

GURIAN HORSEMEN ABROAD

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Abstract. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Guria was gripped by a desire to travel to America, driven by the prospects of financial gain and making a name for oneself. At the end of the nineteenth century, Thomas Oliver, a representative of an American international circus, arrived in Batumi. He stayed with the American Consul in Batumi, James Chambers. The purpose of his arrival was to select trick riders. At the Consul's residence, Thomas Oliver met Kirile Jorbenadze, a native of Zemo Chibati, who promised to assist him. They departed for Lanchkhuti, stopping along the way in the village of Bakhvi at the household of Ivane Makharadze, who was renowned for his horsemanship. It was decided that they would assemble a troupe. In 1893, the first group of Gurian horsemen departed for America. From then on, over a span of nearly 30 years, more than 150 women and men went abroad a total of 105 times, captivating audiences with their performing mastery. The American researcher Dee Brown wrote: *"Trick riding entered the rodeo from the troupe of the wild Cossacks; having become interested in the Cossacks' stunts, which were performed on galloping horses, the Western cowboys soon presented their variation to the American rodeo."* Numerous studies and works have been dedicated to the foreign tours of Gurian horsemen by both Georgian and foreign historians. Today, it is well known that these were not Cossacks, but Georgian-Gurian horsemen.

Keywords: Trick riding, horsemen, Cossacks, American rodeo.

Both foreign and Georgian sources testify that Georgia was a country of equestrian traditions. Various types of horsemanship were widespread here—horse racing, equestrian games, *qabakhi*, *isindi*, *jriti* (trick riding), and others.

The existence of a horse cult is indicated by representations preserved on belt buckles from the 2nd–1st millennia BC, wooden carts, and ritual horse burials. A figurine of a pedigree horse discovered in Naokhvamu, Colchis, confirms that Georgian tribes had no equals in horse breeding and training. A gilded horse with raised forelegs, depicted standing before a fiery altar on the bottom of a silver pinax from the Zghuderi burial ground, dates back to the second half of the 3rd century.

According to the Roman historian Dio Cassius, Rome was visited in the year 141 of our era, in connection with a festival dedicated to the god of war, by Pharasmanes the Valiant, King of the Iberians, Queen Ghadana, their son Radamistus, and Georgian nobles. Georgians took part in the grandiose competition dedicated to the god of war on the Campus Martius—specifically King Pharasmanes the Valiant and his son, whose competition reportedly amazed all of Rome. As a sign of respect, by order of Emperor Antoninus Pius, an equestrian statue of Pharasmanes the Valiant was erected near the altar in the Temple of Bellona.

Perhaps it will not be an exaggeration to say that the nimble and agile Gurians, who grew up bound to horses, did not betray the deeds of their ancestors and, at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, entertained and amazed European and American audiences with their virtuoso performances.

It is precisely this topic that we will discuss in the present article. We will introduce you to the adventures of the Gurian horsemen who stood at the origins of American show business.

Numerous books and studies have been dedicated to the performances of Gurian horsemen.

Georgian and foreign historians and researchers have touched upon this topic, including Academician Amiran Tsamtsishvili, director and writer Irakli Makharadze, ethnographer and public figure Tedo Sakhokia, writer Nino Nakashidze, and film director Aleksandre Tsutsunava, who directed the film *Who is to Blame?*.

A particularly great contribution and merit in showcasing the Gurian horsemen belongs to an American of Georgian descent, Richard Alexi Georgian-Gokhia.

Prior to the year 2000, I knew more or less about the activities of the Gurian horsemen abroad through the stories passed down by the aforementioned researchers and writers. However, in September 2000, when I met Mr. Georgian, my view of them changed cardinally. Richard Georgian had a profound influence on me, and I became involved in the research and investigation proposed by him.

It will not be devoid of interest to introduce you to the appraisals that the Gurian horsemen earned. Tedo Sakhokia noted: *"Even the best horsemen of America itself were forced to concede first place to our compatriots."*

The famous researcher of the Wild West, Dee Brown, wrote: *"Trick riding entered the rodeo from the troupe of the reckless, outlaw Cossacks; having become interested in the stunts of the Cossacks, which were performed on galloping horses, the Western cowboys soon presented their variation to the American rodeo."*

More than 150 Gurian horsemen, women and men, departed from this world without leaving any written records, but by a stroke of fate, they left their mark on the path of life, and the stories—that is, the history—of a forgotten people was created.

