

Fake Grave of Stalin’s Father and Modernity: Materials for Biography of Joseph Stalin

by

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Abstract

The narrative around well-known Soviet leader Joseph Stalin has always been surrounded by secrets and contradictions. The life of his family members is no exception. The archives of Georgia contain many interesting documents about the biography of Joseph Stalin and his family members. In this case, Stalin’s father, Besarion (Beso) Jughashvili, and his grave are of particular interest. For a long time, it was believed that the grave of Besarion Jughashvili was in Telavi, Kakheti, Eastern Georgia, in the so-called “The Cemetery of Georgians.” Documents found in the Georgian Central Historical Archive and the Archives of Internal Affairs of Georgia reveal the true story behind the death of Joseph Stalin’s father. According to these documents, Besarion Jughashvili died in Tbilisi. He was hospitalized in the “Mikhail Hospital” and died of liver cirrhosis on August 12, 1909. The doctor’s signature and other available information confirm his death in the hospital. His body was buried in the “Kukia Cemetery” in Tbilisi. Thus, he was buried in Tbilisi but his real grave is lost. Why? What about his tomb in Telavi? For a long time, it was considered the grave of Stalin’s father. Some documents of 1954, letters with anonymous authors, which are stored in the Georgian archives, contain a long history of Besarion’s move to Telavi to his niece. These archival documents tell the story of the death of Besarion Jughashvili and explain how Besarion Jughashvili’s grave was located in Televi. All of this information does not appear to be a reality and is just gossip from residents about the last years of Besarion Jughashvili’s life. In addition, false information is also circulated among scholars who deal with Joseph Stalin’s biography and family life. According to these scientists, Besarion Jughashvili was killed in 1906 and buried in Telavi. All these reports, as well as information about the murder of Besarion Jughashvili, later became an interpolation of historical reality. The real reasons for creating these myths are not fully known and need to be studied further.

Keywords: The Georgian achieves, Joseph Stalin, Biography, Soviet documents, Soviet Union, Historiography

Introduction:

Studying the biography of a person like Joseph Jughashvili (Stalin) does not lose its relevance. There is a lot of very interesting research on Stalin such as Stephen Kotkin, “Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941,” 2017; Stephen Kotkin, “Stalin: Volume I: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928”, 2014; 2014; Oleg V. Khlevniuk, (*Translation by Nora Seligman Favorov*) “Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator”, 2017; Robert Service “Stalin: A Biography”, 2005; Simon Sebag

Montefiore, “Young Stalin”, 2007; R. Brackman, *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin: A Hidden Life*, 2001; Edvard Radzinsky, “Stalin: The First In-depth Biography”, 1997; Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, “Time of Stalin-portrait of a tyranny”, (*Translated from the Russian by George Saunders*), 1981; Ian Grey, Robert H. McNeal, “Stalin: Man and Ruler”, 1988; Ronald Hingley, “Joseph Stalin: Man and Legend”, 1974; Robert D. Warth, “Joseph Stalin”, 1969; Edward Ellis Smith, “Young Stalin: The Early Years of an elusive Revolutionary”, 1967; Essad-bay “Stalin: The Career of a Fanatic (Translation From The German by Huntley Paterson), 1932; I. Iremashvili “Stalin and the Tragedy of Georgia”, Berlin, 1932; E. Padzinsky, “Iosef Stalin. Nacholo” (Russian) 2012; A. Medvedov, “Heizvestni Stalin” (Unknown Stalin) (Russian), 2012; A. Martorosian, “Stalin: Biografia Vojdia” (Biography of a Lider) (Russian), 2012; A. Ostrovsky, “Kto Stoial sa spinoi Ctalina”, (Russian) 2004; and so on.

The narrative around well-known Soviet leader Joseph Jughashvili (Stalin) has always been surrounded by secrets and contradictions. The life of his family members is no exception. The archives of Georgia contain many interesting documents about the biography of Joseph Stalin and his family members.

Documents found in the Georgian Central Historical Archive and the Archives of Internal Affairs of Georgia reveal the true story behind the death of Joseph Stalin’s father. According to these documents, Besarion Jughashvili died in Tbilisi. He was hospitalized in the “Mikhail Hospital” and died of liver cirrhosis on August 12, 1909.

