

# ROMANS SUTA'S LIFE TBILISI PERIOD (1941–1944)

## From the history of the later period of the life of a Latvian artist

**On the occasion of Romans Suta's 120<sup>th</sup> birthday**

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*The late period of life and activity of the famous Latvian painter, designer, and teacher Romans Suta (1896–1944) is connected with Georgia. The presented article dwells on Romans Suta's Tbilisi period and his nearest Georgian confreres.*

*In the summer of 1941, Romans Suta came to Tbilisi. He started working in a Georgian movie studio as a painter. He has worked on movies: In Black Mountains (1941, Producer Nikoloz Shengelaia), Giorgi Saakadze (1942, Producer Mikhail Chiaureli), The Shield of Jurgai (1944, Producers: Siko Dolidze and David Rondeli).*

*Romans Suta's successful career was stopped abruptly because of his arrest on 4 September 1943. He was charged for being an "enemy of people" and for "faking bread coupons". He was tried and sentenced to be shot on 14 July 1944. In 1959, Romans Suta was partly rehabilitated, because the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court exculpated Romans Suta's charge of "enemy of people", but "faking bread cards" still remained into effect.*

*The article shows the real reasons for accusations to Romans Suta. The memoirs of his acquaintances, kept in the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, prove that Romans Suta was a member of the Georgian anti-Soviet organisation "White George" (in Georgian, "Tetri Giorgi"). The leader of this organisation was Levan (Mustafa) Shelia, the members: Levan Abdushelishvili, Shalva Svanidze, Mzechabuk (Chabua) Amiredjibi, Maria Amiredjibi (Nakashidze), Pavle and Archil Kharanauli, Giorgi Machavariani, Vakhtang Jordjadze, Archil and Giorgi Tsulukidze, Amiran Morchiladze, Vilhelm Siller, Eleonora (Nora) Pfefer, and others. The aim of the above organisation was to make use of the German–USSR war and meanwhile restore Georgia's state independence. The article is based on a variety of archival materials.*

Alongside with being a professional artist, Romans Suta was pretty much aware of the world history of culture and the current events in contemporary arts, thanks to his self-education and international trips, and

personal contacts with his European colleagues.

Starting from 1939, R. Suta got keen on arts. His first work was to design the scenery for the film *Uprising in Kauguri*, made by

the Riga Film Studio. Afterwards the designer proceeded to make the scenery for *Melancholic Waltz*, a film about the composer Emīls Dārziņš, but this work was interrupted due to the outbreak of the war between Germany and the USSR.

According to the film director Vilis Lapenieks, in the spring of 1941, he and R. Suta were in Moscow where they got acquainted with “the administrator of the Georgian Film Studio”<sup>1</sup>.

Since 1940, the famous theatre and film director, actor, screenwriter, sculptor, painter and teacher Mikhail Chiaureli (1894–1974) was an artistic manager of the State Film Production of Georgia (later, *Kartuli Pilmi* “Georgian Film”).

According to Natalja Jevsejeva, curator of the Memorial Collection and Head of the Museum of Romans Suta and Aleksandra Beļcova in Riga, “the head of the Georgian Film Studio offered R. Suta a job in Tbilisi; the Latvian painter accepted the offer with pleasure. He was very fond of the Caucasus and, particularly, of its central part — Georgia, and everything associated with it. As the aforementioned V. Lapenieks said, R. Suta was “infected with the bacillus of the Caucasus”. In the spring of 1941, when the German armed forces were attacking on Riga, Romans Suta understood that it was his last chance to leave and see Georgia. The painter made the decision to leave quickly, without really waving goodbye to his family. As his daughter Tatyana Suta recalls it, father called her mother (Alexandra Beltsova) and told her that he was leaving.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1941–1943, R. Suta lived in Tbilisi working as a designer at the Georgian Film Studio.<sup>3</sup> At the Georgian Film Studio, R. Suta worked on the following films: *In the Black Mountains* (1941, directed by Nikoloz Shengelaia), *Elusive Jan* (1942, directed by Isidor Annensky and Vladimir Petrov), *The Shield of Jurgai* (1944, directed by Siko Dolidze and David Rondeli) in association

with Evgeni Machavariani, as well as on the film *Giorgi Saakadze* (1942–1943, directed by Mikhail Chiaureli).

R. Suta’s successful career of a designer was discontinued by his arrest on 4 September 1943. He was convicted according to Article 58-Ia and 58-II of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR (on “enemies of the people”), as well as for faking bread coupons (bread cards) (in accordance with the Law of 7 August 1932) and was sentenced to ten years in camps and confiscation of property. On 14 July 1944, he was executed.<sup>4</sup>

In 1959, the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court quashed the verdict against R. Suta under Articles 58-Ia and 58-II, but upheld the verdict concerning bread coupons. Therefore, he maintained the status of a repressed artist and was not completely rehabilitated.

In his memoirs, the famous Georgian playwright and journalist Kita Buachidze (1914–2000), who, owing to his anti-Soviet way of thinking, spent many of his youth years under arrest, has revealed interesting facts about R. Suta’s life in Tbilisi. He recalled that when, having endured a long and tiresome queue, characteristic of the Soviet way of life, and having bought her favourite boots, Margarita (Margo) Astvatsaturova, a resident of Tbilisi, told her friend R. Suta about her sufferings, he jokingly replied: “And after that your portrait did not appear on the cover of the Magazine *USSR in Construction* to glorify how heroically you got the boots?”

According to K. Buachidze, shortly after the joke, M. Astvatsaturova and R. Suta were arrested.<sup>5</sup>

The essential question is the following: how realistic were the charges brought against Romans Suta and having caused his death? Answers to this question can be found among his friends and in the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. The Archive preserves the materials<sup>6</sup> providing

detailed information on the activities of R. Suta and his associates.

