁴ Johann Anton Güldenstädt, *Beschreibung der kaukasischen Länder* aus seinen Papieren gänzlich umgearbeitet von Julius Klaproth, Berlin, im Verlage der Stuhrschen Buchhandlung, 1834, p. 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 148 et 154.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

²⁰ Jacob Reineggs, *Allgemeine historisch-topographische Beschreibung des Kaukasus*, hrsg. Von Friedrich Enoch Schröder, 1. Teil, Gotha und Sankt Petersburg bei Gerstenberg und Dittmar, 1796, p. 239.

²¹ Ibid., p. 241.

²² Jacob Reineggs, *Allgemeine historisch-topographische Beschreibung des Kaukasus*, hrsg. Von Friedrich Enoch Schröder, 2. Teil Hildesheim und Sankt Petersburg bei Gerstenberg und Dittmar, 1797, p. 14.

the Georgian milieu in which they lived²³. Simon Pallas supposed that the Kabardians who saw themselves as Arabs were the remainder of the armies sent towards the Caucasus mountains by the early Califs²⁴ and that the Abkhazians were a population from the north-west that had been driven into the mountains by the Circassians. Potocki suggests simpler classifications: “I include in the Caucasian class 4 families of peoples living in the Caucasus: 1 the Lesgians, 2 the Misjeghi, 3 the Circassians and 4 the Abkhazians.”²⁵, and Klaproth thought there were six, the Lesgians, the Misjeghi or Kist people, the Ossetians, the Abkhazo-Circassians, the peoples of Georgian origin, and the Turkish tribes²⁶. Classifications were barely really carried out during the time of Bodenstedt, who observed that the Caucasian Kurds were in part Christian, in part Muslim, and that the Gypsies spoke according to him a corrupt form of Armenian²⁷. But he observed the movements of contemporary peoples with much greater attention, in this Caucasus where the city of Tiflis is an example of cosmopolitanism: “After the conquest of the Pashalik of Achalzig by General Paskievich almost all its Turkish residents left the capital and moved to Anatolia so as not to remain under Russian domination. The Turkish emigrants were in large part replaced by Armenian immigrants who, as Christians, preferred the domination of the white Czar to that of the representative of Mohammed.”²⁸

Attention is focused on certain peoples, such as the Ossetians for example. Güldenstädt sees in them the descendants of the Polovtsian Turks²⁹, Potocki sees them as descendants of the Medes and Alans who were pushed back from the banks of the Don, where they had primitively settled, into the Caucasus.³⁰ Klaproth was happy to adopt this explanation which, in a context that was witnessing the development of Indo-Europeanism, at least recognized in the Ossetians a people liable to be assigned to the Indo-European tree and to the Iranian language-branch –

²³ Ibid., p. 76. — On the Jews of the Caucasuseenotably V.A. Dmitriev, Les Juifs des montagnes: un groupe ethnique et confessionnel stable, in Baryam Balci et Raoul Motika (éds.), *Religion et politique dans le Caucase postsoviétique*. Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2007, p. 313-328.

²⁴ Peter Simon Pallas, *Voyages entrepris dans es gouvernements méridionaux de l'Empire de Russie dans les années 1793 et 1794*, traduit de l'allemand, T.1, Paris Deterville et à la librairie économique, 1805, p. 427

²⁵ Jean Potocki, *Voyage dans les steppes d'Astrakhan et du Caucase. Histoire primitive des peuples qui ont habité antérieurement ces contrées. Nouveau périple du Pont-Euxin*, t. 1, Paris, Merlin, 1829, p.18.

²⁶ Julius Klaproth, *Tableau*, p. 55.

²⁷ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus* p.163

²⁸ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, II, p. 30.

²⁹ Johann Anton Güldenstädt, *Beschreibung*, p. 138.