In September 2000, in the village of Bakhvi, Richard Georgian said: *"My task and the purpose of my arrival in Georgia is to find family histories, oral traditions, and documents in order to dismantle the false American myth about the Cossacks. After all, Americans consider these stories to be the beginning of American show business, and how proud it is that it is precisely the Gurians who stand at its origins. Today I am a completely different person from who I was before; I am taller. It was precisely this spiritual metamorphosis that made me decide to sacrifice immense strength, energy, and finances for the publication of a book about the adventures of the Gurian horsemen, who were not content with their own ancestral villages and countries and stepped horse-to-horse into the New World."*

Who is Georgian? In his own words: he is the grandson of Alexi Gokhia, the son of Estate, who was born in the village of Pakhluani (Tsalenjikha municipality). Alexi was among the many Georgians who went abroad; he was oppositionally minded toward the dominant policy implemented by Russia over Georgia, and as a student of the Tbilisi Theological Seminary, he rebelled against this regime, for which he was expelled from the seminary. In December 1893, Alexi arrived in the United States of America. In 1896 and subsequent years, he joined Luka Chkhartishvili in Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World. *"Everything started with Bakhvi, with Ivane Makharadze,"* says Richard.

In 1892, William Frederick Cody, known by the name of Buffalo Bill, organized a show for 10 Georgian horsemen in London, England. Among the horsemen were: Ivane Makharadze, Luka Chkhartishvili, Dimitri Mgaloblishvili, Vaso Chkhonia, Data Chkhonia, Irakli Chkhonia, Levan Jorbenadze, Mose Gigineishvili, Besarion Tsintsadze, and Meliton Tsintsadze. They arrived in London on May 26, 1892. Queen Victoria sent a letter of the following content to Buffalo Bill: *"Her Majesty would be highly gratified if the managers of the Wild West could somehow arrange for their Cossack riders to come to Windsor Castle and exhibit their backward trick riding on horseback for Her Majesty."*

The press agents working with Buffalo Bill himself referred to the Georgian and Gurian horsemen as "Russian Cossacks."

In 1893, two groups of Georgian horsemen arrived in America for the first time. One worked for Buffalo Bill at the World's Fair, while the second was in the Adam Forepaugh Circus, owned by James Bailey. The Adam Forepaugh group included 12 horsemen. Among them was one woman, Frida Mgaloblishvili.

The Georgians performed in Buffalo Bill's show from 1895 to 1899. They traveled from Georgia to New York every year in April and remained until the end of the season, which usually lasted until October. They returned back home in November.

The popularity of the Georgians reached such an extent that every Wild West show wanted "Russian Cossacks" to participate in it. In 1900–1905, Georgians performed in 10 different shows.

In 1903, Buffalo Bill took his show to England again and toured Europe until 1906. With this show, the Georgian horsemen visited England, France, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Belgium. As for the remaining horsemen, they worked in various shows and toured across America. The Georgian horsemen toured not only Europe and America, but were also in America, Canada, and Cuba. Hundreds of Georgians worked abroad between 1892 and 1920. Frida was the first and only woman until 1893, but in later years, other women also went and joined the horsemen in America.

Time passed; the Georgians returned home every year, though some remained in America and settled in New Court [New York] and Chicago. The World War of 1914 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 disrupted travel between Georgia and America. The Georgians who were in America had to remain there. Thus, the career of the Georgians as Wild West riders practically came to an end.

History forgot those Georgian horsemen who traveled abroad to entertain the public.

In 1950, Academician Amiran Tsamtsishvili reconstructed a small part of the history of the Georgian horsemen who were abroad. He spoke with several former horsemen, although they exhibited confusion regarding the facts.

I summon Richard Georgian again: *"I am in debt to the Georgian and Gurian people; therefore, I will finish my book and publish the history of the brave women and men who amazed the world with their equestrian art and won fame more than 100 years ago."*

Over the years, I periodically provided Mr. Richard with certain types of research and information for his future book. I conducted research in the municipalities of Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri, and Lanchkhuti, personally meeting members of the horsemen's families, who told me the stories and traditions preserved in their memories. There were cases when they came to me themselves, both at my workplace and at my home. Lia Mshvidobadze—granddaughter of Ioseb Mshvidobadze—visited me at home from Tbilisi; also Magnolia Lomadze—daughter-in-law of Jimsher Lomadze; Iagor Koplatadze—grandson of Markoz Zhghenti; Guram Kartvelishvili, and others. The descendants of the horsemen remember from tradition the amazing adventures of their ancestors; they show us faded but telling photographs that miraculously survived the passage of time. Today they tell us stories with pride, though the truth about them must be gathered grain by grain, as these stories span more than a century.

