

Research Article

**FAKE GRAVE OF STALIN'S FATHER AND MODERNITY
(MATERIALS FOR BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH STALIN)**

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Abstract.

The narrative around well-known Soviet leader Joseph Stalin is always surrounded by mystery and controversy. The life of his family members is no exception. The archives of Georgia keep many interesting documents about biography Joseph Stalin and his family members. In this case father of Stalin, Besarion (Beso) Jughashvili, and his grave is of particular interest. It was long believed that the grave of Besarion Jughashvili was located in Telavi, Kakheti region, Eastern Georgia. The grave that was believed to be the burial place of Besarion Jughashvili is located in so-called "Georgian Semetary" of Telavi. The documents that were retrieved in the Georgian Central Historical Archive and the Archives of Internal Affairs of Georgia reveals the true story behind the death of Joseph Stalin's father, Besarion Jughashvili. According to those documents Besarion Jughashvili died in Tbilisi. He was hospitalized in "Mikhail's Hospital" which is located in Tbilisi and passed away on August 12, 1909. His death was caused by liver cirrhosis. Doctor's signature and all available information is accessible that confirms his death in the hospital. His body was placed in "Kukia Semetary" located in Tbilisi. There are witnesses who attended procession from "Mikhail's Hospital" to "Kukia¹ Cemetery". Hence he was buried in Tbilisi. Now his genuine grave is lost. But the grave that is still preserved in our days is above-mentioned grave in Telavi. It was long believed to be the grave of Stalin's father. Some documents dated from 1954 contain information that the grave of Besarion Jughashvili is situated in Televi. Long story how Besarion went in Telavi to his alleged niece is related in those documents. Anonymous authors of the letters kept in the Georgian archives tell the story of the death of Besarion Jughashvili in Telavi and his burial in the same city. All these information appears to be hoax and gossips of the local population concerning the last years of Besarion Jughashvili. Some other fake information also circulates among the scholars who research biography of Joseph Stalin and his family life. According to those accounts Besarion Jughashvili was murdered in 1906. All these accounts as well as information about the murder of Besarion Jughashvili were later interpolation of historical reality. The true reasons behind the creation of those myths are not entirely know and need further investigation.

Keywords: The Georgian achieves, Joseph Stalin, biography, fake grave, Soviet documents, Soviet Union, historiography.

As it is officially known, Joseph Jughashvili's (Stalin) father, Besarion (Beso) Jughashvili, died of illness² in Tbilisi at so-called "Mikhail's Hospital". Here I am presenting some archive documents that I have discovered in the Georgian historical archives about Stalin's father. According to those documents Besarion Jughashvili died on August 12, 1909. Here are the archival data on his illness, doctor's signature etc.³ (See photos №№ 1, 2)

I think, it would be interesting for our readers to see the documents that were composed in the Soviet period. There are very interesting materials, which I have discovered in the Georgian archives. One document preserved in the Archive of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia states that *"In 1906 a postman brought a newspaper... and reported that Beso Jughashvili was said to be*

¹ It is a name of district in Tbilisi.

² Liver cirrhosis.

³ The Georgian Central Historical Archive, fund 507, description 1, case 2763, p. 17.

killed at Vanqi Street.⁴ Soso was said to be distressed”.⁵ There is a memoir of contemporaries as well. Informer claims to have been attending at Besarion Jughashvili’s funeral procession from hospital to “Kukia⁶ cemetery” in Tbilisi.⁷

Some biographers of Stalin do not agree with this information, they claim that the city of Telavi was the place of Besarion Jughashvili’s death or murder. For example, Roman Brakman writes that Besarion Jughashvili was murdered in Telavi⁸ on March, 1906.⁹

I have found in the archive some documents including letters from anonymous author dated to 1954; the author confirms that the grave of Besarion Jughashvili is located in Telavi. Indeed, there is a grave and a tomb with an image and inscription – Beso Jughashvili – in the northeastern part of so-called “Cemetery of Georgians”¹⁰ in Telavi (See photos №№ 3, 4, 5).