³⁰ Jean Potocki, *Voyage*, p. 111-112

a reassuring parentage in the indecipherable complexity of the Caucasus. “The Ossetians call themselves Ir or Iron, which does not have any particular meaning in their language, whereas their country is called Iron-sag or Ironistan. This distinction proves that they are of Medic origin, since according to Herodotus the Medes called themselves Arianoi, and today still their country and the part of Persia over which they were spread is named ‘Iran’ in neo-Persian”³¹. Bodenstedt was happy to adopt Klaproth’s idea that the Ossetians and Alans are related but denied any particular importance within the Caucasian mosaic of peoples to this people which he considered to be uncultured, dominated by the Russians, and lacking a literary tradition. In particular he believed that the Ossetians, always following the dominant tendency, had gone easily from Islam to Christianity all while preserving still-palpable elements of paganism.³²

Along with the Ossetians, the Chechens are also often the object of attention, not only because they are among the war-like Caucasian nations corresponding to the traditional image of the Caucasus mountains, but also because of the difficulty of placing them among the categories the German travelers were struggling to establish. Güldenstädt was one of the first ones to be upset by this: “the Kist or Misjeghian language – or as it is called after one of its noblest districts, the Chechen language – is not, as my linguistic samples show, related to any Caucasian language nor in general to any language known to me, and is thus a completely particular language.”³³ Potocki suggested relating them to the Ingush and to the Karabulaks, but he noted that they are Muslims whereas these peoples have remained pagans.³⁴ As far as Klaproth is concerned, he thought that the Chechens were too often taken to be an autonomous people whereas they are a branch of the Caucasian Misjeghi family, but he also saw in them the oldest inhabitants of the Caucasus and rejected the hypotheses of certain of his predecessors, Pallas and Potocki, who thought they saw in them the descendants of the Alans.³⁵

Despite the ethnic mosaic of the Caucasus, the most present group, forming a bond and providing a language of broad communication, are the Tartars – a term designating all the Turcophone populations of the Caucasus regardless of their different languages. Bodenstedt considers this population to be more cultured than the Russian one. Of course, they arrived later than others, and when, accompanied by Mongols, they spread across the Caucasus in 1262, they notably pushed the

³¹ Julius Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus*, p. 586.

³² Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 236.

³³ Johann Anton Güldenstädt, *Beschreibung*, p.148.

³⁴ Jean Potocki, *Voyage*, p. 122.

³⁵ Julius Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus*, II, p. 143.

Armenian populations toward the region of Astrakhan.³⁶ The level of cultural development of certain peoples of the Caucasus undermines the image of conquest of underdeveloped lands connected to the history of colonialism. In the end the journey to the Caucasus and especially the confrontation with the Muslims of the Caucasus is an opportunity to explore the genesis of Russian cultural history itself, and to examine its Oriental contributions.

Baku is certainly the city where their presence is the greatest, but it is also, like all of the cities of the Caucasus, like Tiflis, a city that reproduces in a small space all the complexity of the cultural interweavings that characterize the Caucasus in general. It's precisely in Baku that the connections between Turkish and Persian culture can best be observed. Klaproth observed that in the old city, where the Persians seemed to him to be the most numerous, the houses were all full of naphtha.³⁷ As early as the 1820s, the Caucasus was perceived as a petroleum extraction site: "The annual harvest of black naphtha is estimated at eighty thousand quintals. Of this quantity, Persia alone takes more than seven eighths."³⁸ While the German travelers take note of the citadel built by Shah Abbas (1571-1629), the petroleum is generally what most fascinates them. It is connected to the cult of fire-worshippers who had made Baku a sacred city that Reineggs also considered to be a sacred site for Indian Brahmans.³⁹ Bodenstedt established a link between Zoroastrianism and fire-worship: "Behind the Tartar city of Baku on the beak-shaped isthmus of Apcheron lies the famous eternal fire whose flames carry the prayers of Zoroaster's last disciples in this land toward the heavens."⁴⁰ Allusions to a Zoroastrian layer in the cultures of the Caucasus are frequent. But above all, Baku is along with Derbend the main city of the Muslims of the Caucasus, and among the ethnic dispersion the reference to Islam, and to an Islam that is close to Sufi traditions, was a factor of cultural unification which explained in Bodenstedt's eyes the phenomenon of Imam Schamyl, who was at once priest, legislator and war-lord: "The people at whose head he has been placed is only a people because of him, and this fusion of the most heterogeneous elements into a single indissoluble mass, this rallying of the masses by means of *mores*, traditions and inherited hatreds for separate tribes was no easier to direct than it would be to create a unified

³⁶ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus* 157.