I want to draw your attention to several of them and introduce you to their adventures.

Kirile Jorbenadze

The personality of Kirile Jorbenadze, who was called the manager of the American Consulate, arouses particular interest.

The beginning of the Gurian horsemen's appearance on the arena is connected with the name of Kirile Jorbenadze. Among his descendants, Zekia Jorbenadze—daughter of Lazare Jorbenadze and niece of Kirile (whom I visited at her home in Chibati in October 2001)—and Kirile Jorbenadze's grandson, Aleko Jorbenadze, are alive.

The selection of Gurian horsemen, the giving of recommendations, and their departure abroad took place with the direct participation of Kirile Jorbenadze. His relatives also refer to him as an entrepreneur. The literature existing to this day, however, refers to him as "the servant boy at the hand of the English Consul."

To select horsemen, Thomas Oliver (1867–1943), a representative of an American circus, arrived in Batumi. He stayed with the American Consul, James Chambers. Kirile Jorbenadze, a native of Zemo Chibati, was employed as a valet with the Consul. When Kirile learned about the nature of the business, he promised Oliver assistance in gathering horsemen. Kirile, along with Oliver and Vice Consul Harry Briggs, set off for Lanchkhuti. Along the way, in the village of Bakhvi, they stopped at the household of Ivane (Didi) Makharadze, son of Rostom, who was renowned for his horsemanship throughout Guria and went by the nickname "Matrakha" (The Whip). They held negotiations with him, and it was decided that Ivane would assemble a troupe. From here began the horsemen's multi-year tour abroad.

This fact is confirmed by an article printed in the newspaper *Iveria* (June 12, 1892, N124): *"About two months ago, a wealthy man arrived from abroad to stay with the Consul of Batumi, whom we call the 'English Prince.' This man took a great liking to a Gurian boy who was with the Consul, dressed in long attire and carrying himself 'with grandeur.' The wealthy man asked the boy: 'Find me twelve players dressed like you, and I will provide you with 50 rubles a month at my expense, take you to our country, and after six months, bring you back right here, also at my expense.'"*

Ms. Zekia Jorbenadze tells me: *"The Jorbenadzes of Zemo Chibati are called learned peasants. Five generations were raised in the house where I live now. Initially, five brothers lived together. All five brothers knew singing, dancing, trick riding, and playing well; Ivane and Lazare were particularly distinguished by performing difficult maneuvers. Lazare performed the headstand—standing on his hands on the saddle; Ivane stood on the saddle and brandished swords."*

Before going to America, the brothers practiced in Luka Chkhartishvili's yard. Luka Chkhartishvili cleared a part of his yard, which was called "Mongreula." As Luka Chkhartishvili's daughter-in-law later told me, today seven families reside on the site of this "Mongreula." A large pear tree stood in Luka Chkhartishvili's yard, and under this tree, they talked and drew up plans about going to America.

There were very many who wished to go abroad—young men of 18–25 years of age whose goal was financial gain and also making a name for themselves. Those who returned from abroad told of their adventures, which further increased the interest of prospective travelers. *"A man cannot prosper if..."* they told each other; they sold everything and acquired the necessary ammunition.

Applicants approached Luka Chkhartishvili with requests to enlist them in his troupe. Regarding this, the daily illustrated newspaper *Kvali*, in its issue of March 9, 1897, published the following text: *"Lo, it has been 5–6 years since, under the leadership of a Gurian, Luka Chkhartishvili, 6–9 men depart from Guria every year to the exhibition in Chicago and New York. Mr. Chkhartishvili takes such men who know dancing and especially playing on horseback. Chkhartishvili himself is so skilled in playing on horseback that no circus player can compare to him, and everyone wonders how this man learned to play on horseback so well in this village. Foreigners entrusted him with the leadership and instructed him to choose 8 good player boys to play at the exhibition."*

This news set the boys of every village on their feet; everyone wanted to go, but this was impossible, as he needed only eight men. In these five or six years, Chkhartishvili took more than 50 persons abroad and guided them through magnificent cities."

