

THE LAST QUEEN OF GEORGIA MARIA

Ivane Imerlishvili, Full Prof.
Grigol Robakidze University, Georgia

Abstract

In the paper the fact of an assassination of General Lazarev (1766-1803) is discussed, which up to the present day according to the existing Georgian, Russian and European sources and according to the existing special literature in the Foreign languages, is prescribed to the last Queen of Georgia Maria (1768-1850) which is an inaccurate version and is based on an unfounded supposition. An assassination as if done by the last Queen of Georgia Maria, who was the wife of King Giorgi XII (1746-1800), does not coincide with an assumption of many Georgian, Russian and European scientists.

Keywords: Assassination, Queen, Accusation, General

Introduction:

It is known that an assassination of Major-General Ivan Petrovich Lazarev (1766-1803), which up to the present day is shrouded in mystery, is connected with the name of the last Queen of Georgia Maria.

Basing on rich historical facts and on the grounds of scientific analysis, I shall try to mention that the Georgian Queen is guiltless of a crime and that the blame was just put on her for an assassination as of the Russian general.

This assassination as if done by the last queen of Georgia called many foreign writers' attention at one time.

In the Georgian, Russian and European sources predominates an idea that General Lazarev was assassinated by the last Queen of Georgia Maria which is false and does not correspond with the truth.

It is not my aim to reveal the guiltlessness of Maria which itself is well-known for the modern Georgian historians.

On the basis of the scientific analysis carried out by me, I have come to that conclusion that for the European sources the report published by colonel Rottiers was the footing point for creating the various kinds of literary sketches about an assassination of General Lazarev by Queen Maria.

This report written by Rottiers was published in the French language in the journal "The Inhabitants Of Asia", in the issue of June 1827, which was translated into Georgian by Alexander Chkonia and was published in the magazine "The Herald", N 7, 1894.

The story about an assassination of General Lazarev by Queen Maria was told to Rottiers by a parish priest Onisime Ioseliani who used to celebrate mass at St. George church which belonged to that palace where the Queen was arrested. Rottiers himself published his own account in the French language in the above-mentioned journal under the title Queen of Georgia Maria.

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In spite of an unfounded assertion of an assassination of general Lazarev by Queen Maria, colonel Rottiera writes: "I considered it my duty to tell you thoroughly this historical fact, which I regard much more interesting. Though in some circumstances I am against the

other writers who touch on the same fact and relate it to us differently, but I am completely convinced of the truthfulness of the story told by me and I am even responsible for it”.

This report written by colonel Rottiers who served in the Russian Army was used by many others from the very outset, especially by the European writers who in spite of having little desire, all the same, wanted to present the readers with this or that heroic and half romantic episodes. And if the European writers really wanted to show the stories elucidated with the splendid and noble patriotism of a Georgian woman, the act committed by Maria must have been the harshest and the most attractive episode for them.

Here I want to note that the writer Iohannes Wille, basing on the report by Rottiers, published the story in Stuttgart in 1888 under the title *The Last Queen of Georgia*.

According to Oliver Wardrop (1864-1948): “In 1803 Prince Tsitsishvili, a Georgian succeeded Knoring. By his advice all the royal family were summoned to Russia, “in order to prevent civil discussions”, and this removal was organized by a very unfortunate incident. Queen Maria, widow of Giorgi, refused to go; General Lazarev proceeded early one morning to the queen’s sleeping apartments with some soldiers and attempted to force her to accompany him; she killed him with a dagger which she had concealed under her dress and her young son and daughter stabbed some of the soldiers. They were, of course, overpowered and carried off; at Dariel, in the narrowest part of the pass, a few Tagaur Ossets made a vain attempt at a rescue. Queen Maria was kept imprisoned in a convent at Voronezh for seven years, and never saw her native land again”. /Wardrop, Oliver – *The Kingdom of Georgia*, London, 1977, p.130/.

According to David Marshall Lang (1924), “Arriving at Tbilisi on 1 February 1803, Tsitsianov’s first care was to pack off the remaining members of the old royal family. The former Prince-Regent David and his uncle, Prince Vakhtang, left Tbilisi under escort later in February. There remained the Dowager Queen Darejan, widow of Erekle II and the widow of the late King Giorgi XII, Queen Mariam with her seven children. In April, Tsitsianov heard that Queen Mariam was planning to flee to the mountain strongholds of Khevsureti with the aid of loyal clansman from the hills. He therefore gave orders that the Queen and her children should be sent off into exile in Russia under guard the very next morning. To impart an air of ceremony to the proceedings, it was decided that Major-General Lazarev, commander of Russian troops in Tbilisi, should proceed in full uniform to the Queen’s residence, with a military band and two companies of infantry, and prevail upon her to take her departure forthwith.

Death of a general of the ensuing tragedy there are several contemporary accounts on, based on the reports of eye-witnesses. Arriving at Queen Mariam’s mansion, Lazarev found her in her private apartment, seated on a couch, and surrounded by her seven sleeping children. The general strode brusquely up to the queen and said, through his interpreter: “Get up; it is time to be off”. The Queen calmly replied: “Why this hurry to get up? Can you not see my children peacefully asleep round about me? If I wake them up abruptly, it might be harmful to them. Who has given you so peremptory an order?”

The general replied that his orders were from Prince Tsitsianov himself.

“Tsitsianov, that mad dog!”- Queen Maria cried out.

