

VALIKO JUGELI AND THE CULT OF THE PEOPLE'S GUARD IN GEORGIA*

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This article looks at the semiofficial cult of the Red (People's) Guard in Georgia from 1917 to 1921. The guard originated in the chaos and uncertainty of late 1917 and played a key role in securing the power of Noy Zhordania and the social democrats in Georgia against Bolshevik and other challenges. It also served as the power base for its undisputed leader, Valiko Jugeli. The official and party press fostered a heroic cult around the Guard, its exploits, and its leadership, reflected in Jugeli's diary-style memoir, *A Heavy Cross* (1920). The guard's cultivated image was selfless, politically conscious, internationalist, and devoted to the revolution. Its many critics saw it as thuggish, undisciplined, chauvinistic, corrupt, and militarily ineffective. The mutual dependency between Zhordania and Jugeli ensured that the guard was politically untouchable in Georgia. The need to maintain the loyalty of the guard, and gain the support of Jugeli, was at times a crucial factor in the politics of the country. Ultimately, the power and influence of the guard eroded the effectiveness of Georgia's armed forces, and its treatment of national minorities, particularly Armenians and Ossetians, helped Bolsheviks inside and outside Georgia undermine and then overthrow the Democratic Republic. After the Sovietisation of Georgia in 1921, the record of the guard was used to discredit the social democrats' democratic credentials domestically and internationally. Since around 1990, the guard's South Ossetia campaigns of 1918–1920 have been used to underpin the area's claims for independence from rule by Tbilisi.

Keywords: Valiko Jugeli, Noy Zhordania, Georgiy Kvintadze, Democratic Republic of Georgia, Red (People's) Guard, *A Heavy Cross*, Ossetia

Рассматривается официальный культ Красной (Народной) гвардии в Грузии с 1917 по 1921 г. Гвардия возникла в хаосе и неопределенности конца 1917 г. и играла ключевую роль в подкреплении власти Ноя Жордании и грузинских социал-демократов перед лицом большевистских и других угроз. Она служила базой политической власти своего бессменного вожака Валико Джугели. Официальная партийная пресса создавала героический культ гвардии, ее подвигов и ее руководства, который отразился в дневни-

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ках-мемуарах Джугели «Тяжелый крест» (1920). Гвардия предстает в них как интернациональная сила, самоотверженная, политически сознательная и преданная революции. Однако в глазах многих она была скорее недисциплинированной шовинистической коррумпированной шайкой разбойников, причем малоэффективной в военном отношении. Ввиду взаимной зависимости Жордании и Джугели гвардия была политически неприкосновенной. Необходимость обеспечивать ее лояльность и поддержку Джугели являлась подчас ключевым фактором в политике республики. Однако мощь и влияние гвардии снижали эффективность вооруженных сил Грузии, а факты жестокого обращения гвардии с представителями национальных меньшинств, в особенности армян и осетин, помогли большевикам внутри и вне страны подорвать основы и затем ликвидировать демократическую республику. После советизации Грузии в 1921 г. большевики ссылались на деятельность гвардии для того, чтобы уничтожить демократическую репутацию социал-демократов как внутри Грузии, так и за ее пределами. В частности, в Южной Осетии начиная с 1990 г. местные политики используют историю гвардейских кампаний в этом регионе в поддержку претензий на независимость от Тбилиси.

Ключевые слова: Валико Джугели, Ной Жордания, Георгий Квинтадзе, Грузинская Демократическая Республика, Красная (Народная) гвардия, «Тяжелый крест», Осетия

On 1/14 December 1917, the *Izvestiya* of the Tiflis Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies carried a statement from the soviet's executive committee, headed 'Events in Tiflis' and dated '30 November, at 11.00 a. m.':

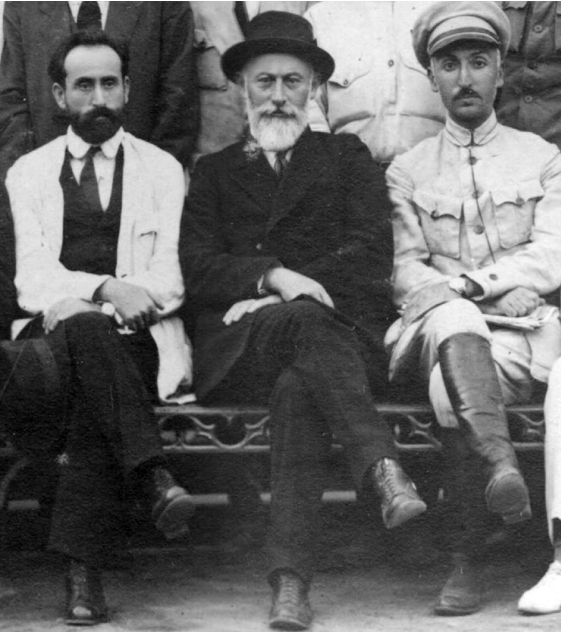
Yesterday, on the morning of 29 November, the Executive Committee presented the arsenal with an order for 2000 rifles for the needs of the Red Guard, which is under the command of the committee. The arsenal command refused to issue any weapons. The EC then resolved to enforce compliance. To this end, on the evening of that same day, it took possession of the arsenal by armed force, without a shot being fired. This caused a stir in the Bolshevik units of the garrison, and some individuals from the 4th Battalion of the 218th Reserve Regiment made their way to the arsenal one by one in the course of the night. This morning, this group of up to 150 people opened fire in a disorderly fashion. But this Bolshevik group, acting against the instructions of the EC found no support from anyone and was obliged to return to barracks.