At the end of January 2011, I talked with the prominent writer Mzechabuk (Chabua) Amirejibi (1921–2013) about the organization “*Tetri Giorgi*” (“White George”). It should be noted that he is an author of famous novels, *Data Tutashkhia*, *Gora Mborgali*, *George the Brilliant*, and a number of other writings. The TV series *Shores* (1977, screenplay by Chabua Amirejibi, directed by Giga Lortkipanidze and Gizo Gabeskiria), based on his novel *Data Tutashkhia*, was a great success on the USSR television. He was awarded the State Prize of the USSR (1979) and the Shota Rustaveli Prize (1994), and decorated with the Order of Honour and Order of Vahktang Gorgasali (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Classes), as well as of St. George (from the Georgian Orthodox Church). He was elected to the Parliament of Georgia from 1992 to 1995. Three years before his death, C. Amirejibi was consecrated as a monk by the blessings of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All-Georgia Ilia II and was given the name David. Due to his severe health condition, the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church permitted the ceremony to be held at the writer's own apartment. He was buried on the Mount of St. David (*Mtatsminda*) in the Pantheon of Writers and public figures.

Chabua Amirejibi told me the following:

“After the outbreak of the war between Germany and the USSR, my close friend age-mate Levan (a.k.a. Mustafa) Shelia founded the illegal national liberating organization “*Tetri Giorgi*”, and, together with me, both ethnic Georgians (mostly of the noble descent) — Lean Abdushelishvili, uncle (mother's brother) of Levan Shelia, brothers Archil and Giorgi Tsulukidze, Vakhtang Jorjadze, Giorgi Machavariani, and others, and non-ethnic Georgians residing in Tbilisi — the artist Romans Suta, Eleonora (Nora) Pfeffer, Wilhelm Siller joined it. We were all set up anti-Soviet. Our principal goal was to

overthrow the hated occupation regime and to regain the independence of the Georgian state. We hoped that the German troops, who successfully got hold of the northwestern part of the North Caucasus and, by the Autumn of 1942, stood at the border of central Georgia, would soon liberate us from the Soviet regime. In order to collect money for clandestine activities, we printed and sold fake bread coupons, in which R. Suta's talent and know-how appeared to be very beneficial. He was a friend of Georgian artists with some of whom he got acquainted during his stay in Paris. Romans hated the Soviet regime which victimized his homeland as well as Georgia. Therefore, he enthusiastically got involved in the activities of our organization. Levan Shelia and I respected Romans very much who was 25 years older than we and was actually of a father's age. He frequently told us interesting stories of his life in independent Latvia and in countries of Western Europe. The Latvian artist was fascinated by the rich history and culture of the Georgian people. Our struggle for independence reminded him of the history of the freedom-loving Latvian people.”

On May 26, 1943, “*Tetri Giorgi*” celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of Georgia's statehood. The friendly feast was led by the brilliant toastmaster Levan Abdushelishvili. Since his early years, he was an ideological enemy of the Bolsheviks. Following the Georgian tradition, at the end of the banquet, the toastmaster pronounced toasts to all the participants of the feast, among them, for Romans Suta, a representative of the older generation of our organization. Listing the merits of the Latvian artist, Uncle Levan said: “When our common dream comes true and our beloved homeland is finally freed from the disgraceful occupational Soviet regime, we will establish the order “*Tetri Giorgi*” and reward our esteemed Romans for his merits before Georgia; he will be the first foreigner to be decorated with this prestigious

award. Moreover, we will ask Romans to stay in Tbilisi and will appoint him a manager of the factory for printing of money and government treasury securities of Georgia!" All of the participants of the banquet stood up, raised their glasses in honor of Romans and expressed their unanimous support for the toastmaster.

It should be noted that during Romans Suta's stay in Paris, young Georgian artists Elene Akhvediani (1898–1975), Ketevan Magalashvili (1894–1973), Lado Gudia-shvili (1896–1980), and David Kakabadze (1889–1952) lived there; later, they returned to Georgia and became prominent artists.

It should also be noted that, when the film *Giorgi Saakadze* was being made, the film-makers looked for a young man with a pronounced Georgian appearance for the role of King Luarsab II, King of Kartli (Central Georgia) (1592–1622; reigned in 1606–1614). 20-year-old Mzechabuk Amirejibi was among those invited for casting. He met all the parameters, and his approval for the role was virtually decided. There is even a photo in which Mzechabuk is dressed in the clothes of the Georgian king. However, quite unexpectedly he was rejected owing to his noble descent. It may be assumed that it was then when he met and made friends with the designer of the film studio Romans Suta.

Poet Tamar Javakhishvili (b. 1937), wife of Mzechabuk Amirejibi, confirms that her husband always recalled Romans Suta with great respect. She gave me an excerpt from an unpublished memoir by Mzechabuk Amirejibi which reads:

"There was a Latvian intellectual in Tbilisi — the artist Romans Suta. He told me that, on the eve of the occupation of Riga by the Germans, he, together with other necessary individuals, was literally "kidnapped" by the Soviet secret police... Initially, he was taken to Moscow, at the Mosfilm Studio, then, he moved to Tbilisi, to the Georgian Film Studio where he was assigned to

work on the scenery of one of the films. I met Romans by chance who was a staunch anti-communist. When Levan Shelia gave me an assignment about printing of bread coupons, I had to find an appropriate professional. I was to act cautiously. I chose Romans as a man with anti-Soviet ideas. I introduced him to Levan who agreed to meet him. It turned out that Romans was very well aware how to make any kind of clichés of zinc plates and to transfer a resulting image onto paper. He willingly agreed to print fake bread coupons... When Levan Shelia moved from my apartment to another one, he took Romans and all the equipment with him... Our organization had several secret apartments in Tbilisi, one of which was located in upper Sololaki, in the house of Margarita Astvatsaturova, Romans's friend."

The history of the organization "*Tetri Giorgi*" has been described in the novel *Gora Mborgali*, in which the author, Chabua Amirejibi, is mentioned under the assumed name Iagor Kargareti (nicknamed as Gora Mborgali), Levan (Mustafa) Shelia — under the assumed name of Kemal Turkia, and Romans Suta — under his real name<sup>7</sup>.

In Chapter 7 of the novel *Gora Mborgali*, we read:

"...A certain Kemal Turkia, my age-mate, lived in Tbilisi. Initially, he was in prison as a counter-revolutionary when he was fifteen. Kemal lost his parents in his early years. His father, a hereditary intellectual, died; his mother, belonging to an ancient noble family, was hit by a tram when carrying a parcel for her son in Ortachala prison. Having served a three-year term, Kemal came back home in 1940... And during the war, when the Germans were on their way to Stalingrad, suddenly rumors spread that Kemal was arrested once again but he managed to escape. Even some details were provided: somebody reported that Kemal had a radio receiver at home and he listened to German broadcasts. He was arrested immediately in the street.