Let us return again to Kirile Jorbenadze. From 1887, he was the valet (servant boy) to the American Consul.

Aleko Jorbenadze—grandson of Kirile Jorbenadze—tells us: *"Kirile Jorbenadze was reportedly such a good worker that he was called the manager of the American Consulate."* Aleko has preserved a certificate

issued by Consul John Chambers, compiled in the Russian language: *"This certificate is given by me to Kirile Maksime's son Jorbenadze, a resident of the Chibati community of the Ozurgeti district, to the effect that he was in service with me in the position of valet for eight years. He performed his duties conscientiously. He was not noticed in any bad activities, was quiet and attentive. He was dismissed by me on the basis of his own application. This certificate is given by me concerning his conduct, which I certify on the first day of November 1098 [1898], city of Batumi, John Chambers, American Consul."*

During his time working at the American Consulate, Kirile Jorbenadze appears to be an influential and well-to-do man. Kirile had a close relationship with the Consul. This "servant boy" worked so hard that he started his own business, for which the recommendation, assistance, and initial capital were given by the Consul himself. Kirile opened the restaurant "Florida" (built of wood). For this restaurant, after leaving Batumi, the Consul left Kirile a dinner service belonging to the consulate for 50 persons, manufactured in Moscow. The service is numbered, which indicates its originality; a portion of this service is still kept in the Jorbenadze family today. Kirile was reportedly a shareholder in the Hotel "London" and owned lands in Ardagan (near Batumi stood a unit of the Ardagan military regiment, which is why this place was called Ardagan).

His close relationship with the American Consul is also confirmed by the fact that after returning to America, the Consul sent his young son to Batumi to stay with Kirile for a vacation. After some time, Kirile had a white chokha tailored for the child and sent him back. Later, the Consul's son came by invitation of the Soviet Union to the construction of the Volga-Don Canal. That same year, he came to Batumi to visit Kirile and his family.

At that time, the quite wealthy Kirile Jorbenadze, himself a great lover of trick riding, showed a lively interest in his compatriots, as evidenced by his photograph taken in 1903 together with Gurian horsemen heading to Chicago.

Initially, Kirile lived in a rented apartment on Azizie Square, and later he bought a five-room private house with a yard on Beibutov Square. Kirile's situation changed drastically after the Communists came to power. In 1922, the government confiscated all his property: lands and estate. To this was added the death of his daughter, Shushana. He suffered a stroke, was ill for 15 years, and passed away in 1938.

Kirile and Tamar had four children: Valentina, Shushana, Davit, and Karlo. Davit went abroad in the 1920s, first to Istanbul and then to Germany. He graduated from Berlin University and was a Doctor of Chemical Sciences. In the 1940s of the last century, he worked on obtaining artificial quartz. The first specimen of the obtained quartz was kept in the family of his friend and colleague. That sample was later handed over to Davit's nephew, Simo Jorbenadze, who was on a business trip to Germany. Davit died unmarried and childless in Germany.

Karlo's son, Aleko Jorbenadze, at the time of the recording of the interview (2002), worked as the head of the physical education department of Batumi State University. He lived with his family on one of the floors of a multi-story apartment building constructed on the site of the house left by his grandfather. He tenderly preserves the old documents of his grandfather, Kirile Jorbenadze.

Despite the multitude of elapsed years, we were still able to establish that Kirile Jorbenadze was a great lover of trick riding, who, carrying himself "with grandeur," took the great liking of the foreign agent who arrived in Batumi, and subsequently became a quite influential and successful businessman who assisted the Gurian horsemen in every way.

Ivane Makharadze "Matrakha"

Among the Gurian horsemen, the one who first set foot on American soil was Ivane Makharadze. According to the account of his granddaughter, Neli Makharadze, Ivane's father, Rostom, lived in the village

of Bakhvi in the Ozurgeti district. He had four sons: Silibistro, Aleksandre, Pavle, and Ivane—nicknamed "Matrakha". Their house was located in the lowlands by the edge of the Bakhvi River. The father settled them separately on the plateau. This plateau in Kveda Bakhvi is still called the Makharadze Hill today. The Makharadzes of Kveda Bakhvi were renowned falconers and good horsemen. Rostom also loved folk songs, hunting with sparrowhawks, and trick riding. Ivane, Pavle, and Silibistro became horsemen, while Aleksandre was a singer.