³⁷ Friedrich Klaproth, *Tableau*, p. 148.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³⁹ Jacob Reineggs, *Allgemeine Beschreibung*, p. 144.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, I, p. 173-174. — Presentation of Marie Lecomte-Tilouineat the international Kolloquium Interactions in the Himalayas and Central Asia, Vienna (November 25-27, 2013): «Is there a network of Sacred Fires across the Himalayas and Central Asia? From Baku to Nepal, and Back »

Germany.”⁴¹ Not only does the Turkish element among the ethnicities of the Caucasus operate a certain unification on the basis of Islam and of a privileged connection with Persian civilization, but this unification could be useful for a Germany still far from being unified itself. And, while what was happening was certainly a military expansion, it was at the same time, as is implied by the term Tartar itself, a return to one of the basic components of Russian cultural history.

To the German scholars tasked with describing it, the Caucasus seemed to be a series of stratifications, with each one suggesting a particular division. Where there were interferences among ethnic groups, the travelers would attempt generally to find an explanation in the past, or even in Antiquity. For Güldenstädt, the Caucasus was to be analyzed as a sum of residual peoples who had taken refuge in the mountains during the great invasions at the margins of Europe. Others moreover came from Europe, and traces of the Genoese, whose implantations could be found on the banks of the Black Sea go back to the 12th century. In each district, one can find a plurality of languages and peoples, but also of political forms. Some residents thought of themselves as living under a despot, others living without any form of authority.⁴² Klaproth looked among the Circassians for a tradition having to do with the Amazons. Alexander the Great was supposed to have left traces, certain adversaries of his having been pushed into the mountains, conserving their religion and their way of life.⁴³ The hypotheses of ancient authors such as Arrian concerning the Pontus Euxinos are generally not taken into account.⁴⁴ For the name “Caucasus” itself appears for the first time in the theatre of Aeschylus, the binding of Prometheus being one of the great Greek legends connected to the Caucasus, and as early as the 7th century B.C. the Milesians sent colonies to the eastern shore of the Black Sea, notably founding Tanaïs at the mouth of the Don.⁴⁵ Without bringing any theory of his own concerning the origins of the Caucasus, Reineggs gives reports of tales according to which the descendants of Noah were supposed to have occupied the Caucasus just after the flood or those according to which ancient immigrants from the Iberian peninsula were supposed to have brought metallurgic techniques with them to the Caucasus.⁴⁶ Potocki relates an old legend according to which the Armenians were the descendants of an ancient Anatolian people, the Phrygians.⁴⁷ For Bodenstedt, it was the Phoenicians who opened the sea route to the Caucasus for the first time, and the city of Kutaisi, on the banks of the Phasis, which became the

⁴¹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 469.

⁴² Johann Anton Güldenstädt, *Allgemeine Beschreibung*, p. 125.

⁴³ Julius Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus*, p. 295

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 226

⁴⁵ Julius Klaproth, *Tableau*, p. 10

⁴⁶ Jacob Reineggs, *Allgemeine Beschreibung*, II, p. 116

⁴⁷ Jean Potocki, *Voyage*, II, p. 259.

Rioni, was supposed to have been the site of the Golden Fleece: “The ruins of the fortress of Kutaisi, famous since ancient times, offer a particularly splendid view; ruins which, on the right bank of the Phasis, sit atop a steep mountain that dominates the city and upon which is supposed to have stood the palace of the legendary king Aeëtes who received Jason and his companions with such hospitality when they disembarked in the capital of Colchis, Kytaiia.”⁴⁸ Thus the Mingrelians were supposed to be the descendants of the companions of Jason.⁴⁹ The reference to Classical Antiquity was an indispensable auxiliary for the first analyses of the Caucasus where Greeks and Persians, Romans and Parthians were the protagonists of permanent conflicts.