On the embankment, Kemal escaped the security officers, jumped into the passing truck and was gone. As far as his escape was accompanied by chasing and shooting, it was shouted from the rooftops. I and my mother lived in a room in the outskirts of Saburtalo. Once, in the evening, Archil Morchiladze knocked on our window. For several days, he harbored Kemal at his place; however, he was no longer able to harbor him. Amiran was in search of a reliable shelter for him and asked me whether I could accept him. I agreed without hesitation. This is how I got acquainted with Turkia — in my opinion, with one of the most courageous man of the time, clever and good-looking... He was named Kemal in honor of his father's close friend, an ethnic Azerbaijani... Our room was adjoined by a cramped pantry with a window into the street; Kemal set himself up there. Soon, he brought a radio and we started listening to broadcasts. Kemal frequently disappeared at night. Of course, I told my mother who he was, and she reacted amenably to it. Over time, I realized what Kemal did. Groups of deserters operated in each and every district of Georgia: they were those who, from the very outset, avoided general mobilization and those who fled from the army. In a word, they were individuals who had no desire to sacrifice themselves to the Soviet empire. Those groups could be formed as fighting forces loyal to the homeland.

Now, some words about why it was necessary to build national armed forces in Georgia. Let's assume that the German National-Socialism and its military machine succeeded in defeating of the Soviet empire; however, Germany would be confronted by the whole western coalition with which it could hardly succeed and would be defeated. In that case, Georgia would need other, alternative armed forces; they would oppose Germans if they reached Georgia. And, following the collapse of fascism, Georgians could rightfully claim their independence in front of the victorious

allies. That was the plan, and I consider our activities necessary even in our days. The movement was led by "*Tetri Giorgi*" — carefully conspiratorial, small, and with long-standing traditions. As far as I am concerned, "*Tetri Giorgi*" has existed for some centuries, its preferred principle being ideological influence. Kemal Turkia worked for this organization but he did not know any of its members. Kemal created several groups with various tasks. Ours was one of them.

In that period, we collected money and sent purchased weapons to our units in Dusheti and Tianeti. We were in need of significant sums of money. Violence and theft were categorically rejected. Somebody got the idea to print fake bread coupons. We made a go of this place when the task was undertaken by a professional. It was the Latvian artist Romans Suta. When Germans invaded Riga, he was evacuated to Tbilisi and found a job at the film studio. He was brought to us right from his work, wearing the same clothes with a bit of money in his pocket. Suta set things up brilliantly. Soon, for the purposes of secrecy, we had to move our "enterprise" to another location. He used to meet Kemal only when it was absolutely necessary.

The case was uncovered with the involvement of Suta himself. He was a foreigner who did not know much about our reality; he spoke what he thought; he didn't like the Soviet regime. It was enough for Vanya Pankov, chief of the special department of the studio, to allocate an agent to him; it was Armenak Danelyan, an incompetent film director who was assigned to some insignificant job. When Germans were defeated near Stalingrad, Suta started looking for ways how to flee abroad. Armenak Danelyan told him that he knew a man who was ready to smuggle him over the border for fifty thousand Rubbles. Suta shared his joy with Kemal. He asked him to show Armenak. Once, they made it. Kemal categorically forbade Suta to communicate

with him. Romans followed his advice; however, would the secret police officers calm down? This is what they rigged. Quite unexpectedly, Suta suddenly received an invitation from Moscow to work on a film to be made in Alma-Ata. Naturally enough, he agreed. They bought him a ticket and put on the train to Baku. Armenak and his men solemnly escorted him...

As it turned out later, right there, in Navtlugi, secret police officers removed him from the train. We knew nothing about that. We did not go to escort him for obvious reasons, especially in Navtlugi. Time passed; there were no news from Suta. That alerted us. We had agreed that he should send us a postcard right after his arrival. At the secret police, he was tortured; and soon, they started to attack our organization. As it turned out at face-to-face testimonies and, later, at the court, Suta had reported that it was in the street where Gora introduced him to Kemal Turkia. "He introduced me!" That was why secret police officers decided to target me after Suta."

Here we have to recollect the history of the organization "*Tetri Giorgi*" without which the reader will hardly get oriented in the realities of the Georgian national liberation movement in the past century.

Following the suppression of the anti-Soviet uprising in Georgia, having started in late August, 1924, aimed at restoring of the independence of the Republic of Georgia (existing in 1918–1921), some of the rebels managed to leave the country and, by way of crossing the Turkish border illegally, reached Europe, predominantly France.

In late September 1924, "*Momavali*" ("Future"), the Georgian *émigrés* political non-social organization, was founded in Paris which was aimed at restoring of the independent Georgian state. Shalva Beridze (1892–1970) became a leader of the organization. Later he became a doctor, head of the Department of Georgian Language and Literature at the Institute of oriental Studies in

Naples (1936–1943), then, professor of the University of Naples. He was married to an Italian woman, Caterina Ruperto<sup>8</sup>.

The following *émigrés* were members of the organisation: Kalistrate Salia, Mikheil Kedia, Elise Pataridze, David Mkheidze, Konstantine Kobakhidze, and others<sup>9</sup>.

On 24 October 1924, members of the "Posse of the Sworn" were invited to the convention of the organisation. The detachment, led by the colonel of the army of the Democratic Republic of Georgia Prince Kaikhosro (Kakutsa) Cholokashvili (1888–1930), selflessly fought the Soviet regime in Georgia since March 1922, up to the suppression of the aforementioned uprising. On the proposal of K. Cholokashvili, the said organisation was transformed into the patriotic union "*Tetri Giorgi*" ("White George").