There is complete calm in the garrison.

Further updates will be given later¹ [Известия Совета рабочих и солдатских депутатов, 1917, 1 дек., с. 1].

One year later, the anniversary of this event (12 December) had become a national holiday. The official and social-democratic press was packed with celebratory articles and greetings, while Tiflis hosted a massive pageant

¹ All translations from Russian and French into English are by Francis King.



1. G. Lordkipanidze, Minister of War of the Democratic Republic of Georgia; N. Zhordania, Head of Government; V. Jugeli, Chairman of the General Staff of the People's Guard of the Republic. Photograph. 1920

of People's Guardsmen from across Georgia. A raid involving just over 200 people to seize 2000 rifles had become Georgia's 'storming of the Bastille'.

Using mainly Russian-language newspapers published in Georgia and other contemporary accounts, this article explores the official mythologisation of the Red (later 'People's') Guard during Georgia's brief period of independence from Russia, from the end of 1917 to early 1921. It argues that this heroic cult of the guard played a key role in the ideology and politics

of the social-democratic regime throughout its existence. Contemporary observers noted and remarked upon the political and social importance of the guard. The British journalist Carl Bechhofer, the French-Armenian diplomat Jean Loris-Mélicof, and the German General Friedrich Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein, all highlighted the great influence, material privileges and indiscipline of this armed militia, [Bechhofer, p. 58; Loris-Mélicof, p. 164; Kress von Kressenstein, p. 42] as did numerous Bolshevik apologists for the Red Army's reannexation of Georgia, published in 1921 and after [см., например: Махарадзе; Trotsky]. But apart from one brief sour remark by Bechhofer about 'soul-inspiring' press coverage [Bechhofer, p. 59], there was little attention paid at the time to the cult fostered around the guard and its exploits. Subsequent literature in the major European languages on this period of Georgian history has generally focused attention on other aspects of the story, with the exception of the memoirs of General Kvintadze, a professional soldier and trenchant critic of the guard throughout the independence period [Квинтадзе]. Since 1991, the guard has again featured in Russian-language works, particularly in relation to its punitive missions in Ossetia. Most recently, V. M. Mukhanov has discussed military policy and the relation between the guard and the regular army in his detailed history of independent Georgia, but without much attention to the guard's heroic self-presentation [Муханов, с. 230–267].

Background: Georgia after March 1917

Tiflis was the administrative and military centre for all Transcaucasia. From 1914 Russia's war effort against the Ottoman empire was run from Tiflis, reserve troops were garrisoned there, and troops returning from the southern front passed through the city. After the fall of Tsarism in March 1917, the key regional political figure in Tiflis became Noy Zhordania, the charismatic Menshevik-aligned leader of the regional committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) and chair of the Tiflis Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

Years of patient political work and struggle had made the RSDRP the predominant political force among intellectuals, workers and peasants in Georgia. Most Georgian social democrats identified with the Mensheviks – so much so, that in early April 1917 the local Bolsheviks opted to work with the Mensheviks in united RSDRP organisations, rather than risk striking out on their own [Кавказский рабочий, 1917, 2 апр., с. 3].

Among the Armenians, the RSDRP could not dislodge the nationalist-Dashnaktsutiun, and in the Moslem Tatar (Azeri) population it had little influence outside Baku. Nonetheless, the RSDRP's superior organisation, dominance in Georgia and presence throughout Transcaucasia gave it a hegemonic position in the region after March 1917. The Provisional Government in Petrograd replaced the Tsar's viceroy with a Transcaucasus Commission known as OZAKOM, but the real authority in Georgia and much of Transcaucasia lay with the Tiflis Soviet, headed by Zhordania. The only other city in Transcaucasia with a soviet body of comparable weight was Baku, the cosmopolitan capital city of Azerbaijan.

All political institutions across Russia in 1917 were provisional, pending the election and convocation of the all-Russia Constituent Assembly, which was to decide on the future constitutional structure of the post-revolution Russian empire. The Transcaucasian political leaderships all shared this perspective. None of them envisaged seceding from Russia, which since the revolution held out the prospect of much freer national development within the Russian state. The very real political disagreements between Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – not least concerning their national boundaries – could be shelved until the Assembly could rule on them.