At this, Lazarev bent down to drag her forcibly to her feet. The Queen was holding on her knees a pillow, beneath which she held concealed the dagger which had belonged to her late husband, King Giorgi. As quick as lightning, she drew the dagger and stabbed Lazarev through the body with such force that the tip of the weapon emerged through his left side. Mariam pulled the dagger from the gaping wound and threw it in the face of her prostrate tormentor, saying: “So dies anyone who dares add dishonour to my misfortune!”

At Lazarev’s exspressing cry, his interpreter drew his sword and hacked at the Queen’s left arm. Soldiers rushed in and beat at the Queen with their rifle butts. They dragged her from the house all covered in blood, and hurled her with her children into a carriage.

Escorted by a heavy guard of armed horsemen, the party left Tbilisi along the military road leading to Russia over the Daryal Pass. Everywhere the Queen's carriage was surrounded by devoted Georgians, who wept as they struggled to bid farewell to the family of their late sovereign. These loyal manifestations were repulsed by the Russian soldiery. When one of the children cried out that he was thirsty, a bystander brought up a jug of water which the Russian escort hurled to the ground. On arrival in Russia, Queen Mariam was imprisoned for seven years in a convent at Voronezh. She lived to a great age, and eventually died in Moscow in 1850. She was interred in Tbilisi with regal honours. The Queen Dowager Darejan – “that Hydra”, as Tsitsianov delicately termed her – held out until the October of 1803, when she too was bundled off to Russia” /Lang, David Marshall- A Modern History of Georgia, London, 1962, pp 46-47/.

It is true that the story of an assassination of General Lazarev is described differently by the various scientists and authors but that fact that Lazarev was assassinated by Queen Maria is false.

I shall try to prove that Lazarev was not assassinated by Queen Maria and that he became the victim of quite another person.

And really, is it interesting who assassinated general?

Lazarev, according to an academician Nicholas Dubrovin (1837-1904), was a straightforward, frank and honest person who was assassinated out of envy by General Prince Paul Tsitsianov (1754-1806), the relative of the royal family of Georgia who had been in the service of Russia for a long time.

Paul Tsitsianov wanted to get rid of this pesky general, especially as this latter enjoyed a considerable authority at the Emperor's court.

Soon an opportunity itself turned up and Lazarev was assassinated on the 19th of April, 1803, while telling the Queen about an order of banishment, on which Maria refused, flew into a rage and slew General Lazarev.

According to an official statement, Queen Maria was an assassin. But the eyewitnesses and other reliable persons, among them the representatives of the Georgian Royal family spoke in favour of Queen Maria.

In 1818, the archbishop Papnuti Khoziashvili being in Petersburg, managed to report about the blamelessness of Queen Maria in the case of an assassination of General Lazarev to the Sovereign-Emperor.

The archbishop was asserting that he himself was present on the spot where the tragedy took place on the 19th of April, 1803, when general Lazarev was assassinated and was underlying categorically the guiltlessness of the Queen.

According to the archbishop, Maria did not even take part in an assassination.

It is hard to state who stabbed General Lazarev during the quarrel with the Queen and her children. But it is of no vital importance because the performers can always be found if they are promised a reward.

The person who did not pity general for death and hired an assassin to crown this business was Governor-General P. Tsitsianov in Georgia who was appointed to this post on the 8th of September, 1802, and who was conducting unswervingly the Russian policy in Georgia.

To my mind, Commander-In-Chief P. Tsitsianov regarded General Lazarev as his rival because he had a very great prestige at the sovereign's court and as a result of this was filled with envy towards him and planned to assassinate him.

Soon a lucky chance itself cropped up and Lazarev was assassinated in such circumstances that laying an accusation of slaying against Maria was not of a great difficulty for Tsitsianov who artfully found the means of disposing of General Lazarev by ordering him to take away the Queen by force from the palace and then to deport her to Russia.

So General Lazarev was forced to banish the Queen from Georgia and during the fulfillment of an order given to him by Governor-General Paul Tsitsianov, he was assassinated by a hired assassin and not by the Queen.

The documentary proof about that Lazarev was assassinated by Paul Tsitsianov is given in the book under the title *The History of the 13-th Erivani Life Grenadiers Regiment of His Majesty*, compiled by the staff-captain Shabanov of the same regiment, Tbilisi, 1871, part III which is in the Russian language.

In the list added at the end of the book, after the page 177, in appendix of the 3rd part, it is clearly seen who assassinated General Lazarev which I have included in my book *The Last Queen of Georgia Maria* published by Grigol Robakidze University in 2007, edited by the Rector of the University, Professor Mamuka Tavkheldidze.

There is an outline in appendix of the 3rd part of the book in which we read that P. I. Lazarev /1791-1803/ was assassinated by chief. It must be I. P. Lazarev in the list and not P. I. Lazarev and this mistake done in the book is simply a printer's error.

It is exactly indicated in the list that General Lazarev was eliminated by chief and I think it is clear for everybody who was the direct chief of Lazarev.

It is difficult to say to whom chief secretly ordered an elimination of his faithful and open-hearted right hand. Maybe, he ordered to commit this foul crime to a certain officer or even to a soldier who are of no vital importance.

And Tsitsianov himself was assassinated perfidiously in Baku in 1806.

Conclusion:

It is true that the story of an assassination of General Lazarev is described differently by the various Georgian, Russian and European scientists and authors but that fact that Lazarev was eliminated by Queen Maria is incorrect and false which is already shown in my book printed in the Georgian language that was mentioned above.

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