It should also be noted that K. Cholokashvili is a national hero of Georgia. In November 2005, his remains were delivered from Paris to Tbilisi, and, after the memorial service and funeral at St Trinity Cathedral, were buried at the Pantheon of Georgian public figures and writers, on Mount of St David. The burial ceremony was a great event of national importance. The Georgian people paid a decent homage to the blessed memory of the hero who dedicated his life to liberating of his homeland.<sup>10</sup>

On 15 June 1925, the constituent assembly of the youth division of "*Tetri Giorgi*" was held in Paris. It was also aimed at restoring of the independent Georgian state. As a leader of the organisation was elected General Leo Kereselidze (1883–1943), veteran of the First World War, one of the founders of the "Georgian Legion" in the territories of north-western Turkey (formerly Georgian lands) to fight for the restoration of the independent Georgian state. The ideological leader of the organisation was Professor Meikheil (Mikhaiko) Tseteli (1878–1965), a well-known scholar of oriental studies, professor of Berlin and Brussels universities.

Among the honorary members of “*Tetri Giorgi*”, there were prominent representatives of the intellectual elite of the Georgian emigration, among them, the famous writer Grigol Robakidze (1880–1962).

In 1926–1939, the organisation published in Paris the newspaper *Tetri Giorgi* whose motto was “Georgia above all”. The newspaper was edited by Leo Kereselidze (1926–1930), Mikheil Tsereteli (1930–1934), Viktor Nozadze (1935–1936), then again Leo Kereselidze (1936–1939). 106 issues of the newspaper were published.

Other Georgian émigrés, too, worked for the newspaper: Prince Kaikhosro (Kakutsa) Cholokashvili, writer Prince Shalva Amirejibi (uncle of Mzechabuk Amirejibi), professor Prince Zurab Avalishvili, Prince Svimon Tsitsishvili, Nakashidze, Prince Pridon Tsulukidze, Prince Grigol Diasamidze, Prince Vladimer Emukhvari, Prince Alexandre Khimshiashvili, Prince Elizbar Makashvili, Major-General Prince Alexandre Eristavi of Ksani who edited the supplement *Samkhedro Purceli* (Military Paper), Major-General Zakaria (Shakro) Bakradze, Shalva Maglakelidze, Leo and Maria Kereselidze, Kalistrate Salia, Prince Nikoloz (Koki) Dadiani, his son Mikheil Dadiani, Revaz Gabashvili, Tite Margvelashvili, Mikheil Kedia, Alexandre Manvelishvili, Shalva Vardidze, David Sagirashvili, Simonika Bereshiani, Solomon Machavariani, Dimitri Chiabrishvili, Irakli Otkhmezuri, and others.

In 1934, simultaneously with *Tetri Giorgi*, another newspaper *Momavali* (Future) was published, edited by Alexandre Manvelishvili (1904–1994). Prince Irakli Bagrationi (1909–1997), Prince David Vachnadze, Prince Vladimer Emukhvari, and others collaborated with the newspaper.

The Berlin division of “*Tetri Giorgi*” published their own newspaper with the same name (in 1930).

In 1936–1939, “*Tetri Giorgi*” was led by Shalva Maglakelidze, his deputy being Kalist-

rate Salia. Since 1939, the organisation was once again led by L. Kereselidze who died several years later<sup>11</sup>. S. Maglakelidze (1894–1976) was Governor-General of Tbilisi in the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–1921). He was distinguished among the Georgian military fighting on the side of Germans during the Second World War. Before the outbreak of the war, he was appointed a military advisor (*Militärberater*) at the General Staff of the German armed forces in the rank of Oberst (Colonel), and, on 17 July 1944, he was awarded the rank of Major-General of the *Wehrmacht*. He had close links with the military leadership of Germany, including Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the head of the *Abwehr* (military intelligence and counter-intelligence).

While in emigration, the organisation “*Tetri Giorgi*” sought support from western European countries in the struggle for the liberation of Georgia from the occupational Soviet regime. During the Second World War, Germany acted as a patron of “*Tetri Giorgi*.”

Acting with the principle “My enemy’s enemy is my friend,” radical Caucasian and Georgian émigrés, among them, hailed the outbreak of the war between Germany and the USSR with excitement. Those Georgian émigrés believed that Germany, in case of its victory in the Second World War, would support Georgia in restoring of its independence as it happened during the First World War. Some of them, hoping to liberate the country from the Bolshevik regime, joined the hostilities together with Germans as early as 22 June 1941.

People are not unanimous even in our days concerning the Georgians who fought on the side of Germans in the Second World War. Some believe that their behaviour was justifiable, others don’t; however, in fact, in that period, Germany was the only power to fight the Bolshevik regime who buried Georgia’s independence, and that a certain part of Georgians (mostly political émigrés) assumed

Germany as their ally can be explained by that circumstance.

Later the Georgian national-socialist group, led by Giorgi Magalashvili, joined "*Tetri Giorgi*"; following that, "*Tetri Giorgi*" was transformed into the Georgian National-Socialist Party "*Tetri Giorgi*". The most well-to-do Georgian immigrant in Germany was the doctor and journalist Giorgi Magalashvili (1904–1969) who was born in Tbilisi to the family of nobleman Alexandre Magalashvili and Princess Elene Javakhishvili. He studied at Tbilisi State University. For further studies, he was sent to Germany where he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Munich. He received his doctorate (1928) at the same university. He lived in Ising, Bavaria. His wife Baroness Monica Witt was a daughter of a rich German industrialist. During the Second World War, he was in charge of the Georgian centre (in Berlin) publishing, the magazine *Georgian Nation* (1943–1944), and was active in saving the lives of Georgian prisoners-of-war. He was a friend of the director of the Institute for Continental European Studies, prominent physicist and geo-politician, Dr. Alexandre Nikuradze (1901–1981) who was a close friend of Alfred Rosenberg and Arno Schickedanz, the ideologists of the Third Reich. The latter was a would-be governor-general of Georgia. It should also be noted that the above mentioned A. Rosenberg and A. Schickedanz were Baltic Germans who, in their young years, studied at the Riga Polytechnic Institute and were members of the corporation "*Rubonia*". After the war, he chaired the Georgian community in West Germany.

It should be noted that, irrespective of the close cooperation of members of "*Tetri Giorgi*" with Germans and service in the *Wehrmacht*, racist ideology and anti-Semitism was totally unacceptable for the Georgians. That was why they in fact saved the lives of a number of Jews, natives of Georgia, who became prisoners of the Nazi during the Second

World War<sup>12</sup>. Besides, Mikheil Tsereteli, one of the leaders of "*Tetri Giorgi*", strongly opposed the adoption of the party's constitution in exile, calling for the consideration in it of local Caucasian peculiarities after moving the party's activities to the homeland liberated from the occupational Soviet regime.