Ivane Makharadze's biography begins like this: one day, the 14-year-old Ivane was sent by his father to a relative in Bakhmaro. He brought his favorite horse out of the stable and sat him upon it. Ivane whipped the horse and rode it at a gallop; the horse made it to Baisura (a place on the road to Bakhmaro). There he dismounted to drink water. The horse, left unattended, rushed to the cold water, drank, and died. Ivane removed the saddle from the horse, loaded it onto his back, and returned home. Rostom became furious, asking how he could let a sweating horse drink water, and slapped Ivane. Ivane took this as an insult, ran away from home, and went to Batumi. This happened in 1880, when Batumi was declared a duty-free port for the import and export of foreign goods, that is, a *porto-franco*.

After wandering in Batumi for some time, he became acquainted with two travelers from Racha who worked as firemen on a ship. The Rachans brought Ivane to the captain, who liked the short-statured but agile boy and hired him as a fireman. The ship departed from the port that very day and arrived in New York approximately 50 days later.

Ivane, exhausted by the labor on the ship, refused to continue as a fireman and found a job with a baker. Here, too, he had to perform heavy labor. As soon as he learned a little English, he left the baker as well and got a job as a cleaner in a New York circus.

Ivane, who had been skilled in horsemanship since childhood, soon caught the attention of an Arab horseman. The latter hired Ivane to take care of his horse. Ivane saved penny upon penny, and when he gathered enough money, he bought an Arabian horse. The Arab horseman then granted him one act in his attraction.

Dressed in a Georgian chokha, Ivane picked up coins thrown into the arena from his galloping horse. The audience liked the young, mustachioed boy's performance in the circus and did not spare their applause.

The Arab increased Ivane's salary, which enabled him to buy a second horse. After this, Ivane left the Arab's show, created his own circus, and accumulated more money. He sent a letter to his parents and informed them of where he was.

Ivane returned to his father's house in 1885, which he dismantled, and in its place built an eight-room house in the American style. In 1886, he married Nino Kalandarishvili.

Following the arrival of the American circus representative Thomas Oliver (1863–1943) in Batumi to select horsemen, and with the direct assistance of Kirile Jorbenadze, who was with the American Consul, Thomas Oliver met Ivane Makharadze. The first group was selected: Ivane Makharadze—"Matrakha", the brothers Pavle and Silibistro, cousins Kishvardi and Ivane Makharadze—Ivane the younger or "Chokhagrdze-la", Ivane's brothers-in-law Qaraman and Giorgi Kalandarishvili, Luka Chkhartishvili from Lanchkhuti, and Polta Tsintsadze. This was the first group, and its leader was "Prince Ivane Makharadze."

The Russian Cossacks (as they called the Gurian horsemen) first joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in London in 1892. The group consisted of 10 men aged 18 to 25. Their leader was Ivane Makharadze. He was contacted by the agent Ercoli, who managed all the organizational matters to bring them to London.

On May 28, 1892, the London newspaper *Pictorial World* noted: "*A new attraction is being added to the already splendid Earl's Court; on Monday, several Don Cossacks arrived, and as we understand, they will participate in the performances.*"

Gurian horsemen appeared in the United States of America for the first time in 1893 in the shows of Adam Forepaugh and Buffalo Bill.

Regarding this, the newspaper *Iveria*, in its issue of February 13, 1893, wrote: *"Batumi. Recently, a trusted man of the managers of the Chicago Exhibition departed from here, who was instructed to gather several equestrian Gurian brave men and send them to Chicago. This man has already gathered this troupe, in which there are 10 good brave men, splendidly dressed and fully armed. This troupe already arrived in Batumi on February 13 and shortly thereafter departed for America."*

The Gurian horsemen arrived in New York on April 10, 1893, on the ship *Persian Monarch*. The group included Prince Ivane Makharadze, Luka Chkhartishvili, Kishvardi Makharadze, Qaraman Kalandarishvili, Ivane (Patara) Makharadze nicknamed "Chokhagrdzela", S. Dgebuadze, Silibistro Makharadze, Giorgi Kalandarishvili, Ioseb Talakhadze, and Pavle Makharadze. They were called sometimes Cossacks, sometimes Russian Cossacks, and sometimes Caucasian Jews.