The stratifications of which the different population groups of the Caucasus are composed led the German travelers to observe traces of groups in their neighboring groups. For Bodenstedt, the dominant population is that of the Tartars “The Turco-Tartar tribes which under Genghis Khan and Tamerlane flooded and subjugated the regions of the Caucasus still represent today the largest portion of the population, and that explains why their language, which they still designate as the “Turkish language” (turkidschedil) remains dominant. The language which we habitually call veritable Turkish is called the Ottoman language (osmanlidil) by the Turks and has the same origin as the language known as Tartar.”⁵⁰ Whereas the Armenians under Persian domination had largely preserved their traditional ways and customs, the Armenians under Tartar rule had been largely assimilated.⁵¹ The superposition of Persian and Tartar references among the population is of great interest for the German travelers: “In the Persian province of Azerbaijan (the Land of Fire), whose capital is Tabriz, the languages mix like Russian and Polish in the Ukraine, and most of the folk songs that my Mirza sings to me in order to explain them have their origins in Azerbaijan”⁵². For the Tartar poets, the Persian poets were as important a reference as the Greeks were for the Romans.⁵³ Bodenstedt recalls in passing that Turco-Tartar is a carrier of essential elements of Arab culture, and that among the regions of Terek occupied by Tartars one finds Armenian villages, whereas Karabagh was occupied according to him by 2/3 Tartars and one third Armenians. In the cultural history of the Caucasus the Tartars represent a general cultural layer linked to the invasions of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, and it is by their differences with respect to these

⁴⁸ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 351. Anca Dan presented recently the debate on the location of the river Phasis: “The river called Phasis”, in *Ancient West and East* 15-2016, p. 245-277.

⁴⁹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 63

⁵⁰ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 291.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 331.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 31.

groups that the identities of other groups are distinguished, just as the Caucasus overall is distinguished in opposition to Greco-Latin testimonies and settlements.

At least as important as the linguistic and ethnic layers in the Caucasus, such as the German travelers tried to understand them, were the religious layers. The religions came from elsewhere, and when the Georgian king Mirian converted, he brought, with Constantine's help, a bishop who is thought to have been Eustathius of Antioch.⁵⁴ Georgia became Christian in 320; and Armenia under king Tiridates as early as 302. An original religion came to be constituted out of these imports. For example, the Armenians separated from the Greek Church in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon⁵⁵. The Christian religion in the Caucasus accords an important place to the prophet Elias, for example, to whom many places of worship are dedicated. Religious appearances often change over the course of time. Güldenstädt observed that the Czar had obtained the conversion of the Circassians to Orthodoxy and that crosses and churches could be found on their territory. And while Orthodoxy subsequently disappeared among them, it was not really in order to be replaced by another religion: "Today, the majority of the nobles are Muslim, but they have neither priests, nor mosques, not Koranic schools, and so they are quite ignorant. The people live without religion."⁵⁶ As for Islam, it did not arrive with Genghis Khan in the 13th century nor with Tamerlane in the 14th century but much earlier "Murwan Agarian, the general of Omar, Muhammed's successor, crossed the ravines of the Caucasus with the glorious flag of the Prophet of Mecca."⁵⁷

But what was much more striking in the 19th century was the presence of pagan beliefs underneath the monotheistic religions: "As a singular example of the way in which these peoples are attached to their ancient pagan faith, we might cite the fact that the Ingush people, when they accepted the rule of the Russian scepter, took their oath of allegiance on their idol Galjerd."⁵⁸ Aside from Galjerd they seem to have had other idols such as Daile, in whose honor they held festivals in spring and in autumn.⁵⁹ More than the Georgians, the Armenians seemed to have preserved the remains of a folk religion that was a mixture of Zoroastrianism and Greek myths.⁶⁰ In various regions of the Caucasus, the encounter between fire worship and

⁵⁴ Julius Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus*, p. 160

⁵⁵ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 151.

⁵⁶ Johann Anton Güldenstädt, *Beschreibung*, p. 136.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Christianity or Judaism seemed to have given rise to syncretisms like Manicheanism or the cult of Mazdak along the Caspian Sea.⁶¹