It should be noted that the publication of unknown documents about Joseph Jughashvili (Stalin), which I found in various archives of Georgia, is impossible without an analysis of already published materials since the content of these new materials about the grave of Stalin’s father completely differs from the “real” facts known to the residents of Telavi, which, in fact, is false.

Methodology:

For analyzing information archival documents I guided with the following methods and principles of modern scientific research:

- i. Comparative Method – comparing historical objects with time, analyzing and revealing similarities and differences;
- ii. System Method – making a generalized model by using materials found out during the process of investigation, which will be the reflection of the real situation taking place in social interrelations and upheavals typical to historical process, or present-day situations;
- iii. Retrospective Method – investigating past gradually, in order to find out genuine reasons for occurred historical events;
- iv. Ideographic Method – coherent description of historical occurrences and objective factual materials;
- v. Logical Method – making objective analysis about the situations in order to shed light on the historical development stages and define boundaries for separate historical ones;
- vi. Chronological Method – studying historical events chronologically;
- vii. Chronological-Problematic Method – studying problems of chronological occurrences thoroughly;
- viii. Historical-Comparative Method – investigating the past from present including current situation by using comparative analysis of historical events and processes;

- ix. Structural Method – studying events accompanied to the historical process coherently.

Content:

As it is officially known, Besarion (Beso) Jughashvili, the father of Joseph Jughashvili (Stalin), died of illness¹ on August 12, 1909, in Tbilisi at the so-called “Mikhail Hospital”. One of the documents stored in the Archive of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia says (Institute of Marxism-Leninism Materials, 1936):

“In 1906 a postman brought a newspaper... and reported that Beso Jughashvili was allegedly killed at Vanqi Street.² Soso was said to be desperate”

There are also memories of contemporaries of Stalin’s father; an informant claims to have participated in Besarion Jughashvili’s funeral procession from the Mikhail hospital to the “Kukia³ Cemetery” in Tbilisi (Institute of Marxism-Leninism Materials, 1935).

However, some Stalin biographers disagree with this information and claim that Besarion Jughashvili’s death or murder occurred in Telavi. For example, Roman Brackman writes that Besarion Jughashvili was murdered in Telavi⁴ in March 1906 (Brackman, 2001).

Due to different opinions on this case, I decided to study it further. In this article, I will present interesting archive materials about the illness and death of Stalin’s father, the signature of the hospital doctor, etc. (See photos 1, 2) (Mikhailov Hospital materials, 1909), found in the Georgian historical archives, in the hope that our readers will be interested in documents written in Soviet times.

In the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, letters from an anonymous author of 1954 are stored; The author believes that Besarion Jughashvili’s grave is in Telavi, namely, in the northeastern part of the so-called “The cemetery of Georgians.”⁵ In fact, in Telavi there is a grave with an image of a person and an inscription on it - Beso Jughashvili (see photos 3, 4, 5) about which I will mention later.

Thus, The Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia received anonymous letters (The Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia materials, 1954) with the following content:

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

It is clear to everyone that Stalin is dead. But why is his father’s real grave concealed? Why the photos of Beso (Stalin’s father) brought by me are hidden? Why they do not question the employees of the branch [of Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin], for instance, Comrade Nadia Sturua, Jashiashvili and the rest of the staff about the location of Besarion’s grave?...he was a poor man, and that’s why they do not even try to pay attention to him. Speak up and investigate; his grave is in Telavi and there are some old people still alive who knew him well and worked with him...”

¹ Liver cirrhosis.

² Kukia is the name of the street in Tbilisi.

³ It is a name of district in Tbilisi.

⁴ Telavi is a city in East Georgia.

⁵ It is a name of cemetery in Telavi.

The author in his letter accuses the “party people” of keeping information about the whereabouts of the grave of Stalin’s father secret and of being hostile to Stalin for “embarrassing his mother’s name”. At the end of the letter, the author writes with dissatisfaction that he spoke about this case even to Stalin’s classmate from the Gori Orthodox Seminary, George Elizavedashvili, but he also did nothing:

“He turned to me and said - don’t talk about Stalin’s father anymore, hide everything you have about his life and stop ... As soon as I spoke with Sturua, it became obvious that no one wanted to listen to me.”