Although Transcaucasia experienced the same deterioration in political, economic and social stability as the rest of Russia during 1917, the Mensheviks in Georgia retained their grip on the main political institutions and the loyalty of their working-class base. They did not lose many supporters



2. General G. I. Kvintadze (Chikovani). Photograph. 1921

to the Bolsheviks. Their tacit transformation into an increasingly national Georgian political force played an important part here.

October and after

On 25/26 October (7/8 November) 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government in Petrograd and proclaimed 'Soviet power' across the empire. They called on soviets everywhere to recognise the 'Council of People's Commissars' (Sovnarkom) and its various decrees, including on land and peace. There was no 'October revolution' in Transcaucasia. Anticipating the Sovnarkom's speedy collapse, the leading politicians of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan all refused to recognise it. Even in Georgia, where the socialist movement was predominant, the Bolshevik appeals received little response among ethnic-Georgian workers and peasants. However, the largely ethnic-Russian soldiers of the southern front and its rear garrisons *were* far more inclined to recognise the Sovnarkom – a Russian government which promised an end to the war, and rapid demobilisation.

October created a power vacuum in Transcaucasia, which several bodies attempted to fill. OZAKOM was replaced on 15/28 November 1917 by a Transcaucasian Commissariat – a temporary government composed of leading figures from the main parties of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, pending the convocation of the All-Russia Constituent Assembly. At the same time, 'national councils' for Georgia and Armenia were created, which sought to play increasingly political roles. But the key institution remained the Tiflis Soviet. As the social democrats' Russian-language paper *Bor'ba* put it on 1/14 December, 'everyone knows that all power in Tiflis is in the hands of the Tiflis Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies'. [Борьба, 1917, 1 дек., с. 1]. Paradoxically, the Bolsheviks' overthrow of the Provisional Government had brought about 'soviet power' in Tiflis, even though the Tiflis soviet leaders and the commissars in Petrograd, refused to recognise one another. But 'power' needs resources and forces, and so Zhordania's party looked for the means to defend itself and its conception of 'the revolution'.

The Tiflis Soviet and the regional soviet organisations were the social democrats' firmest power base, and the main arena for their struggle against the Bolshevik challenge. Bolshevik agitators were particularly active among the soldiers. The back pages of the local Bolshevik paper, *Kavkazskiy rabochiy*, were filled with resolutions from soldiers' meetings greeting the Sovnarkom, denouncing the existing leadership of the Tiflis Soviet, and ending with demands like '1) arming the groups of soldiers which have no arms; 2) immediate new elections for all committees of all soldiers' units, and 3) immediate calling of a congress of delegates of the Caucasus army', or 'We demand immediate new elections for the Tiflis Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies' and 'We demand that power pass into the hands of the soviets' [Кавказский рабочий, 1917, № 200, нояб., с. 4].

Supporters of Lenin's government across Russia had sought to topple non-Bolshevik local leaderships after October, and Tiflis in November 1917 was on a knife-edge, expecting some kind of *vystuplenie*. But Zhor-

dania's party was not about to surrender power without a fight, particularly since Bolshevik strength in the region was concentrated mainly among Russian soldiers keen to be demobilised and leave Transcaucasia for good. The Georgian Mensheviks took the initiative. On the pretext that local Bolsheviks were planning to seize power under instruction from Petrograd, the Executive Committee of the Tiflis Soviet declared a state of martial law in Tiflis on 26 November/9 December 1917. [Сеф, с. 336–337]. The next day the 'workers' Red Guard' was mobilised to 'preserve revolutionary order' in Tiflis and their usual employers were ordered to pay them for the time they took off work to accomplish this [Известия Совета рабочих и солдатских депутатов, 1917, 30 нояб., с. 1]. But this poorly-armed band needed more weapons for this task, and therefore the soviet determined to acquire them from the arsenal, voluntarily or otherwise.

Enter Valiko Jugeli

This mission was entrusted to Valiko Jugeli (1887–1924), a young, but experienced RSDRP activist and a prominent figure in the Tiflis Soviet. In early 1917, when all social democrats were still in the same party, Jugeli had identified as a Bolshevik, and wrote leader articles for *Kavkazskiy rabochiy* [Кавказский рабочий, 1917, 30 марта, с. 1]. But by the end of May he had alienated other local Bolshevik leaders and was denounced over two issues of the same paper as 'a little man with a big opinion of himself'. [Кавказский рабочий, 1917, 30 мая, с. 2, 3; 31 мая, с. 2, 3]. He had subsequently transferred his loyalty to Noy Zhordania and the leadership of the Tiflis Soviet, even though he would still sometimes claim to be a Bolshevik. [Джугели, с. XII]. Impetuous, daring and charismatic, Jugeli was the natural leader of the Red Guard, able to command the loyalty of his men. He knew his organisation was one of the lynchpins of social-democratic power in a period of political, administrative and military chaos. It was the only reliable force at Zhordania's disposal, and this underpinned Jugeli's rapid rise to become one of the most powerful figures in Georgia, if not, for a time, in Transcaucasia.

