

Armenian Noble Dynasties in the Russian Empire

By Greg Balagian

In the first quarter of the 19th century despite its imperfections Russian rule brought relative

peace to South Caucasus. While Georgians bitterly disliked the Russians for suppressing their independence and Azeris considered them hated infidels, the Armenians welcomed the Russians as liberators and protectors, an attitude that had a noticeable effect on Armenian development during this period. Free to utilize their talents with the Russian service, both military and administrative open to them, the Armenians soon became omnipresent on every level of bureaucracy and every sphere of economic activity. An eastern Armenian renaissance was born in this period and soon Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, became the center of Armenian cultural and intellectual life in Transcaucasia.

The relationship between Armenians and Russian imperial authorities was complicated, shaped often by parallel interests or competing objectives. Nevertheless, middle-class Armenians prospered under Russian rule and they were the first to seize the new opportunities and transform themselves into a prosperous bourgeoisie when capitalism and industrialisation came to Transcaucasia. They became the most powerful element in the municipal life of Tiflis (currently Tbilisi), the heart of the tsarist administration of the Caucasus as well as its economic center. Armenian entrepreneurs were also quick to engage the oil boom which began in Transcaucasia in the 1870s, making investments in the oil fields in Baku in Azerbaijan and the refineries

Part 1 – Loris-Melikov dynasty

Among the notable Armenians from Tiflis was **Count Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov** (Russian: Граф Михаил Тариелович Лорис-Меликов, Armenian: Միքայել Տարիելի Լորի-Մելիքով, Միքայել Լորու Մելիքյան). He was born on October 21, 1824 in Tiflis, Georgia, and died on December 24, 1888 in Nice, France. Count M. T. Loris-Melikov was a Russian statesman, General of the Cavalry and Adjutant General of His Imperial Majesty Retinue.

(Loris-Melikovs (translated from Georgian as Princes of Lori) represent an old noble family whose ancestors owned the town of Lori and principality of the same name since 14th century –ed.).

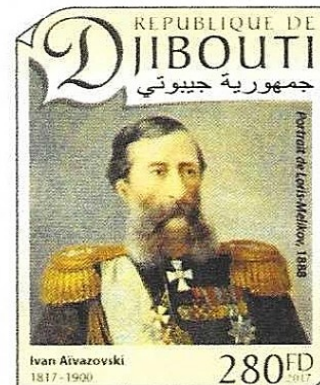
His family descended from an Armenian nobleman named **Malek Miriman** from Somkhети, who converted to Islam and was enfeoffed in the 16th century with the principedom of Lori by the Safavid Iranian king Tahmasp I. Under the Safavids, the family continued to rise to prominence, and they were known as the Mirimanidze family.

Later, the family returned back to the Georgian Orthodox Church and were confirmed as Princes

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Ivan Aivazovsky 1817-1900
Portrait of Loris-Melikov, 1888



Portrait of Mikhail Loris-Melikov by Ivan Aivazovski



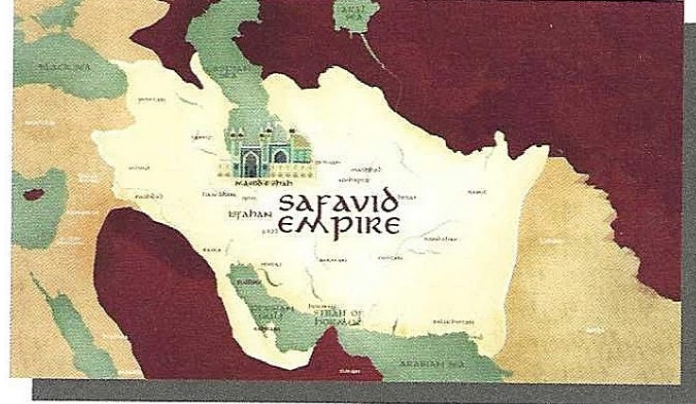
Coat of Arms of Loris-Melikovs

Melikishvili and Dukes of Somkhети. A branch of this family converted to Armenian Apostolic faith.

Mikhail was born to a prominent merchant Prince Tariel Zurabovich Loris-Melikov and Princess Ekaterina Akhverdova. He attended the Lazarev School of Oriental Languages in Moscow and the Guards' Cadet Institute in St. Petersburg before he joined a hussar regiment in 1843. By the age of 10 he was fluent in Russian, German, French, Georgian, Caucasian Tatar languages. While studying in Moscow, at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, he mastered Persian and Turkish. Assigned to the Caucasus in 1847, he served as governor of the Terek region (1863–75) and, while commanding an army corps in Turkey during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, scored notable military victories. For his heroism, he was bestowed the Countship.