The organization "*Tetri Giorgi*" conducted its activities in exile till the mid 1950s. The ideological successor became the organisation called "Solidarity of the Georgian Soldiers Abroad," founded in Munich on 26 January 1954; initially, it was led by S. Maglakelidze, and later by his son Gaioz Maglakelidze<sup>13</sup>.

It should also be added that, since 1923 till the mid 1930s, S. Maglakelidze and his wife Maria Grass (who was a local German) lived in Latvia. It was there where their son Gaioz (a.k.a. Kajus-Marius) Maglakelidze (1919–1989) grew, later moving to Germany. All of them were fluent in Latvian.<sup>14</sup>

Influenced by the overseas organisation "*Tetri Giorgi*", at various periods of time, three underground groups emerged in the territory of Georgia. Later all of them were destroyed by the NKVD, and their members were repressed.

In 1926–1937, one of the groups of "*Tetri Giorgi*" was led by the lawyer Evgeni (Geno) Gvaladze (1900–1937) who was shot; another group was led by the colonel of the Democratic Republic of Georgia Prince Alexandre Chavchavadze (1870–1930) who was shot as well; and the third group was led by Levan (Mustafa) Shelia (1921–1943) who was shot dead when they attempted to arrest him. Levan Shelia was born and raised in the family of the noblemen Alexandre Shelia and Nutsa Abdushelishvili. Since his childhood, he hated the Soviet regime and dreamed of liberating of his homeland. For his involvement in a youth anti-Soviet organisation, L. Shelia was arrested and exiled to Siberia back in 1937. In 1940, following his early release, he returned to Georgia and



continued his struggle against the existing political regime. As well as members of the organisation created by him, he believed that the time of liberation of their homeland was approaching.

Based on the materials preserved at the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, it becomes clear that, following his release, in December 1942, Levan Shelia, “being summoned as a witness for another case to the NKVD, on his way he escaped the NKVD officer and went underground, hiding in Tbilisi”<sup>15</sup>.

Despite of his young years, L. Shelia was famous for his chivalrous nature enjoying a great reputation among the youth in Tbilisi. In that period, the city was not big, and virtually all of its residents knew that Levan had already been arrested on political charges and that, since 1942, he lived illegally, that giving him an image of a fearless hero.

There is an interesting recollection about Levan<sup>16</sup> by Tamar (Tatuli) Maskharashvili (b. 1924). She is a daughter of the nobleman Alexandre Maskharashvili (1895–1937) and Princess Barbare (Babo) Dadiani (1903–1999).

Based on the materials preserved at the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia<sup>17</sup>, it becomes clear that members of “*Tetri Giorgi*” used to gather at the apartment of Levan’s uncle, Levan Abdushelishvili (1906–1944) who earlier was a member of the Georgian National-Democratic Party. They listened to German broadcasts by means of the radio receiver “T-6” belonging to L. Abdushelishvili. Shalva Svanidze (1908–1944), his school-mate, regularly visited him for that reason.

On 3 November 1943, in Tbilisi, Levan Shelia was wounded when they attempted to arrest him and he rendered armed resistance. Badly wounded, L. Shelia was taken to prison hospital where he died. On the same day, some of the other members of the organization were arrested.

As far as detained Levan Abdushelishvili did not know about the death of his nephew, in order to save him, he testified that he was in charge of “*Tetri Giorgi*”. That knighthood cost him a high price — he was executed.

The accused L. Abdushelishvili testified that he and his associated “were sure in the rapid defeat of the Soviet Union based on which they agreed to make up an illegal organization aimed at armed overthrow of the Soviet rule when the Germans would reach the Georgian border, and, before the adequate moment, in order to prevent excessive victims and repressions, no active efforts were to be made against the Soviet regime”<sup>18</sup>.

As it turned out later, arrested on the same charges Prince Mikheil Jorjadze (1895–1946) gave his passport and military ID to his relative Vakhtang Jorjadze (1921–1981), who was close to Shelia, and it was Shelia who gave them to him, “an active member of the counter-revolutionary organization, who, during their removal at night on November 3, 1943, rendered armed resistance against the operatives of the NKGB of the GSSR”. It also turned out that Vakhtang Barkalaia, arrested on the same charges, gave shelter to Levan Shelia and provided him with a Parabellum revolver for 4500 Rubbles<sup>19</sup>.

The protocols of interrogations” of the accused individuals preserve fragments of what Levan Shelia, leader of “*Tetri Giorgi*”, said: “Shelia said that, in the process of the armed uprising, as soon as the radio station in Navtlugi was taken over, speakers would read prepared texts, in foreign languages, of their address to the whole world: “Georgian people’s will proclaims by force “an independent state” and, even if we will fail to overthrow the Soviet regime in Georgia, let the whole world know that this uprising is a document testifying that the Georgian people does not want the Soviet rule”... As for the establishment of the independent Georgian state, Shelia said, initially, they would use Germans for that purpose, and later they would get rid of them”<sup>20</sup>.

The court materials refer to “*Tetri Giorgi*” as “the illegal anti-Soviet nationalistic rebel organization,” Suta is referred to as Sutta Romans Yakovlevich, and the surname of Mzechabuk and Maria Amirejibi — as “Amirajibi”.

The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia preserves “The resolution on applying a measure of restraint to Sutta Romans Yakovlevich,” dated 5 September 1943<sup>21</sup>. The resolution reads:

“Sutta Romans Yakovlevich, born in 1896, place of birth — village of Rauna, Riga-Venden district (former province of Lifland), specialist — painter, employment and position — designer at the Georgian Film Studio, not a party member, education — higher, ethnic background — Latvian, citizen of the USSR, marital status — married, evacuated from Riga, family — 4 people, address — Gori str. 18, Tbilisi.

He is suspected of crimes under 19–84 and 58/10 parts of Article 2 of the Criminal Code of the GSSR and, with a view to the fact that, while at large, Sutta may influence the investigation process, guided by Art. 145 and Art. 158 of the RSFSR Code of Criminal Procedure, resolved: detention shall be applied as a measure of restraint to prevent evasion from investigation and trial for Sutta Romans Yakovlevich.