Political authority in Transcaucasia was completely chaotic at this time. There was a 'government', the Transcaucasian Commissariat, which had almost no apparatus, armed forces or budget. It claimed still to be part of Russia, but did not recognise the government in Petrograd, nor any other government in Russia. There was a fragile ceasefire on the Ottoman front, still manned by remnants of the Russian army, but neither the Bolshevik-influenced soldiers nor those outside their group recognised any authority in Tiflis. The National Councils were trying to organise locally-recruited armies to take the place of the departing Russian forces, but with neither resources nor discipline these 'national' units were a poor substitute for the Russian army, and frequently degenerated into groups of bandits. Without the Red Guard, loyal to the soviet and its leaders, and led by the reliable and capable Jugeli, Zhordania's party might have been swept away. Moreover, as it was a volunteer force, comprised of workers whose employers had

to keep paying their wages while the guards were mobilised, the soviet did not need to pay for its upkeep [Известия Совета рабочих и солдатских депутатов, 1917, 30 нояб., с. 1].

Early Red Guard campaigns

In late 1917 and early 1918, the Red Guard was mainly concerned with internal security. The initial threats came from groups of Russian soldiers in Tiflis, some seeking to overthrow the local authorities in favour of the Sovnarkom, others simply looking for a chance to loot. As Jugeli put it, in a speech to mark the first anniversary of the seizure of the arsenal

Taking the arsenal protected Tiflis from Bolshevised bands, from disorganised soldiers who were on their way home and fancied stopping off in Tiflis to poke about a bit there. After the armed action of the Tiflis proletariat, they no longer wanted to make a detour to Tiflis, because they knew that there they would meet armed resistance from the workers [Джугели, с. XVI].

But even if the soldiers could be deterred from marauding in Georgia's cities on their way back from the southern front, how were they to get back to Russia? How much weaponry and equipment should they take with them – and who was to take charge of the weaponry left behind? The rail route back to Russia passed through Georgia, and then Azerbaijan. The slow-moving trains on the unguarded railway were a sitting target for Tatar (Azeri) armed bands seeking more weapons. In one notorious incident, the 'Shamkhor massacre' of 9/22 January 1918, a train full of soldiers returning to Russia, already largely disarmed by Georgian national military forces, was then attacked and massacred in Azerbaijan by Tatar forces aiming to seize their remaining arms [ИККЦ, 1918, 12 янв., с. 3]. This caused an immediate scandal in Georgia. At a session of the soviet Regional Centre, Jugeli denounced both the massacre and the preceding 'looting' of the soldiers by the Georgian national forces. To Jugeli, the 'national' military forces were both a rival to the Red Guard and a hotbed of nationalism and counterrevolution [ИККЦ, 1918, 14 янв., с. 3]. The Red Guard's 'militia' model, in contrast, provided a 'reliable guarantee that the question of armed forces for Transcaucasia will be resolved in full accord with the demands and interests of democracy' [Там же, с. 2]. A fortnight later, at the Regional Centre, Jugeli clashed with his party comrade, Noy Ramishvili, who argued for nationally-based armed forces within Transcaucasia. [ИККЦ, 1918, 28 янв., с. 3]. Jugeli positioned himself and the guard as defenders of the gains of the revolution, rather than defenders of the nation.

Army or guard?

On 8/21 February the soviet paper published an article, 'Red Guard', with the byline 'He' – almost certainly Jugeli – which declared:

The creation of the National Councils and their regiments, which have already started out along the road of defending narrowly-national interests, the departure homewards of the frontline Russian forces, the growing anarchy, the lack of any firm power – all this, taken together, is evidently a threat to the revolution and its gains.

The presence of this threat made it essential to organise the Red Guard quickly [ИККЦ, 1918, 8 февр., с. 2].

It called for both military and political education for the Red Guard, the better to defend the revolution. This notion that national armies were a source of counterrevolution would have a profound effect on Georgia's subsequent fate.