The author writes herein (The Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia materials, 1954) :

“My 80-year-old parent says that he remembers Beso... and says that Beso is buried in Telavi. According to him, Beso was made to pay tax; and he went to his relative ... My father says that he was present when He (Beso) said [to someone]: I know that you are going there; I want to visit my niece’s family; can you take me?... and on the third day they brought him there; We were happy that no one could harm him; all comrades were happy; He died there ... he is buried there. Father is surprised why this fact is hidden. It is really hidden; just ask why the photo and grave in Telavi are hidden.”

The funeral of Besarion Dzhughashvili in Telavi is mentioned elsewhere in the letter:

“Keke⁶points out that he(Beso) died in the family of his niece and was buried there and says that her husband was ill and got swollen from time to time; she herself could not go there(in Telavi) as she didn’t have enough money...”.⁷

Presumably, the same anonymous author sent another letter as he uses the same handwriting and signs it as “Truth teller”.

The second letter contains information about Besarion Jughashvili’s relative, a woman who was still alive at the time, and claimed that Beso’s grave was in Telavi. According to the author, this woman was persecuted for telling the truth about Stalin’s father. The letter says:

“Sturua’s and Jashiashvili’s ⁸misguided thoughts and betrayal affected her and she poisoned herself.”

The letter also contains information that the author brought witnesses to confirm the existence of Beso Jughashvili’s grave in Telavi, but Nadia Sturua threatened him with the words,

“Do not try to investigate this case. It seems we are of no importance here ... be silent, otherwise, we will put you on trial ... Convince everyone that he is buried in the city (Tbilisi) to silence them.”

An analysis of the letter shows that the author lived in Tbilisi and knew Ekaterina Geladze, Besarion Jughashvili’s wife, personally. The information that Besarion Jughashvili’s niece lived in Telavi is also very interesting. I haven’t met this fact in any other source.

I recently published a short article about Beso Jughashvili’s tomb in Telavi in one of the newspapers. After the publication, several people contacted me. Some of them were simply interested in this story, while others told me that the tomb in Telavi undoubtedly belonged to Beso

⁶ Stalin’s mother, Ekaterine (Keke) Geladze.

⁷ Here we see the symptoms of Besarion Jughashvili’s illness which is characteristic to liver cirrhosis.

⁸ Those two were employee of Tbilisi Branch of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.

Jughashvili (?!). It turned out that some of them, especially older residents of Telavi, remember that in the so-called “The cemetery of Georgians” in Telavi, in place of the current iron fence and marble grave, there was another grave of Jughashvili. It was a tomb that was built at the beginning of the 20th century and bore the inscription “Beso Jughashvili” and a cross, but then it disappeared. I became interested in this fact, opened an investigation, and soon found Beso Jughashvili’s old tombstone, which was reportedly removed from his alleged grave, in the archaeological collection at the Telavi History Museum. Although damaged - half of the inscription is still on it (photo 6) - a cross carved on the tombstone and the inscription in the Georgian language ბე (Be) ... and ჯუღა (Juga) are clearly visible... although it is fragmented, it is still legible (photo 7) (Simashvili, 2020).

As experts in the field have explained to me, this gravestone is a metamorphic rock of monolithic origin - sandstone. Typically, this type of stone carving is simple, and in the old days, these inferior stones were used as tombstones by ordinary people. Since the stone has a layered structure, it collapses easily over time.

After collecting these materials, I began to investigate how the tombstone with the inscription “Beso Jughashvili” appeared in Telavi since Beso Jughashvili was reported to have been buried in Tbilisi in the so-called “Kukia Cemetery”.

In the Central Historical Archive of Georgia, I studied death records for the first decade of the 20th century, stored in the so-called “Parish Registers” compiled by the three existing Telavi churches. The information on birth, marriage, and death of Telavi residents was mainly recorded by these three churches. One of them served various ethnic groups, such as Russians, Armenians, etc. Two other churches served the Georgians. One of these two churches was the “Transfiguration Church of the Lord”, also called “Gvtaeba”¹⁶ which primarily served the people of Telavi.