The dominant presence from the beginning of the 19th century, at least from a military standpoint, was the Russian presence. But the Germans who studied the space of the Caucasus didn't insist on the fact that the Russians were foreigners. They attempt on the contrary to see in them the result of a deep cross-breeding which would render their presence in the Caucasus more natural. These Russians were notably the Cossacks. And Bodenstedt associates the Cossacks with the Khazars. The empire of the Khazars, which stretched from the shores of the Caspian to the steppes of southern Russia was a melting-pot of peoples. The term Cossack itself means nothing if not a free, independent, wandering warrior⁶². As a mixed people from the very start, the Cossack, representing Russia in the Caucasus, carried, for Bodenstedt, this mixing into the present day: "Due in part to frequent mixing with Circassian women who had been carried off, in part to their Caucasian customs and way of life, they have become so similar to the mountain peoples that an uninformed eye would not be able to distinguish them."⁶³ We can certainly speak of a Russian expansion into Asia and even of a Russian attempt to reach India⁶⁴. But Russia is itself the result of mixing. Bodenstedt refers to Russian historiography: "In a work on 14th century Russian literature the famous philologist Buslaeff calls Rurik's Moscow a half-Tartar encampment from which all the Slavic countries of the North-East and especially the powerful Novgorod were fought in the interest of and with the help of the Mongols."⁶⁵ Gerhard Friedrich Müller one of the first members of the Russian Academy of Sciences, published his book on *Origines gentis et nominis Russorum* in 1749 in order to recall that the Muscovites were not Slavs, and he was joined in this by another member of the Academy, Johann Gotthelf von Stritter (1740-1801), whose book *Populi antiquae Russiae* took up the thesis of Tartar origins. Although the Russians, often under the command of Germans such as Kaufmann the first governor of central Asia, were having difficulty traversing central Asian deserts or the wild spaces of the Caucasus in order to reach India, Bodenstedt was in possession of all the elements allowing him to prove that the Russians were in fact returning so to speak to an original space, that of the Mongols, the Tartars or the Khazars. The conquest of the Caucasus was not simply a colonial enterprise. It was also a return to the forgotten origins of Russian culture itself.

⁶¹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, I, p. 174.

⁶² Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 239-240.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 253.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Bodenstedt refers notably to the book by the French functionary of the Russian Empire Félix Fonton, *La Russie dans l'Asie mineure* 1840.

⁶⁵ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 251.

The interwoven layers that characterize the space of the Caucasus also manifest themselves in toponyms and ethnonyms. It is rare for a people, a language, a dialect to have only one name. Take the Circassians: “The inhabitants call themselves and their country Adigi, the Turks and the Tartars Cherkas, the Georgians Cherkesiani, the Russians Cherkessy, the Germans Tcherkassien, but the Ossetians call it Kasach, which was perhaps the common name in Constantine’s time.”⁶⁶ Overwhelmed by the diversity of the groups, the Russians are happy to speak of “Gorsky”, mountain people, which become “Tawli” in Turkish mouths.⁶⁷ The group of 647 homes in which Muslims, Armenians, Georgians and Jews live in the town of Derbend which Alexander is supposed to have founded is also called Darband, Derre-Deri, or Derrebend, designations which refer to the image of a closed door and corresponds to the term “portae caspiae” of the Ancients⁶⁸. The place names, in their diversity, also carry meanings. Elbrus is also called Ellborus or Elebo Rous, but one also finds El-bourogh, after the camel on which Mohammed is said to have ascended into heaven, since the slope of Mount Elbrus looks like a camel’s back. Place names that carry meaning are so diverse that they allow us a clear portrait of the different groups. The Mountain of Languages evoked by the Arab historian Abul-Fida (1273-1331) is also for this same reason a mountain of peoples.

The Caucasus is for the German travelers a place to be explored and described as a coherent system, but also as a collection of traditions, of texts from which new knowledge can be extracted and transposed to other contexts. This is especially Bodenstedt’s perspective. Settled in Tiflis at the foot of Davidsberg, Bodenstedt is at first in a state of admiration before the city’s cosmopolitanism: “next to the Georgian woman in a chador walks the wife of a Russian bureaucrat. Next to the Kurdish savage from Ararat rides the Cossack from the Don. Next to the grey tunics of the Muscovites the Merschals (carriers) push through, having come from Imereti, from Ossetia, from Leghistan.”⁶⁹ In contrast to the travelers who came before him, he put himself not only in the position of observer but also of student. And his main teacher was to be the poet Mirza Schaffy. With his poems in the Tartar language but inspired by Persian models, Mirza Schaffy did not even intend to publish them. They lived in the mouths of Georgians and of Tartars without anyone thinking to commit them to writing. Bodenstedt gave himself the task of insuring their transmission and their translation. Let us recall in passing that Bodenstedt was also a connoisseur of Russian poetry and was one of the first translators of the Lermontov’s texts on the Caucasus. In Tiflis he met the widow of Griboiedov, the friend of Pushkin who was

⁶⁶ Johann Anton Güldenstädt, *Beschreibung*, p. 135.