At this stage, however, the Red Guard was more a militia than an army, mainly concerned with quashing local disorders and rooting out bandits. Its mettle was tested on 10/23 February 1918, when the Sejm – a new parliament for Transcaucasia, based on the deputies elected from the region to the all-Russia Constituent Assembly – opened in Tiflis. The local Bolsheviks called a mass rally in the Alexander Gardens in Tiflis, in front of the Sejm, to protest this 'counterrevolutionary' move. Convinced that local Bolshevik leaders Stepan Shaumyan and Nikolay Kuznetsov were going to use this rally to storm the Sejm and declare 'soviet power', the Tiflis Soviet allowed the Red Guard to help disperse the rally. Armed clashes left one policeman and seven demonstrators dead. [ИККЦ, 1918, 14 февр., с. 4]. The soviet appointed a commission to investigate the events, but, as Zhordania later admitted, 'we knew in advance that its findings would be kept quiet'. [Жордания, с. 84].

As the Red Guard expanded its operations and became more firmly entrenched, at least in Georgia and on its periphery, its mythology developed. In early March 1918 it held a major rally outside the Sejm in Tiflis, with speeches from regional social-democratic leaders, including Nikolay Chkeidze, Isidor Ramishvili, Evgeniy Gegechkori and Vladimir Voytinsky, as well as Jugeli, who concluded:

Our Red Guard is an international force. We do not recognise divisions into Muslims, Armenians, Russians and Georgians. For us there is just one revolutionary proletariat ... This international is not limited to Tiflis. It spreads across Transcaucasia, across Russia, across the whole world. Long live the international Red Guard! [ИККЦ, 1918, 2 марта, с. 4].

In mid-March, official regulations for the guard were issued. Its purpose was defined as 'defence of the revolution and decisive struggle against counter-revolution and anarchy'; it admitted 'all workers who have a class and internationalist standpoint', with 'strict filtration' to exclude unsuitable elements. Red Guards were 'obliged to observe the strictest revolutionary discipline', any violations of which were 'a crime against the revolution'. Point 9 obliged Red Guards to 'present an example of high revolutionary

morality and, struggling decisively against all antirevolutionary and anti-socialist phenomena around them, above all fight mercilessly against all such phenomena in their own midst'. [ИККЦ, 1918, 13 марта, с. 4]. Such ideals probably had a greater effect on the guards' self-image than on their behaviour.

In the latter part of March 1918 the Red Guard was despatched to suppress disorders in and around Tskhinvali, South Ossetia. It was reported that the first group of guards sent there was overwhelmed and disarmed by 'an armed band of Ossetians and Georgians, composed entirely of former soldiers', characterised as 'Bolshevik elements, hooligan elements and landowner elements'. [ИККЦ, 1918, 23 марта, с. 3, 4]. Several guards were killed or taken prisoner, and in response a large mixed force of Red Guards, regular troops, gunners and machine gunners was sent to crush the rebellion with 'unwavering decisiveness'. At the same time, Jugeli called for 'the greatest care and tact, in order not to deepen the terrible gulf which this provocation has opened up between us and the unenlightened local masses'. [ИККЦ, 1918, 24 марта, с. 3]. The gulf would prove hard to close.

Quashing internal disorder within Georgia was one matter, but war against a traditional, well-funded army was another. The shaky ceasefire on the southern front with the Ottoman empire was crumbling in April 1918, and although Armenia was getting the worst of the Turkish advances, Georgia was also threatened. Early that month, Jugeli addressed the Sejm to a standing ovation with calls of 'Long live the Red Guard!', although his rousing speech denouncing Turcophilia said little about how best to resist the Ottoman forces. [ИККЦ, 1918, 4 апр., с. 4]. In fact, the main resistance came from the regular troops of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, organised into national formations with the Armenians taking on the brunt of the fighting [Квинтадзе, с. 32].

The relentless Ottoman advance of spring 1918 drove the very rapid changes which took place in Transcaucasia in April and May 1918. On 9/22 April 1918, on Turkish insistence, Transcaucasia finally declared itself a sovereign state, independent from Russia and competent to negotiate with Turkey. Five weeks later, also as a result of Turkish pressure, Georgia broke from its neighbours, declared 'independence' on 26 May 1918, and immediately invited in German troops for protection against Turkish encroachments. Independent Georgia's new government was led at first by the veteran social democrat Noy Ramishvili, while Zhordania remained in his own power base of the regional soviet centre. On 4 June, Ramishvili signed a peace treaty with Turkey, ceding significant territory, including control of the important port of Batum.

The Red Guard leadership protested vigorously against this treaty, proposing a motion at the regional soviet centre on 5 June that

...*such* a treaty should not have been signed without one final, desperate attempt at armed resistance. We should have fought. ... It would have been better to perish, than to give in to the enemy without one last attempt to resist.

It would have cost us our heads, but the enemy would not have bought victory over us so cheaply, and would have taken our country more seriously in the future [Борьба, 1918, 8 июня, с. 2].