Unfortunately, I could not find information about the death of Beso Jughashvili. I have to mention that several “Parish registers” of the three existing churches of that period are missing, in particular, two “Parish Registers” recorded from 1870 to 1917, including the records from 1902 and 1906, which were of particular interest to us because, as mentioned above, R. Brackman writes that Beso Jughashvili was killed in Telavi in 1906.

Since I could not find any documents about Beso Jughashvili’s Telavi tomb in the archives, I tried to find elderly people who could give me the necessary information about it. As a result, I found one person, Estate (Baia) Chikvaidze, the son of Mikhail Chikvaidze who made an iron fence for Beso Jughashvili’s old grave and took care of the grave until his death in 1975. According to Estate Chikvaidze, the east side of the so-called “Cemetery of Georgians” in Telavi was covered with shrubs.

In the early 1960s, Mikhail and his children accidentally found this grave while strolling through the territory of a cemetery. It was an old tombstone that had an inscription “Beso Jughashvili” and a small cross on it. Estate’s father Mikhail Chikvaidze, who loved Stalin very much, built an iron fence around the grave. He also placed a small marble slab with the inscription and Beso Jughashvili’s photo on it. Those interested can still find this tomb there (photos 8 & 9) (Simashvili, 2015).

Estate Chikvaidze confirmed that the tombstone kept at Telavi Historical Museum was the original one that was placed on the alleged grave of Beso Jughashvili. According to him, the stone remained there long after the iron fence was installed, but later it disappeared. Estate Chikvaidze gave us several photos that prove his words about the grave; In one of them is Stalin’s grandson Evgeny Jughashvili with his wife in Telavi at the alleged grave of Beso Jughashvili in the 1970s. (see photo 10) (Unkoun Author, 1970).

¹⁶ The Georgian word “Gvtaeba” means Deity.

Conclusion:

Based on the foregoing, it becomes clear that the archival documents contain a lot of interesting information about the causes of the death of Father Joseph Stalin and the whereabouts of his grave. The truth is that he was taken to the so-called “Mikhail Hospital” in Tbilisi in 1909 and died there. Other materials are also interesting, but as seen, they contain people’s false memories or reflections on the gossips. The archival documents prove that Stalin’s father was buried in the so-called “Kukia cemetery” in Tbilisi; moreover, at that time there was less opportunity to carry his body in Telavi, since this town is quite far from Tbilisi and, besides, Beso was a poor man with no wealthy relatives. Thus, the idea of Beso Jughashvili’s Telavi tomb is incorrect. All information related to his funeral in Telavi is also part of the myth. However, the interesting question is who invented such stories? What was the reason to hide his grave? We are currently unable to answer these questions accurately. Who knows, in the future, we can find more documents revealing this hidden story.

Fans of Josef Jughashvili (Stalin) from Telavi, who are few in number, contributed to the creation of the “new” myth; In 2018, a black gravestone with the inscription “Besarion Jughashvili” in the Georgian language was additionally placed on the fake grave of Stalin’s father (photo 11) (Simashvili, 2020). Many people know nothing about this fact and they believe that the grave really belongs to Beso Jughashvili. Therefore, it is necessary to publish and popularize my research so that future generations do not live with such false stories.²¹

²¹ there are a lot of other myths about Stalin in Georgia

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№ по книге	1679	Отделение	Мераневское	
Имя, отчество и фамилия	Тесо Михаил Юрьевич			
Нация и вероисповедание	Арм. кр. Виши			
Словесие или звание	Мр			
Возрасть	55			
Семейное положение	Женат			
Место происхождения	Тифлисской губернии			
Место жительства	Зу. Нарматской уезды			
Скол. вр. жив. в Тифлис.	Кемь достав. больной			
Родь занятія	Самозанят			
Образование	мр			
Имущественное положение				
Время поступления	26 августа 1909			
Время выбытия	умер 12 окт. 1909			
Болезнь	Colitis. Pneumonia стр.			