In 1853–1856 Loris-Melikov was repeatedly commented by the command. He was awarded a golden saber with the inscription *For Courage* (11/19/1853), the Order of St. Vladimir 4th degree with a bow (04/15/1854), a diploma and a gold dragoon saber "For Courage" (06/10/1854), the Order of St. Vladimir 3rd class with swords (07/24/1854), Order of St. Vladimir 3rd class and a golden saber "For Courage" (1855). The Turkish sultan in August 1856, having appreciated his merits in the administration of the Kars region, awards the Order of the Medjidie of the 2nd degree with a star. For more than 30 years of military service, Loris-Melikov becomes a knight of all the highest Russian orders: St. Apostle Andrew the First-Called, St. George 2nd and 3rd degree, Alexander Nevsky, White Eagle, St. Vladimir 1, 2, 3, 4 degrees, St. Anna 1, 2, 3, 4 degrees, St. Stanislaw 1st class, a number of foreign orders.

After serving briefly as governor-general of the plague-ridden lower Volga region (1879), Loris-Melikov was transferred to the provinces of central Russia, where he recommended to the emperor a modest scheme of administrative and economic reforms, aimed at alleviating the causes of social discontent and, thus, combating revolution-



Safavid Empire



Alexander II

ary terrorism. Impressed by his suggestions, Emperor Alexander II appointed him chairman of a special commission with an authority to use the entire government apparatus to suppress the revolutionary movement and to prepare a reform program for the country. Six months later Alexander II abolished the commission and named Loris-Melikov the new minister of the interior (November 1880). In this position Loris-Melikov devised a program of moderate reforms that included provisions for locally elected representatives to give the government advice on certain current problems. Although the project was approved in principle by Alexander II, the emperor was assassinated before it was formally enacted. When his successor, Alexander III, rejected the reform program and firmly committed himself to the pres-

ervation of the autocracy, Loris-Melikov resigned in 1881 and retired to Nice, France. Upon his death,



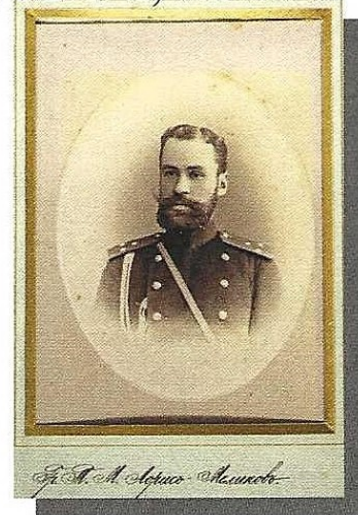
Loris-Melokov's grave.
St. Gevok Armenian
Apostolic Church.

the remnants of this prominent figure were moved to Tiflis and buried in the courtyard of the St. Gevok Armenian Apostolic Church.

Mikhail Loris-Melikov married Princess Nina Ivanovna Argutinskaya-Dolgorukova, who was a member of another prominent Armenian-Russian family. They had 6 children, daughters Maria, Sofia, and Elizabeth, and 3 sons, Taniel, Konstantin, and Zakhariy.

His eldest son **Count Taniel (Stepan) Loris-Melikov** (1863-1941) was the Colonel of Life Guard of the Preobrazhenskiy Regiment. He was married to the granddaughter of the great Russian poet Alexander Sergeevitch Pushkin on a female line, Princess Varvara Nikolaevna Argutinskaya-Dolgorukova (1872-1942) who was an-

other member of Argutinsky-Dolgorukov noble Armenian-Russian family related to Loris-Melikovs. In the autumn of 1918 he was arrested, placed in the Petropavlovskaya Fortress and on February 16, 1919 he was released. On June



Count Taniel Mikhailovich
Loris-Melikov (above). His



LE GENERAL LORIS-MELIKOFF

Le général Loris-Melikoff est Arménien et descend des anciens princes du pays, ainsi que l'indique son nom. Le Lori est un district du gouvernement de Tiflis; Melik, Melik, en arménien signifie seigneur et empereur, c'est-à-dire prince; off est un suffixe qui veut dire capitaine, est la dévotion qui précède les clercs en ramenant leur nom. Il est aujourd'hui âgé de cinquante-six ans. C'est un vaillant des guerres du Caucase. Il figura, en 1880, au siège de Kars, comme colonel de cavalerie, et se distingua à la bataille de Kervel-dars, où il gagna les croix de général et la croix de Saint-Georges de quatrième classe. Après la prise de la ville de Kars, le général Loris-Melikoff fut nommé commandant.

Quelques mois plus tard, après la pacification définitive du Caucase, vers le grand-duché de Miké, le général Loris-Melikoff fut envoyé à Vladikavkaz en qualité de gouverneur.

Cette année, dans la révolution au-



Loris-Melikoff, général en chef de l'armée russe au Caucase.

grands événements au grand-duché Miké, Kars et les Karagachak furent plus que jamais à l'ordre du jour. Les armées russes, sous le commandement de Loris-Melikoff, ont vaincu les troupes turques. Les troupes russes, sous le commandement de Loris-Melikoff, ont vaincu les troupes turques. Les troupes russes, sous le commandement de Loris-Melikoff, ont vaincu les troupes turques.

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