The motion was lost by a margin of just two votes. It was notable that *Bor'ba*, the Russian-language paper of the ruling Georgian social democrats, clearly sympathised with this criticism of Ramishvili. The paper had long championed the Red Guards, and did much to foster the cult of the organisation. The issue of 15 June, for example, devoted half a page to the memory of Valiko Sherashidze, one of Jugeli's closest comrades, killed in action on an operation against Azeri (Tatar) fighters in Borchalo district, in the south. Almost in passing, the article stated:

The news of the death of our beloved comrade and leader led to grief, and anger, and a call for vengeance.

The village, in which Sherashidze was killed, was razed to the ground... [Борьба, 1918, 15 июня, с. 2].

Despite Jugeli's call in April for 'care and tact' in dealing with rebellious areas, the destruction of settlements where armed resistance was encountered would increasingly become a standard practice.

Red Guard to People's Guard

Building an independent nation state in Georgia after May 1918, albeit initially under German tutelage, required a single set of state institutions, including armed forces. The Tiflis and regional soviet centres no longer needed to exercise state functions. But the soviet's Red Guard had become an important political force, and the social democrat leaders, not least Noy Zhordania, wanted to keep an armed body that served as a guarantor of 'the revolution' and as a political counterweight to the regular army. After all, most of Georgia's professional army officers were not friends of social democracy.

The transformation of the Red Guard had certain aspects of a coup d'état. On 8 June, the regional soviet centre resolved to 'renounce all "functions of a state character" and hand over its armed forces to the government'. [Социал-демократ, 1918, 17 июня, с. 1]. Jugeli, in turn, protested, declaring that

he would agree to such a diminution of the rights of the Executive Committee on condition that N. N. Zhordania (chair of the EC of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies) became head of the government, because only in that case would it be possible to trust the government fully [Там же, с. 1].

In other words, the Red Guard would only submit to a government which was to its taste. Jugeli's condition could not be met immediately. The views of the German occupying forces, and the Georgian generals tasked with

building the regular army, needed to be considered. [Квинтадзе, с. 46–47]. In mid-June, the social democrat members of the Georgian National Council proposed a law, which ‘declared the existing Red Guard to be the People’s Guard of the Democratic Republic of Georgia’. [Квинтадзе, с. 48–49]. All its structures and personnel were to be transferred unchanged. Writing in *Bor’ba*, Vladimir Voytinsky stressed:

It is important that state recognition should not suck the vital spirit out of our Red Guard, and that the Red Guard, having become a state body, should remain the same as it was beforehand – a fraternal league of people loyal to the revolution, who have taken up arms to defend ideals dear and sacred to them [Борьба, 1918, 15 июня, с. 2].

The draft law entrenched the civilian character of the People’s Guard. Unlike the regular army, the guard would not be answerable to the Minister of War but directly to the head of government. ‘In short,’ Voytinsky summed up, ‘it affirms the People’s Guard’s role as a *revolutionary civilian militia*’ [Там же].

This scheme met with some serious criticism. General Kvintadze, assistant to the Minister of War in June 1918 and one of the most competent professional army officers in Georgia, sought to amend it so that the regular army took precedence in terms of call-up and mobilisation, but he was also against the entire concept of the People’s Guard, arguing that ‘as an armed force, it was completely unfit for purpose on the battlefield’. [Квинтадзе, с. 51]. His outspokenness on this matter earned him a sharp rebuke from Noy Zhordania and immediate dismissal from the ministry. [Квинтадзе, с. 51].

In the National Council debate on the People’s Guard, Jugeli, with his characteristic frankness, argued for retaining the guard because ‘the hand of reaction’ might ‘turn the regular army to its side’ and, therefore, ‘democracy should have its own, more reliable military apparatus’. [Борьба, 1918, 23 июня, с. 3]. The representatives of the liberal-nationalist National Democrats in the National Council seized on this distinction. V. Tsereteli (not to be confused with the social democrat Iraklii Tsereteli), did not mince his words:

The Red Guard is neither chosen by the people nor responsible to it. It is a party organisation, a state within a state. Troops which are separate from the people are a dangerous thing. It consists of socialists. Jugeli openly said, that the Red Guard is needed to take action against the regular army. This is the start of civil war. The people does not love the Red Guard; it detests it. All the time we have this Red Guard, there will be no end to the chaos [Там же].

V. Tsereteli put the National Democrats’ case that ‘we need to create regular armed forces and abolish the Red Guard’. [Кавказ, 1918, 26 июня, с. 2]. However, his party was a small minority in the council, and the social democrats had no difficulty in getting the People’s Guard approved.

The 'coup' was completed on 24 June, when Iraklii Tsereteli addressed the National Council on behalf of the social democrats proposing the creation of a 'strong government, around which all the democratic forces can unite ... The person who enjoys the trust of the majority is N. N. Zhordania, who should be at the head of the new government'. [Там же, с. 2]. Jugeli was jubilant at the news:

My dream has come true: N. N. Zhordania has become head of the government. He has brought certain members of the bureau of the [soviet] Executive Committee into his government. This is good: I can serve such a government without question... They have offered me the post of deputy war minister. But I refused categorically, I don't want to lose the guard, or the guard to lose me... [Джугели, с. 27].