Мес. и час	Температура	Пulse	Дыхание	Течение болезни	Порция	ЛЕЧЕНИЕ	
						Внутреннее	Наружное
8/11				<p>Тяжелая инфекция на почках, в мочевом пузыре и в мочевом канале. Начались мучительные боли в области желудка.</p> <p>Ст. врач: - сибирская средняя росяка сибирской. Рядом сибирской сибирской, в области сибирской. Подкожной сибирской, раббит, плосо, мучительная сибирской.</p> <p>Область желудка при давлении болезненна; урассея процессивная.</p>			<p>Рр. Ser. ant. grand. 100 200 300</p>

Photo 1 The hospital documentation (Mikhailov Hospital materials, 1909)

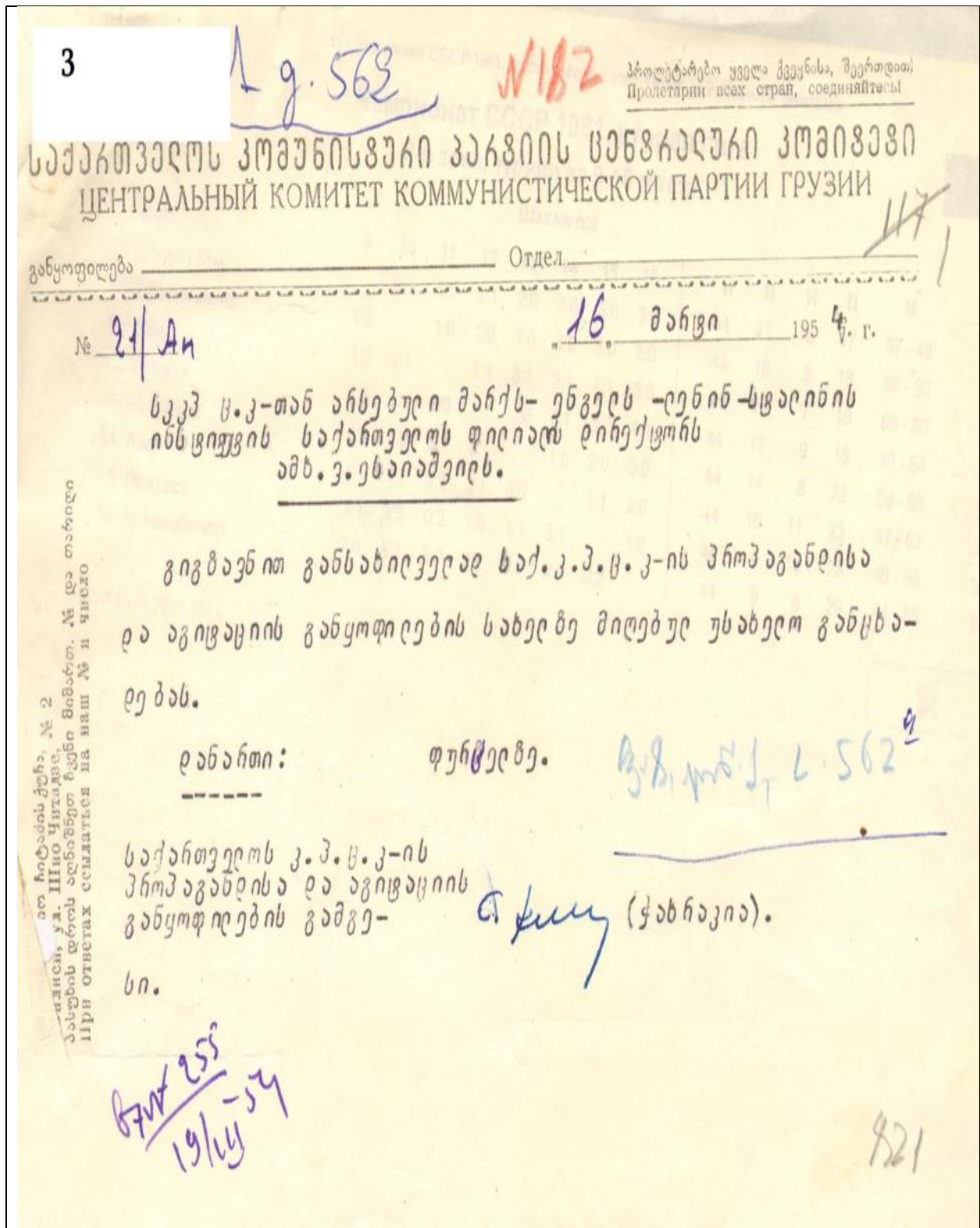


Photo 3 letter from an anonymous author (The Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia materials, 1954)