These letters were received by the Department of propaganda and agitation in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia:

“To Comrade Gunia, Head of Propaganda and Agitation of TSEKA (Central Committee of Russian Communist Party)

*It is clear to everyone that Stalin passed away and not died. Why is his father’s real grave concealed; why the photos of Beso – Stalin’s father, brought by me, concealed and not revealed; why they do not speak up and question the employees of the branch [of Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin]? For instance, Comrade Nadia Sturua, Jashiashvili and the rest of the staff, this reason and such a betrayal, why they do not investigate, why do they hide, because he was a poor man, and they do not even bother to reveal. Speak up and investigate; his grave is in Telavi and there are some aged people still alive who knew him well and worked with him...”*¹¹

The author in his letter accuses “Party People” for keeping in secret the grave of Stalin’s father and showing enmity towards Stalin by “disgracing the name of his mother”. At the end of the letter the author writes that he told about it to Stalin’s schoolmate from Gori Orthodox seminary, Giorgi Elisabedashvili: “I told him about the situation and Keke’s words; he turned to me and said – do not uncover Stalin’s father anywhere, destroy everything and stop... Once, I talked to Sturua,¹² and it was obvious no one even wanted to listen to me”.

The author herein writes: “My parent, who is 80 years old, says that he remembers Beso. He says Beso is buried in Telavi; and he went to his relative; he was charged to pay a tax; so he was taken away. He says, he was present when He (Beso) was asking [to someone] – I know you are going there; I want to visit the family of my niece, and on the third day he was taken away; We were happy that no one could harm him there; all comrades were happy; He died there ... he is buried there. Father is surprised why this fact is concealed. It is indeed concealed; just ask for the reasons why the photo and a grave in Telavi are concealed”.¹³

The reason of Besarion Jughashvili’s presence in Teavi is mentioned elsewhere in the letter as well: “Keke¹⁴ mentions that he died in the family of his niece and was buried there; she herself could not go due to her poverty...My husband got swollen from time to time”.¹⁵ It appears that the same anonymous author sent another letter too, because it uses the same handwriting and is

⁴ Kukia is the name of the street in Tbilisi.

⁵ Archive of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Division II (former party archive), fund 8, description 2, part 1, case 8, p. 88.

⁶ It is a name of district in Tbilisi.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁸ Telavi is a city in East Georgia.

⁹ R. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin: A Hidden Life*, London, Portland, Frank Cass publishers, 2001, p. 31-34.

¹⁰ It is a popular name of cemetery in Telavi.

¹¹ Archive of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Division II (former party archive), fund 8, description 1, case 562a, p. 1-3.

¹² She was Employee of Tbilisi branch of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 1-3.

¹⁴ Stalin’s mother, Ekaterine (Keke) Geladze.

¹⁵ Here we see the symptoms of Besarion Jughashvili’s illness which is characteristic to liver cirrhosis.

signed as “Truth Teller”. The second letter contains information about Besarion Jughashvili’s relative, a woman who was alive at that time, and she was quite certain that the grave of Stalin’s father was in Telavi. According to the author, this person, since she was telling the truth, she was harassed and *“Sturua’s and Jashiashvili’s¹⁶ deception and betrayal had affected her and she poisoned herself.”* The letter contains information about the fact that author brought witnesses to confirm the existence of grave in Telavi, but Nadia Sturua threatened and said: *“Do not try to investigate this case. It turns out that we did nothing, do not speak out, otherwise we will commit you for trial ... Convince everyone that he is buried in the City in order to silence them”*. From the analysis of the letter, it is obvious that the author was Tbilisi resident and knew Ekaterine Geladze, Besarion Jughashvili’s wife, in person. The information that Besarion Jughashvili’s niece lived in Telavi is also very interesting, I have never met this account in any other sources.¹⁷

I have recently published small article in newspaper concerning the location of Beso Jughashvili grave in Telavi. After it was published a number of people contacted me. Some of them were merely interested in the case, and others directly told me that the grave in Telavi really belongs to Beso Jughashvili?!

It turned out that some of them, mostly old residents of Telavi, remember that at so-called Telavi “Cemetery of Georgians”, instead of present iron fence and marble tomb, there was another kind of tomb; which was built at the beginning of the 20th century and had inscription, *Beso Jughashvili* and a cross carved on it.