The cult develops

The newly-renamed People's Guard continued to enjoy extensive and sympathetic coverage in *Bor'ba* and the official press, and could now also mobilise state resources to boost its profile. The first anniversary of the seizure of the arsenal was marked in style. On 6 December 1918, the front page editorial in *Bor'ba* recounted the heroic seizure of the arsenal. It described how '250 Tiflis workers took over the arsenal against a 20 thousand strong "Bolshevistically" inclined garrison' because they 'expressed the united will of the organised proletariat of Georgia'. Moreover, this united will 'has been expressed in all the subsequent heroic struggle of the People's Guard'. [Борьба, 1918, 6 дек., с. 1]. The issue of 11 December carried details of the 'heroes' trains, bringing guards in from all over the country for their grand parade in the centre of Tiflis. [Борьба, 1918, 11 дек., с. 4]. Finally, on the anniversary itself (12 December), much of the paper was devoted to panegyrics to the People's Guard, reprints of speeches that Zhordania and Jugeli had given at the time the arsenal was seized, poems extolling the guard, and suchlike. Vladimir Voytinsky lauded the multi-ethnic composition of the guard, the fact that devotion to the revolution was the only criterion for membership, and that 'it has always been and remains the most reliable keeper of the ideals of internationalism' [Борьба, 1918, 12 дек., с. 2].

This anniversary issue of *Bor'ba* also carried the first instalment of 'A Heavy Cross' (*Тяжелый крест*) – Jugeli's frank and unvarnished memoir of the campaigns of the guard, written in the form of a diary. Further instalments of this memoir became an irregular feature in the paper, often on special occasions, and in 1920 these extracts were republished as a book – a work which secured Jugeli's reputation.

Sotsial-demokrat, the paper of the 'internationalists' who rejected the Georgian social democrats' breakaway from Russia and the RSDRP, took a sourer view of the People's Guard and its anniversary festivities:

Red flags, troop movements, artillery on the streets of Tiflis, processions, welcome speeches, triumphant spectacles, a military band, the cheery sound of the zurna being played – there was all of this on 12 December, the day of the People's Guard.

There was all of this, but one thing was missing – a festive atmosphere...

It is enough to compare the festival of 12 December with the solemn tribute to the memory of the fallen in the revolution which took place in Tiflis on 23 March last year to see how far removed today's celebrations are from the ceremony of *all the people* of last year... [Социал-демократ, 1918, 16 дек., с. 4].

General Kvintadze, meanwhile, was exasperated that such celebrations were taking place at all while there was a war going on. Clashes with Armenian armed bands over border areas had been flaring up since the first week of December 1918, but the People's Guard in Tiflis was more concerned with organising its festivities, even bringing its cavalry away from the battle zone at Ekaterinenfeld to take part in the parade [Квинтадзе, с. 59].

A test of 'internationalism' – war with Armenia

The skirmishes on the border with Armenia on the Borchalo River rapidly turned into a war between the two states. On 14 December 1918, around the start of hostilities, Jugeli noted in his diary that 'the enemies of democracy and socialism can easily give the Borchalo difficulties a nationalist character'. [Джугели, с. 88]. Sure enough, by 31 December, Jugeli was fretting that the ceasefire due to come into effect at midnight might prevent his forces from taking the village of Bolnis, as 'the vital interests of our country demand this! <...> We must bring our country a splendid new year's present!' [Там же, с. 108–109]. It was not just on the border that nationalism flourished. Georgia's Armenian population became the enemy within, to be arrested, expropriated, looted or expelled at will. So indiscriminate was the campaign that on 25 December Arshak Zurabov, an old social democrat of Armenian ethnicity was given a special pass to certify that 'he, as an Armenian, is not liable to detention or arrest'. [НАГ. Ф. 1832. Оп. 1. Д. 1. Л. 1]. For his part, Zurabov expressed his feelings in a very bitter open letter to Zhordania. [Социал-демократ, 1919, 13 янв., с. 1–2]. A letter in the next issue of *Sotsial-demokrat* signed 'Arrestee' told the story of a group of Armenians, arrested at a railway station near Gori on 23 December by the local People's Guard on account of their nationality. They were held for 20 days in appalling conditions, before being handed charge sheets, filled out with bogus charges. [Социал-демократ, 1919, 20 янв., с. 4]. Jugeli's own assessment of the war was altogether more benign: 'we fought this war not against the Armenian people, but just against monstrous Armenian nationalism...' [Джугели, с. 110–111].