Investigator — Head of Department 3 of Division 2 NKGB of the GSSR, Captain of State Security I. Malania (signature).

The present resolution was reported to me — R. Sutta (signature)<sup>22</sup>.”

The 18 September 1943 Resolution reads:

“...according to the testimonies by the detainee SUTTA R. Y., he was denounced for living illegally in the city of Tbilisi and conducting anti-Soviet agitations among employees of the State Film Studio, besides, intending to illegally cross the border together with his associate Shelia Levan Alexandrovich (a.k.a. Mustafa); the latter is not yet

arrested and is hiding from the authorities.

RESOLVED: the present case was accepted for production of further investigation and identification of all the links of the detainee SUTTA R. Y.”<sup>23</sup>.

In the “Detainee’s questionnaire”, Romans Sutta stated that, beside the daughter Tatyana (b. 1923), he had an illegitimate son — Paul-Voldemar (b. 1929).

The accused Wilhelm Siller testified: “Sutta comforted me that soon, some months later, the Soviet Union would be defeated by Germany, that Germans would come and the Soviet regime would no longer exist. I agreed with him and believed him... Once, Sutta told me that that he would go to one of the front-line cities, and, when Germans occupied it, he would come to them and work for them, that it didn’t matter for him for whom he would work but not for the Soviet regime<sup>24</sup>.”

The document “Information about Sutta Romans Yakovlevich” reads:

“...it was established that in 1941, after the beginning of the war... he was evacuated from Latvia. As a freeloader, he lived at the aforementioned address (Gori Street 18) at Anna Karagasheva’s. 5 or 6 months ago, he was arrested. His family are in Latvia. No other information has been established”<sup>25</sup>.

In the process of investigation, Romans Sutta admitted that he got acquainted with Levan Shelia in the family of Mzechabuk Amirajibi.

It should also be noted that Mzechabuk Amirejibi’s mother Maria Amirejibi (1893–1972), née Princess Nakashidze, was also involved in the case. Her husband (that is, father of Mzechabuk Amirejibi), lawyer, Prince Irakli Amirejibi (1890–1938) was executed by the NKVD during the mass repressions in the USSR.

The “Warrant for the arrest” of Mzechabuk Amirejibi, dated 26 October 1943, reads:

“Amirajibi M. I. had criminal links with the detainee Sutta R. Y. who testified that he was an anti-Soviet element, was going to flee

abroad, was associated with a criminal gang producing fake bread coupons, that being led by the outlaw Shelia Levan (associated with a counter-revolutionary organization) who was a close friend of Amirajibi M. I.

Sutta R. Y. testified that Amirajibi M. I., Astvatsaturova Margo and others took part in the production of bread coupons, that all the participants of the aforementioned criminal gang, including Amirajibi, were anti-Soviet elements and hostile to the existing rule. Astvatsaturova, questioned as a witness, fully confirmed the testimonies by the accused Sutta and named Amirajibi as one of the participants of the aforementioned counter-revolutionary gang<sup>26</sup>.

Sutta admitted that “together with members of the said organization, led by Shelia and Amirajibi, he arranged printing of fake bread coupons, opened a key to the fund of bread coupons, and it was himself who printed those bread coupons”, that “during printing of fake bread coupons they listened to foreign radio broadcasts at Mzechabuk Amirajibi’s place and were engaged in entrenched anti-Soviet conversations”.

R. Suta testified that he took part in printing of fake bread coupons at the apartment of M. Astvatsaturova with whom he “cohabited for about 2–1/2 months,” that “he recruited Wilhelm Siller whom he acquainted with Shelia at his (Siller’s) place, he printed fake bread coupons as well”.

Romans Sutta provided a testimony about the fact that “once Shelia took him to a conspirative apartment in Didube where he printed bread coupons for 40 kg bread which were sold by Shelia himself<sup>27</sup>”.

Archil Tsulukidze confirmed that, together with Romans Suta, he visited Astvatsaturova’s home where he brought the equipment for bread coupons packed in a bag for a gas mask<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, fake bread coupons were mostly printed at the apartment of Margarita Astvatsaturova (1911–2011). She was a daugh-

ter of a lawyer. She spent her childhood in Switzerland. She was married to an engineer Giorgi Akhmeteli, brother of the theatre director Alexandre (Sandro) Akhmeteli. Aleksandre was arrested and executed in 1937, and Giorgi was arrested in 1942 and sent to exile for eight years for “anti-Soviet agitation”. That is why it is not surprising that Margarita was determined extremely anti-Soviet. She worked as a stenographer at the Georgian Film Studio where she met Romans Suta. During the interrogation, she pleaded guilty but stated that she was not a member of the organisation. The verdict of Margarita Astvatsaturova says:

“...she is accused of being determined hostile against the Soviet power and, in May 1942, together with the defendant Sutta, she conducted the defeatist anti-Soviet agitation and expressed desire to join the counter-revolutionary organization, besides, on July 28, 1943, she took part in printing of fake bread coupons for 1500 Rubbles<sup>29</sup>”.

M. Astvatsaturova was released in 1953. She lived in Tbilisi where she gave private lessons in French. She died at the age of 100.<sup>30</sup>

“Protocol of the Interrogation of Amirajibi Mzechabuk Iraklievich of November 27, 1943” says:

“The illegal anti-Soviet nationalist organization in which I was involved since January 1, 1943, was aimed at overthrowing the Soviet rule in Georgia by means of an armed uprising with the support and assistance of the Staff of the German army<sup>31</sup>”.

Concerning his anti-Soviet beliefs, Mzechabuk Amirejibi testified:

“...my anti-Soviet beliefs and hostile attitude to the existing system started since the time my father was arrested, that is, since 1938; besides, I was an opponent of socialism and internationalism. I am a nationalist, supporter of “independent Georgia”. I wanted that the Georgian people enjoyed the right for self-determination and believed that all of those things were not available under the

Soviet rule. I considered that, in their hearts, the Georgian intelligentsia, who, in my opinion, are a significant majority among the population in Georgia, have not reconciled and accommodated with the Soviet power. I was an opponent of the Soviet power... and preferred seeing private property of tools and means of production as a basis of social relationships"<sup>32</sup>.