⁶⁷ *Ibid* p. 135.

⁶⁸ Jacob Reineggs, *Allgemeine Beschreibung*, p 113.

⁶⁹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, I, p. 112.

murdered in Teheran, and he recalled, regarding this, Pushkin's meeting with the funeral procession.⁷⁰ For the German observer, the Caucasus was obviously a privileged place for Russian literary memory. But Bodenstedt in Tiflis was mostly interested in the poetry of the Orient, that of his friend Mirza Schaffy. In the mid 19th century one has to mention August von Platen, Friedrich Rückert as translators of Persian and Turkish poetry. But in the case of Bodenstedt, it is also important to show the relation between a master and a disciple to whom the former explains Near-Eastern literature, and how the latter creates as much as he transposes when publishing the poems of Mirza Schaffy in German. Whether they are laments, celebrations of wine or of women (Zuleikha, Hafifa), or portraits of Tiflis, Bodenstedt's poems, which were immensely popular in their day, corresponded to the formal rules of German Romantic poetry. Bodenstedt learned from Mirza Schaffy how to distinguish between the poetry of the great masters and the imitations of imposters: "the following meeting of the Divan of Wisdom was devoted to Mirza Schaffy explaining to me some of the most charming ones by Ghazels of Hafiz which, like authentic diamonds taken from the crown of the king of the Persian poets, find their place here."⁷¹ Bodenstedt happily recalls an Eastern habit of choosing a poem at random from Saadi or from Hafiz for a friend whom one is about to leave, which is to accompany him in his journey⁷². The relationship to the wise man of Gandja was not limited to publishing his works in German, but Bodenstedt wanted him to discover German and English poetry as well, in a sort of exchange, and took pains for example to translate the poems of Heinrich Heine into Tartar⁷³. And Mirza Schaffy took particular pleasure in the reading of the poems of Goethe (*Do you know the country where lemon-blossoms bloom...*) and Heine (*The Fisherman's Song*). And when linguistic problems presented themselves, Bodenstedt and Mirza Schaffy had recourse to a certain Budakoff, the Persian teacher at the Tiflis Gymnasium, who happened himself to be Armenian. The problem of translation is often present in Bodenstedt's writings on the Caucasus. He mentions for example the translation of *Shah nameh* by Firdusi published by Cotta, while he was himself making the effort, with Mirza Schaffy's help, to read it in the original⁷⁴. He was interested in the translation by Georg Rosen (1820-1891), an Orientalist passing through Tiflis, of Dshalal-ed-din Rumi.⁷⁵ It was through the Ukrainian inspector of the Tiflis Gymnasium that he met the Tartar historian Abbas Kuli-Chan who was originally from Baku and who, in imitation of the Georgian kings, had written contributions to

⁷⁰ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 278.

⁷¹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, II, p. 70.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I, p. 127.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, p. 75.

⁷⁴ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 331

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

the history of the peoples of the Caucasus and had had them published in Russian⁷⁶. His model was certainly the great chronicle written in Moscow in the 18th century by the Georgian king Vakhtang VI – by whom, Bodenstedt points out, the German historians such as Güldenstädt and Klaproth who had presented the culture of the Caucasus had been largely inspired⁷⁷.