Jugeli's "Heavy Cross"

This series of diary-style vignettes, first published in *Bor'ba*, constitute the main text of the People's Guard cult. They appeared some months after the events they described, were written for public consumption, but are still quite revealing. The title reflects Jugeli's self-presentation as a reluctant warrior motivated by an overriding sense of duty. He was clearly a very emotional man, sincerely devoted to Zhordania and a certain conception of revolution. He could be calculating – on 13 July 1919 he demonstratively resigned from the People's Guard in protest against a repeat move by the social-democratic group in the Constituent Assembly to subordinate the guard to the War Ministry rather than to the head of government. This paid off, in that by 19 July he could announce that 'my "incident" with the fraction is exhausted, our amendment has been accepted... we are once again independent from the generals, and once again free in our democratism!' [Джугели, с. 165].

The section of *Heavy Cross* which earned the book and its author lasting notoriety concerned the 'South Ossetian Vendée' of June 1920. South Ossetia had been restive throughout the DRG's existence, and, encouraged by local Bolsheviks, there was a large-scale rising there from May 1920. Jugeli's forces joined the effort to repress the rebellion, which he blamed on 'Ossetian nationalists – our worst and tireless enemies' [Там же, с. 231]. On 12 June he noted that 'among the guards there is serious annoyance... and therefore several houses have already been set on fire. It's night now. You can see fires everywhere! But I'm used to it now and can look at it almost calmly' [Там же, с. 235]. The next day he expressed his contempt:

The Ossetians, those silent slaves of the old autocracy, those faithful lackeys of our landowners and old police-officers, those born watchmen – now they are donning red mantles and posing as revolutionaries. <...> We love freedom, our democracy and our republic. We are fighting for the liberation of the working class. And in the interests of the struggling working class, in the interests of the socialism of the future we shall be harsh! [Там же].

A view from the army

General Kvintadze was commanding army operations alongside the People's Guard in the South Ossetian campaign, and observed the guards' uncontrolled rampaging and killing sprees. Kvintadze remarked in his own memoirs:

I cannot understand... how anyone can imagine that an organisation like the Guard, with such appalling practices and morals can be a threat to the enemy or useful to the motherland. <...> They were scared to touch the Guard. It dominated the state. The Guard was the institution which held the real power in the state [Квинтадзе, с. 205].

More than once Kvintadze was brought into the top military command in times of dire military crisis, and then dismissed again once the crisis was over because of his hostility to social democracy and the People's Guard. Four days after the Red Army invaded Georgia, on 15 February 1921, Kvintadze was again summoned to help direct the war effort, although by this time he realised that the war was already lost. His view of the military usefulness of the People's Guard was scathing:

They were Praetorians. They filled the same position under our rulers as the Praetorians did under the Roman emperors. They were just as privileged, and it was as necessary to take account of them and bow to their demands, as it was with the Praetorians [Квинтадзе, с. 368].

The cult of the People's Guard in history

Just as the Bolshevik invasion was putting an end to the DRG, Voytinsky published *La Démocratie Géorgienne* in Paris, aimed at a French labour movement audience. A short section on the People's Guard carried a glowing portrait of Jugeli:

Young, handsome, energetic, an excellent speaker... calm and cautious when he prepares an operation, imperturbable and courageous in combat, always leading the assault... [his] word is law for the guardsmen... [Woytinsky, p. 103].

But it was too late to export the cult of the People's Guard. With the successful Red Army takeover of Georgia, the bitter recriminations among the Georgian exiles, including General Kvintadze's damning assessment of the usefulness of the guard militarily and its organisational principles, the assiduously fostered cult came to nought. Jugeli's arrest by the Cheka in August 1924, while on a clandestine mission to organise a national anti-Bolshevik rising in Georgia, the cunning way Lavrenti Beria subsequently sought to use him to forestall the rebellion, and his eventual execution on 30 August, all represented a sad end to a remarkable career [Лурье, Маляров, с. 91–104].

However, Jugeli's *Heavy Cross* ensured that he was not forgotten. Its incautiously frank descriptions of People's Guard operations, especially the suppression of the rebellion in South Ossetia in 1920, were seized on by Bolshevik publicists to besmirch the 'democratic' credentials of the DRG. In *Between Red and White*, Trotsky damned Jugeli as a 'repulsive mountebank' [Trotsky, p. 69], while the Georgian Bolshevik leader Filipp Makharadze, in *The Menshevik Dictatorship in Georgia*, characterised the guards as not merely Praetorians, but 'oprichniki' [Махарадзе, с. 103]. Since 1991, the break-up of the USSR and the ethnic conflicts on the territory of the former Georgian SSR, *Heavy Cross* has been much used in support of South Ossetia's claim for independence from Georgia. In 2016, a South Ossetian propaganda film *Iron Vendée* selectively quoted Jugeli's book to present him

as nothing more than a malevolent, sadistic villain [Iron Vendée]. Cults and mythologies have a life of their own, and their evolution may sometimes surprise their creators.

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