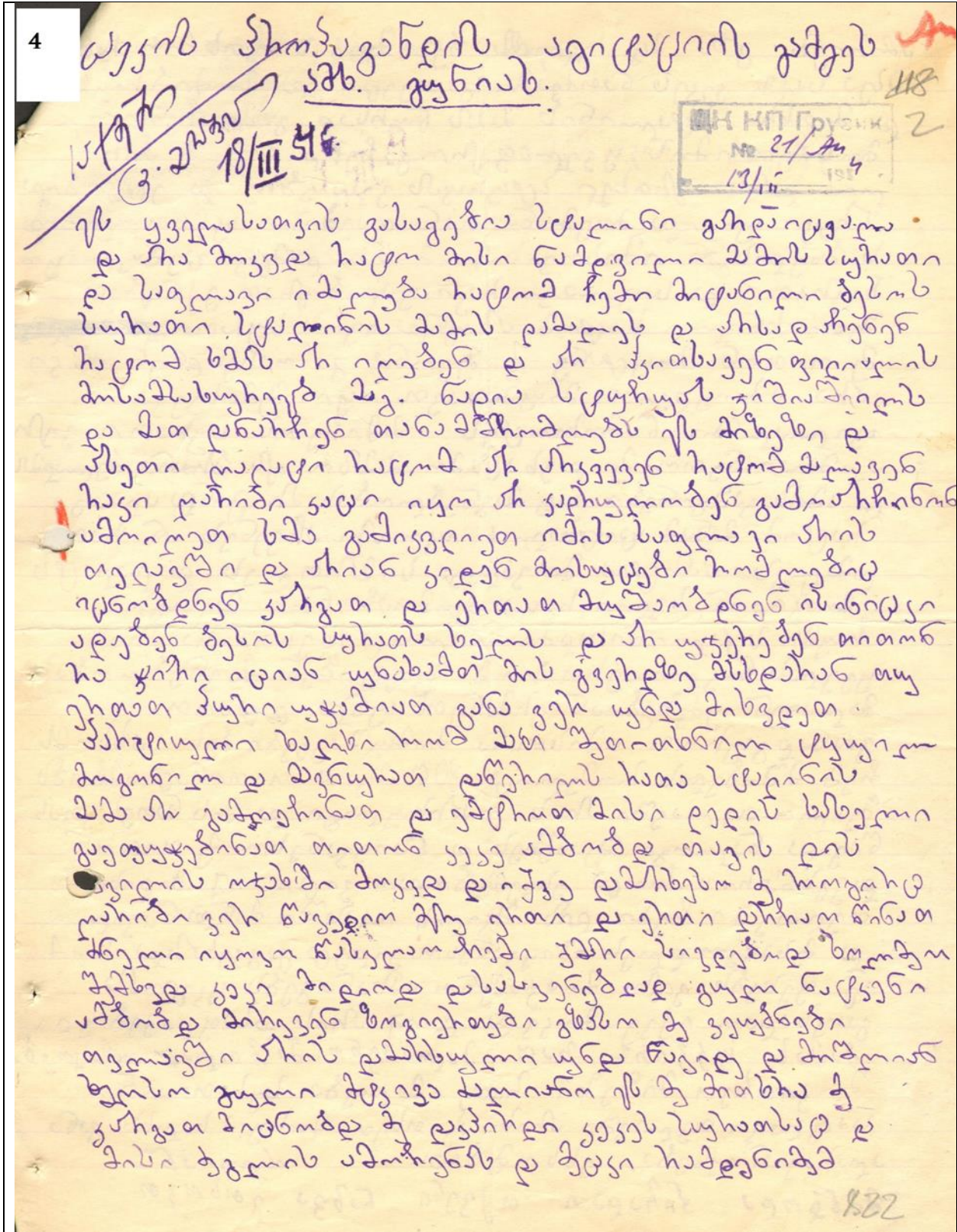


Photo 4 Letter from an anonymous author (The Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia materials, 1954)