The resolution, dated 30 December 1943, with the endorsement "Confirmed" and signed by the People's Commissar of State Security of the Georgian SSR, 3<sup>rd</sup> Rank Commissar Avksenti Rapava, and with the endorsement "Sanctioned" extension of the period of investigation till 15 December 1943, signed by the Deputy Prosecutor of the Georgian SSR Shonia, says:

"I, investigator of the Division of Investigations of the NKGB of the GSSR, Major-Engineer Pavlenishvili, having discussed Case No 22 on the accusation of Sutta Romans Yakovlevich according to Art. 58-10 p. 2. and Art. 19-84 of the Criminal Code of the GSSR — found out: on September 4, 1943, Sutta Romans Yakovlevich was arrested for anti-Soviet agitation and intention to flee abroad.

In the process of investigation, pleading guilty for the charges, he testified that he was associated with the counter-revolutionary group, printed fake bread coupons together with members of the organization, who, as well as he, were the individuals with anti-Soviet attitudes.

The said circumstance has been confirmed with witness statements.

In connection with the foregoing within the framework of the present case, 25 individuals have been arrested to date, among whom Svanidze S. V., Abdushelishvili L. K., Kharanaurli P. L., Amirajibi M. I., Tsulukidze G. A., Tsulukidze A. A., and others admitted to have been members of the illegal nationalistic rebel organization aimed at overthrowing of the Soviet rule in Georgia by means of the armed uprising and with the support

of German imperialism in order to establish "Independent Georgian Republic".

With regard to the arrested individuals within the investigation case, it is necessary to carry out some additional investigation activities, such as: re-qualification of allegations, interrogations, confrontation of witnesses, identification of materials associated with alleged individuals, etc.

Based on the foregoing, it was resolved: Initiate a motion to the Prosecutor of the Georgian SSR on the extension of the term of the investigation and detention of the arrested within Case No 22 for one month, that is, till 4 February 1944; this is to be communicated to the internal prison of the NKGB of the Georgian SSR through Division "A" of the NKGB of the Georgian SSR.

Senior Investigator of the Investigation Department of the NKGB of the GSSR, Major-Engineer Shota Pavlenishvili (signature).

"I join" Deputy Head of the Investigation Department of the NKGB of the GSSR, Major of State Security Artashes Markarov (signature).

"I agree" Head of the Investigation Department of the NKGB of the GSSR, Colonel of Militia Mania (signature).

REFERENCE: request for the extension of the term of the investigation is initiated for the third time.

DETAINEES: Sutta R. Y., arrested on 04.09.1943, Amirajibi C. I. — 26.10.1943, Astvatsaturova M. M. — 30.10.1943, Morchiladze A. M. — 03.09.1943, Tsulukidze A. A. — 03.09.1943, Jordjadze V. G. — 03.09.1943, Siller V. V. — 02.11.1943, Pfeffer N. G. — 10.11.1943, Gotsiridze M. G. — 10.11.1943, Jordjadze M. Z. 09.11.1943, Tsulukidze G. A. — 12.11.1943, Machavariani G. S. — 12.11.1943, Ortavadze S. I. — 11.11.1943, Kharanauli P. A. — 11.11.1943, Tke-maladze L. I. — 11.11.1943, Amirajibi M. M. — 13.11.1943, Ishkhneli T. K. — 11.11.1943., Tkavadze R. S. —

12.11.1943, Beridze V. P. — 16.11.1943, Naneishvili L. R. — 19.11.1943, Barkalaia V. A. — 20.11.1943, Svanidze S. V. — 19.11.1943, Abdushelishvili L. K. — 23.11.1943, Kharanauli, A. — convicted on 10-1 Regulations on War Crimes., Gvelesiani S. S. — 19.12.1943, are detained at the internal prison of the NKGB of the GSSR.

Senior Investigator of the Investigation Department of the NKGB of the GSSR, Major-Engineer S. Pavlenishvili (signature)<sup>33</sup>.

The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia preserves the “Indictment”, dated 30 January 1944, dealing with all the members of the mentioned organisation. The document has a chapter about the members of the organisation with the title “Circumstances of the emergence of the case” in which we read: “Temporary success of the German fascist troops, particularly the enemy’s breakthrough to Stalingrad and to the foothills of the Caucasus by the summer of 1942 were accompanied with activation of counter-revolutionary elements in the country, expecting the defeat of the Soviet Union in the war against Germany.”

In their counter-revolutionary aspirations to speed up the defeat of the Soviet power by way of providing all kinds of assistance to German imperialism, in certain cases, the hostile element tried to build counter-revolutionary rebel groups in the country.

In early 1942, the similar counter-revolutionary group was built initiated by the accused in the present case Abdushelishvili Levan Karamanovich (former National-Democrat) and Svanidze Shalva Varlamovich (former Young Marxist), and joined by the now killed Shelia Mustafa Alexandrovich (returnee from the exile; he was in hiding).

THROUGH THE INVESTIGATION IT WAS DETERMINED: In September 1943, the present illegal anti-Soviet nationalistic rebel organisation, uncovered by the NKGB of the Georgian SSR, was aimed at overthrowing of the Soviet rule in Georgia by means of an

armed uprising with help of German imperialism and at establishing the “Georgian independent state”.

In the same case file, there is a text of the proclamation which was to be published by members of the organisation “*Tetri Giorgi*” in case of the anti-Soviet uprising: “The Georgian people’s will proclaim the “independent national state” by force and, even if eventually we will fail in overthrowing of the Soviet rule in Georgia, let the whole world know that this uprising is a document testifying that the Georgian people do not want the Soviet system of rule”<sup>34</sup>.

The document “Indictment” says the following about Romans Suta (pp. 30–31): “He is accused of, being hostile to the Soviet rule, conducting permanent anti-Soviet agitation among his surroundings. He established links with one of the leaders of the illegal nationalistic rebel organization — Shelia Mustafa who was then in hiding and who involved him in illegal anti-Soviet activities, and with whom he was going to flee abroad illegally; he knew that Shelia belonged to a counter-revolutionary organization and conducted illegal activities against the Soviet rule; besides, members of the mentioned organization involved him in printing of fake bread coupons for the sake of collecting money for the needs of the organization. Together with Shelia and other member of the organization, he illegally listened to radio broadcasts of the German army command. Together with Shelia Mustafa, he involved Siller Wilhelm in the said organization who was assigned to conduct anti-Soviet agitation, that is, the crimes provided in Art. 58-10, p. 2, 58-II, 19-58-2 of the Criminal Code of the GSSR and in the Law of 07/08-1932.