On June 25, 1892, the Gurians, under the leadership of Ivane Makharadze, performed before the Queen, her children, and noble persons. Watching the Cossacks ride backward on a galloping horse, Prince Harry turned to Queen Victoria and said in German: *"Mother, do you think these are really Cossacks?"* Before the Queen could answer, I (Nate Salsbury) replied: *"I assure you that everything you see on the stage and what they represent is entirely genuine."* The Queen was so pleased that she handed the Gurians an album filled with their own photographs, and an address of praise and thanks with twenty thousand signatures.

The International Academy of Horsemen awarded the best riders with valuable gifts and a gold medal to be worn on the chest, which had the shape of a galloping horse. Awarded with such a medal were Ivane and Pavle Makharadze, and Luka Chkhartishvili.

The Georgians became as indispensable to Buffalo Bill as the Indians. Moreover, the Wild West researcher Dee Brown wrote: *"Trick riding entered the rodeo from the troupe of the outlaw Cossacks; having become interested in the stunts of the Cossacks, which were performed on galloping horses, the Western cowboys soon presented their variation to the American rodeo."*

Ivane Makharadze's tour abroad lasted about 4 years, after which he lived in Kveda Bakhvi; he passed away in 1921 and is buried within the gates of the Kveda Bakhvi Church.

Empress of the Cossacks

"For one who has not seen the trick riding of Georgian women, it will not be difficult to believe that these are Amazons, because like men, they jump from horse to horse and ride them at a gallop." — Castelli, 17th Century

Over a span of 30 years, up to 150 Gurian ladies and men went to Europe and the United States of America 105 times in groups of 10–12 persons. They earned much praise and awards. Throughout all this time, they were displeased by the unacceptable moniker—"Cossacks", "Russian Cossacks"—and felt it very painfully.

While in Paris, they complained to Tedo Sakhokia: *"How is it not like death? Everyone calls us Cossacks, and we cannot even make them understand that we are children of Georgia."*

Regarding this, the April 13, 1903 issue of the newspaper *Tsnobis Purtseli* reported: *"The Gurians who were in France at that time caused a great stir. Fully armed, they reminded the Parisians of real warriors. Wherever they walked in the street, it was overcrowded. Everyone thought the Georgians were Cossacks and shouted from here and there, 'Vive les Cosaques!', 'Vive les Cosaques!'"*

It is known that along with the Gurian horsemen, Gurian ladies also performed trick riding and worked wonders: Maro and Barbale Zakareishvili, Kristine Nodia-Tsintsadze, and Frida Mgaloblishvili.

Maro Zakareishvili was distinguished by riding and trick riding on a horse with stitched sides. Great interest was aroused by her performing the single-leg Kabardian style, the "scissors," the shoulder-stand, and

the standing position. She participated in horse races, and Barbale Zakareishvili did not fall behind her sister. Barbale linked her fate with her compatriot Kristepore Imnadze; later the husband and wife remained to live in America, and Barbale did not stop working in the circus in subsequent years either.

Lively interest was aroused by Kristine Nodia-Tsintsadze. She was distinguished by equestrian training and boldness. Kristine was born in the village of Sujuna, Samegrelo, and married in Lanchkhuti. Her brother taught her trick riding. During one of the trick rides, her jaw struck the ground, and her teeth were smashed, but she immediately sprang up, caught hold of the horse, and continued galloping. For her brave action, the circus owner rewarded her with expensive attire, a watch, and a ring.

Likewise, exceeding all expectations with her distinctiveness was Frida Mgaloblishvili. According to the American press, she is the most supreme lady, distinguished by equestrian mastery and education. The American press calls her the "Princess of the Cossacks" and the "Empress of the Cossacks."

The interviews given by Frida allowed journalists to describe Frida and her travel route: *"Her education is astonishing; she knows French, German, English, and Latin. To this are added refined taste, music, painting, and other high values were not foreign to her."* (*The Pittsburg Post*, Tuesday, May 2, 1893).

These interviews give us an idea not only of Frida but of the life of Gurian horsemen in general. Frida stated to journalists that she was 22 years old and lived in a village between the mountains in Ozurgeti, and that since childhood, the horse had been her friend and trick riding her entertainment.

She recalls her childhood like this: different teachers taught her needlework, the piano, and the mandolin. At the age of 12, she left the boring province and traveled through the Black Sea to Paris to receive an education.