I have found Beso Jughashvili’s old tombstone. The tombstone taken away from the alleged grave of Beso Jughashvili is now preserved in Telavi Historical Museum’s archeological collection, it is damaged – half of the inscription is damaged (See photo № 6). Currently, the cross carved on the tombstone is clearly visible. Inscription carved in the Georgian language ზე... and ჯუღაშვილ... though fragmented, it is still clearly readable (See photo № 7). As the specialists of the relevant field explained to me, this tombstone is a metamorphic rock of monolithic origin – sandstone. It is characteristic that carving on this type of rock is easy, and in the old days this low-quality stones were used as tombstones of ordinary people. Since the rock has a layered structure, the stone was damages over time.

Even though some sources claim that Beso Jughashvili was buried in Tbilisi at so-called “Kukia Cemetery”. After finding this information, I tried to research how the tombstone with the inscription “Beso Jughashvili” appeared in Telavi and if there is some other information about it.

In the Central Historical Archive of Georgia I studied the death records of the first decade of the 20th century, preserved in the “Parish Registers” of three operating churches of Telavi, but found no information about Beso Jughashvili’s death. I should have to mention that several “Parish Registers” of three operating churches of that period are missing.

The information about the birth, marriage and death of Telavi residents was mainly recorded by those three churches. One of them provided service to different ethnic groups, those are: Russians, Armenians etc.; the other two churches served to the Georgians. One of these two churches was “Lord’s Transfiguration Church”, also called “Gvtaeba”.¹⁸ This was the church which primarily provided service to Telavi residents, and two “Perish Registers” recorded during 1870-1917 are missing: one recorded in 1902 and the other – in 1906. As I have already mentioned above, Brakman wrote that Beso Jughashvili was murdered in Telavi exactly in 1906. Since I could not find any documents about Beso Jughashvili’s Telavi grave in the archives, I tried to find the aged people who could give me some information about the case.

Accordingly, I found one person, in particular, Estate (Baia) Chikvaidze son of Mikhail, whose father (Mikhail Chikvaidze) made iron fence for Beso Jughashvili’s old grave, and he took care of the grave until his death in 1975. According to Estate Chikvaidze, the east side of so-called “Cemetery of Georgians” in Telavi was covered with shrubs. In the early 1960s Mikhail and his children found this grave by accident; it was an old tombstone from Beso Jughshvili’s grave that had an inscription “Beso Jughashvili” and a small cross on it. His father Mikhail Chikvaidze, who

¹⁶ Those two were employee of Tbilisi Branch of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹⁸ The Georgian word “Gvtaeba” means Deity.

loved Stalin, built the iron fence for the grave. He also placed a small marble slab with an inscription and Beso Jughashvili's photo. Those who are interested can still find this slab there (See photos №№ 8, 9).¹⁹

Estate Chikvaidze confirmed that the tombstone kept at Telavi Historical Museum is the original stone that was placed on the alleged grave of Beso Jughashvili. As he testifies, the stone laid there for a long time even after the installment of the iron fence, but later it disappeared. Estate Chikvaidze gave us several photos; one of them shows Stalin's grandson, Evgeny Jughashvili, with his wife in Telavi at the alleged grave of Beso Jughashvili in the 1970s (See photo № 10).

According above mentioned it is clear that archival documents provide a lot of interesting information about location and reasons of death of Joseph Stalin's father. They show that he was placed in so-called "Mikhail's Hospital" in Tbilisi in 1909 and died there. The other materials are interesting too, but as we see they contain people's false memories or reflection of their gossips. We possess materials such as anonymous author's letters, which are about Beso Jughashvili's Telavi grave, but I want to mention that Stalin's father was buried in so-called "Kukia cemetery" in Tbilisi. Hence it was less possible at that time to carry his body in Telavi just as this town is quite far away from Tbilisi and Beso was poor man without wealthy relatives. In my opinion story about Beso Jughashvili's Telavi grave is fake and other information related to his funeral in Telavi are part of myth as well; but who created it, why or what was a reason, I cannot give precise answers to those questions right now. Who knows, maybe in the future we can find some more documents that will uncover this story.

¹⁹ On picture № 9 Mikhail Chikvaidze works near the fake grave of Beso Jughashvili, photo was taken in 1970s.