Accused Suta pleaded guilty but stated that he was not a member of the organization. It was belied with the testimonies of: Amirajibi, Svanidze, Tsulukidze A., Tsulukidze G., Morchiladze, Astvatsaturova, Jorjadze, Siller, Gotsiridze, Tkavadze, and others”<sup>35</sup>.

At the end of the document “Indictment”, dated 30 January 1944, we read: “The investigation of Case No 22 for the accused... shall be deemed completed, all the charges against all the accused shall be considered proven and, with the permission of Military Prosecutor of the NKVD Troops of the GSSR and through Division “A” of the NKGB of the GSSR, the case shall be directed for the hearing to the Military Tribunal of the NKVD Troops of the GSSR.

The indictment was compiled on 28 January 1944, in Tbilisi, by the deputy head of the Investigation Department of the NKGB of the GSSR — Colonel of the State Security comrade Artashes Markarov<sup>36</sup>.

All the accused were held in Tbilisi, at the internal prison of the NKGB of the GSSR.

Members of the organisation “*Tetri Giorgi*” were punished in various ways. Specifically, Levan Abdushelishvili (b. 1906), Shalva Svanidze (b. 1908), and Romans Suta (b. 1896) were sentenced to death by firing squad; Mzechabuk Amirejibi (b. 1921) and Pavle Kharanauli (b. 1904) were sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment; Giorgi Machavariani (b. 1910) — to 20 years of imprisonment; Vakhtang Jorjadze (b. 1921) and Archil Tsulukidze (b. 1924) — to 15 years of imprisonment; Maria Amirejibi (b. 1893), Archil Kharanauli (b. 1916), Amiran Morchiladze (b. 1922), Giorgi Tsulukidze (b. 1914), Revaz Tkavadze (b. 1925), Wilhelm Siller (b. 1913), Eleonore Pfeffer (b. 1919), Margarita Astvatsaturova (b. 1911) — to 10 years of imprisonment; Giorgi Ishkhneli (b. 1913) and Mikheil Gotsiridze (b. 1901) — to 7 years of imprisonment; Levan Naneishvili (b. 1917) — to 5 years of imprisonment, etc.

“Verdict” (p. 6) reads:

“In accordance with Art. 319 and 320 of the Criminal Code of the Georgian SSR, the court sentenced Abdushelishvili Levan Karamanovich, Svanidze Shalva Varlamovich, Sutta Romans Yakovlevich, for multiple

offenses committed by them, and based on Art. 58-1a of the Criminal Code of the GSSR, shall be subject to capital punishment — shooting, with the confiscation of personal property”<sup>37</sup>.

On 7–12 April 1944, the death penalty against Levan Abdushelishvili and Romans Suta was confirmed. On 14 July 1944, the execution was carried out.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the organisation “*Tetri Giorgi*”, led by Levan (Mustafa) Shelia, consisted of representatives of two generations: 1) of the average age (about 40 and older) and 2) of the younger age (between 18 and 30). All of them were ardent opponents of the Soviet regime and wanted to restore the independent Georgian state.

By the decision of the Soviet law enforcement bodies, the principal ideological opponents of the older age (including the three aforementioned individuals) were physically destroyed, while younger ones were strictly punished but still were kept alive. So they did in relation to women regardless of their age.

This is how tragically the life of the famous Latvian artist Romans Suta ended. It is symbolic that his remains lie in the mass grave together with his executed Georgian friends and associates — Levan Abdushelishvili and Shalva Svanidze, fighters for Georgia’s independence.

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## TBILISI PERIODS (1941–1944) ROMANA SUTAS DZĪVĒ NO LATVIJAS MĀKSLINIEKA MŪŽA PĒDĒJĀ POSMA VĒSTURES

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## Kopsavilkums

Pazīstamā Latvijas gleznotāja, scenogrāfa un skolotāja Romana Sutas (1896–1944) dzīves un radošās darbības nogale ir saistīta ar Gruziju. Rakstā apskatīts Romana Sutas Tbilisi periods un viņa tuvākie līdzgaitnieki Gruzijā.

1941. gada vasarā Romans Suta ieradās Tbilisi. Viņš sāka strādāt Gruzijas filmu studijā par gleznotāju. Strādājis pie filmām: *In Black Mountains* (1941, režisors Nikolozs Šengelaja), *Giorgi Saakadze* (1942, režisors Mihails Čiaureli), *The Shield of Jurgai* (1944, režisori Siko Dolidze un Dāvids Rondeli).

Romana Sutas veiksmīgo radošo darbību spēji pārtrauca arests 1943. gada 4. septembrī. Viņam tika izvirzītas apsūdzības kā “tautas ienaidniekam” un par maizes kartīšu viltošanu. Suta tika notiesāts uz nāvi un 1944. gada 14. jūlijā nošauts. 1959. gadā Romans Suta tika daļēji reabilitēts, PSRS Augstākās tiesas militārā kolēģija atsauca apsūdzību par “tautas ienaidnieku”, taču apsūdzība maizes kartīšu viltošanā palika spēkā.

Rakstā parādīti īstie iemesli apsūdzībām, kas tika izvirzītas pret Sutu. Viņa paziņu memoriāri, kas glabājas Gruzijas leikšlietu ministrijas arhīvos, pierāda, ka Romans Suta bija Gruzijas pretpadomju organizācijas “*Tetri Giorgi*” loceklis.

Šīs organizācijas vadītājs bija Levans (Mustafa) Šelija, tās locekļi: Levans Abdušelišvili, Šalva Svanidze, Mzečabuks (Čabua) Amiredžibi, Marija Amiredžibi (Nakašidze), Pavle un Arhils Haranauli, Džordži Mahavariani, Vahtangs Džordžadze, Archils un Džordži Culukidze, Amirans Morhiladze, Vilhelms Sillers, Eleonora (Nora) Pfeferē un citi. Minētās organizācijas mērķis bija, izmantojot Vācijas–PSRS karu, atjaunot Gruzijas valstisko neatkarību. Raksts balstīts uz daudzveidīgiem arhīvu materiāliem.