One of the journalists was interested in Frida's wardrobe: *"Princess Frida wears a knee-length dress; she is the only woman among the 'Cossacks.' This is her national clothing, and it suits her so well that every woman will be envious. She has a freedom of movement and a gracefulness that every woman should have"—* (*Pittsburg Post*, Tuesday, May 22)—*"The princess wears high-collared boots with a short skirt."*

On April 23, 1893, *The Washington Post* reported: *"In that extraordinarily illuminated tent, the most supreme were the Cossacks, who arrived in America under the leadership of their leader Dimitri. The prince is accompanied by his wife, Princess Dimitri (Frida), who is the only one among the Cossacks who speaks English. She received her education in Paris and speaks with a Franco-Caucasian accent."*

The American press refers to Dimitri and Frida as husband and wife, but this was not the case; their relationship was of a completely different nature. Probably, Dimitri took into account the status of Frida's older brother and, for safety reasons, played the role of the husband, which is confirmed by one fact. It is known from the American press that a Black man insulted Frida; Prince Dimitri immediately rushed to her and threw him to the ground.

Director and researcher Irakli Makharadze writes in his book *Riders of the Wild West*: *"To this day, very little is known about Frida. She was born on August 7, 1871, in Ozurgeti or its surroundings. As it turned out, Mgaloblishvili is not her surname, and she is not related to Dimitri Mgaloblishvili, although in the program they were often mentioned as husband and wife"* (I. Makharadze, A. Chkhaidze, *Riders of the Wild West*, Tb. 2000, p. 35).

In the April 1, 1894 issue of the *Morning Journal*, an interview with Frida Mgaloblishvili was printed, where the journalist calls her a true lady: *"It can be said that it was born with me; as long as I remember myself, the back of a horse was like a cradle for me. No one specifically taught me to sit on a horse... All the stunts that I perform during the shows, I used to do for entertainment and in various competitions that were held in my homeland... We Cossack women, despite the fact that we do not have the right to vote and do not participate in jurisprudence and medicine, are freer than your American ladies... In my country, men and*

women have the same customs. Women smoke pleasant mild tobacco quite freely, which we grow or bring from Turkey. With us, they also quite freely drink splendid Caucasian wine; we are drinkers of wine and not of vodka, unlike the Russians. We are a very sober people. Drunkenness is almost unknown to us. Probably our climate is to blame for this harmony that reigns among us. Living in the fresh air is the guarantee of our health. We are Orthodox and, just like Catholics, have many holy feasts. Suppose you arrived in the Caucasus; you will not need a letter of recommendation there. The best families will be glad of your visit, and you will live there as long as you wish; everything that is in the house will be at your disposal... We mostly live at the expense of agriculture and hunting. I remember in my childhood, wild beasts were shot right out of my bedroom window.

Our main drink after wine is tea, which is widespread among us and is of very good quality. Our people are very good eaters, but obesity is rare among us; the men are slender, but they are stronger than those I have seen here."

The press reported that Princess Frida practiced trick riding sometimes with one, sometimes with four horses. Anyone who saw her trick riding with chariots in "Madison Square Garden," or her graceful and amazing trick riding on furious horses, will immediately realize that Frida was born to mesmerize the whole world with astonishing trick riding.

As it turned out, Dimitri Mgaloblishvili's father, Giorgi, was Frida's stepfather. Frida's mother, Maka, a daughter of the Chkhonia family, was originally from Lanchkhuti. She had been married in Ozurgeti to Iliko Dolidze. Iliko passed away. Giorgi had relatives near Iliko Dolidze. He became acquainted with Maka, a beautiful woman, and abducted her. Maka took her daughters to Chokhatauri—Onchikedi, and left her sons in Ozurgeti.

Giorgi's brother, Ilarion, was reportedly a priest. His children studied in France. As it turned out, the children of the stepfather's brother—Ilarion—took Frida to France. They placed her in a convent there, and since she was raised in the Mgaloblishvili family, her stepfather—Giorgi—gave her his surname.

Frida performed trick riding in America only in 1893–1894; afterwards she disappears. Probably, she returned to France, but her subsequent fate is not visible.

Despite the fact that fate treated many horsemen unfairly, the stories of the Gurian horsemen do not die; they are revived by researchers. A clear proof of this is the very recent visit of the descendants of the Bakhvi horseman Kishvardi Makharadze to the Ozurgeti Historical Museum to search for materials about their glorious grandfather.





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