Photo 6 Cross and the inscription in Georgian language (Simashvili, 2020)



Photo 7 Cross and the inscription in Georgian language (Simashvili, 2020)



Photo 8 Inscription (Simashvili, 2015)



Photo 9 Grave (Simashvili, 2015)



Photo 10 The alleged grave of Beso Jughashvili in the 1970 (Unknoun Author, 1970)

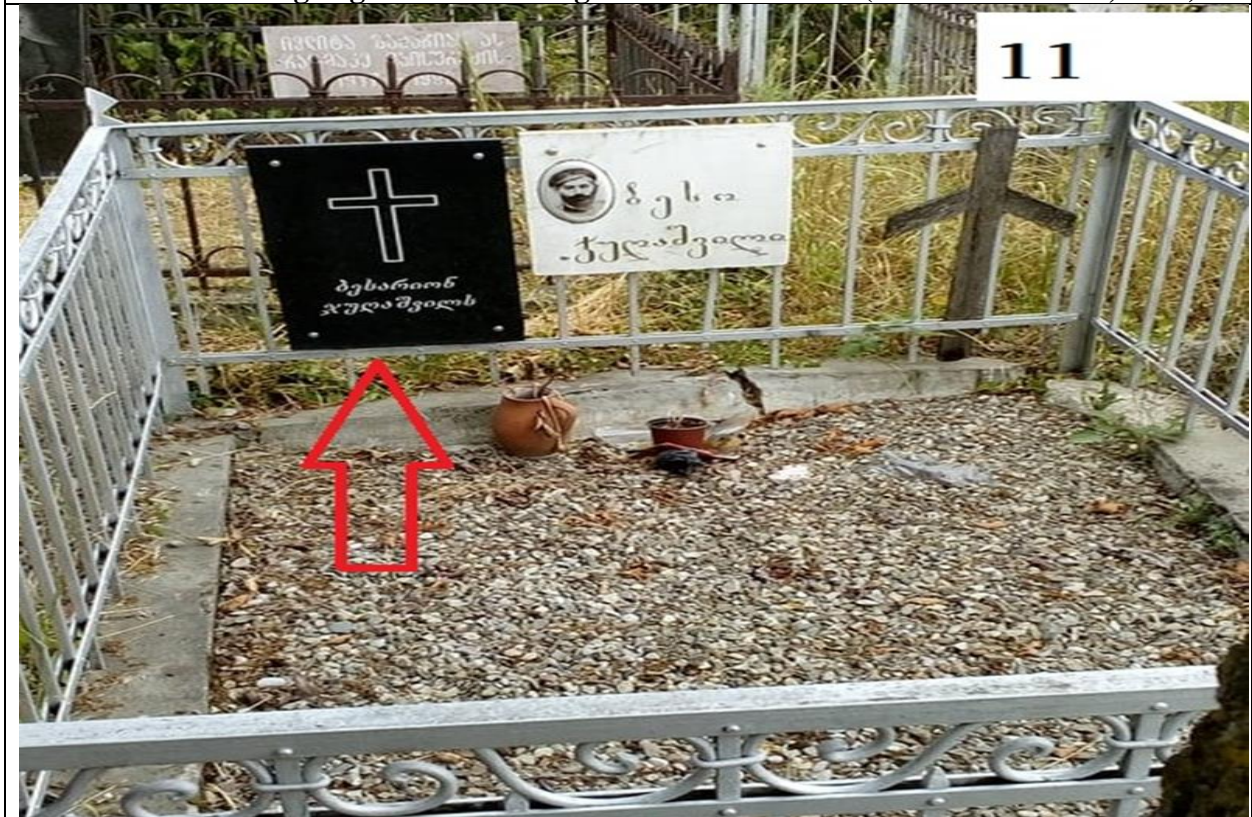


Photo 11 Fake grave of Stalin's father (Simashvili, 2020)

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