Learning from the Caucasus means listening to Mizra Schaffy's advice, but also following the progress of a science, Orientalism, that was developing radically during the first half of the 19th century. Most of the accounts written by the German travelers are contributions to Orientalism in its various forms since they give a glimpse into the *mores* and the history of the peoples and often even offer lists of words in the different languages heard. But Bodenstedt passes in review more scholarly contributions as well. He references the work of Marie Félicité Brosset (1802-1880) who wrote on Georgian literature, was one of the founders of Georgian studies, and published in French a first catalogue of the Etchmiadzin library.⁷⁸ Bodenstedt came across the Danish Orientalist Westergaardt on the way back from Persia, bringing books that Bodenstedt would read in part with Mizra Schaffy's help⁷⁹. He met the British Orientalist Henry Danby Seymour and became friends with him⁸⁰. Sometimes Orientalist work relies on open collaboration between a European and a Caucasian Scholar, as when the Frenchman residing in St. Petersburg Charmoï and the Kabardian prince Murzin Nogma came out with a grammar of Kabardian.⁸¹ But the Orientalists he met were above all German, and Bodenstedt became particularly close to Georg Rosen (1821-1891), who came from Istanbul and who best embodies German Orientalism: "Georg Rosen studied in Berlin in 1839 Sanskrit with Bopp, Persian with Rückert, Armenian with Julius Heinrich Petermann, and then Arabic at Leipzig with Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer. He published in 1843, as a first fruit of his studies, his *Rudimenta persica*, and following this received from the Academy of Sciences the means to travel to the Caucasus to do research."⁸² He studied Georgian in Tiflis, analyzed the documents of the Etchmiadzin library, and also published a book on the Laz language. Using the vocabulary compiled by Klaproth, he also wrote a grammar of Ossetian⁸³.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁷⁷ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 44.

⁷⁸ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Tausend und ein Tag im Orient*, I, p. 186.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 130.

⁸⁰ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 321.

⁸¹ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 230.

⁸² Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 292.

⁸³ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus*, p. 236

Rosen had been asked by Johann Friedrich Cotta, the owner of the main German newspaper at the time, to write articles on his voyage, but the writing of his Ossetian grammar prevented him from writing these articles, while he was supplying material to Franz Bopp, the father of comparative grammar, so that he could study the Indo-European component of the languages of the Caucasus, and so he was replaced so to speak by Bodenstedt. Bodenstedt's first poems on the Caucasus were also published through this Orientalist conduit: "The poems were supposed to be published in Cotta's *Morgenblatt*, which was then the best literary newspaper in Germany, on the recommendation of his poet friends Gustav Schwab and Gustav Pfizer."⁸⁴ A German from Tiflis, Leist (1852-1927)⁸⁵, translated Georgian songs whereas knowledge of Armenian literature came from translations done by the Mechitarist monks of San Lazzaro in Venice.⁸⁶ The visitors to the Caucasus he met in Tiflis were sometimes botanists such as Karl Koch (1809-1879) of Jena or mineralogists such as Hermann von Abich (1806-1886) of Dorpat whom, in addition to their specialty were also interested in the culture of the populations they met⁸⁷. The movement begun by Catherine II bore fruit and the Caucasus became, through the scholarly contribution of travelers and especially German travelers, the object of intense curiosity. At a time when central Asia was still inaccessible, the Caucasus was to become the place where new knowledge liable to transform the perception of literatures, languages and the history of peoples was to be sought.

The discovery of the Caucasus is contemporary to a model of the Human Sciences linked to comparativism between Indo-European languages. With the exception of Armenian and Ossetian, the languages and cultures of the Caucasus do not fit into this vast schema. They invite one to establish alternative typologies and above all to pay less attention to hierarchical classifications than to the connections among the countless parts of this complex whole. Since the Caucasus possess a historical depth that goes back to the myth of Prometheus and the episode of the Golden Fleece, diachronic transfers complete these synchronic interweavings in the attempts to explain the complexity of this space. But the Caucasus was, for the Germans attempting to explain it, a place of learning and discovery: they discovered languages that were difficult to classify, a specific religious history, and customs going back to very ancient times. It is also the place of the discovery of these Oriental poems which established the reputation of Mirza Schaffy's translator Friedrich Bodenstedt. Russia is not only in the position of conqueror of these spaces which were themselves

⁸⁴ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 302.

⁸⁵ Arthur Leist was publisher of the *Kaukasische post*, the monthly magazine of Germans from kaukasus.

⁸⁶ Friedrich Bodenstedt, *Erinnerungen*, p. 298-299.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

often heir to more ancient cultures – she herself, through the pen of these German scholars passing through, became Caucasian.

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