

GIORGI CHITAIA AND THE AUGUST 1924 UPRISING: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS POLITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ITS PROSPECTS AND OUTCOMES

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Abstract: Giorgi Chitaia (1890-1986), an Academician and the founder of the Georgian school of ethnology as well as the modern methodology of field ethnographic research in Georgia, was actively involved in national and political activities from an early age. During the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, he was appointed Mayor of Poti on the recommendation of Niko Nikoladze. In 1921, during the final days of the Democratic Republic, he participated in the defence and liberation of Batumi.

This article draws upon Giorgi Chitaia's autobiographical writings, memoirs, and archival sources to examine the lesser-known aspects of his political biography. Following the Sovietization of Georgia, Chitaia withdrew from active political life and devoted himself to scholarly research. His personal records, however, demonstrate that he continued to monitor political developments closely, documenting major events and reflecting on the activities of contemporary political figures.

The study argues that the Soviet authorities continued to regard Chitaia as a figure associated with the Georgian national movement, as evidenced by his repeated arrests and the attention paid to him in connection with the National Uprising of 1924. According to his memoirs, he was invited to assume responsibility for the Abkhaz sector of the uprising but declined after assessing the military and political situation as unfavourable. Nevertheless, he became a victim of Soviet political repression and narrowly escaped execution.

The article concludes that Chitaia's political biography represents a significant yet insufficiently studied dimension of his life. The examined sources demonstrate that his subsequent scholarly career developed in close connection with the political experience of the formative years of his public activity.

Keywords: Giorgi Chitaia; Democratic Republic of Georgia; Georgian Federalist Party; 1924 Anti-Soviet Uprising; Soviet political repression; Revolutionary Committee (Revkom); Special Transcaucasian Committee (Ozakom).

Introduction. Giorgi Chitaia's political views regarding the August 1924 Uprising have not yet been the subject of dedicated research in Georgian historiography. Although individual aspects of his biography and scholarly legacy have been addressed in several works, a systematic analysis of the political evaluations preserved in his autobiographical notes and memoir materials has not been conducted to date. The purpose of this article is to examine this issue and highlight Giorgi Chitaia's political stance in relation to the national-political events of 1924.

Following the loss of the Democratic Republic of Georgia's independence in 1921, and amid weakening hopes for international support – which became particularly evident through the outcomes of the 1922

Genoa Conference – the resistance movement of national forces in Georgia intensified. Illegal political unions were formed with the aim of fighting against the Soviet regime and restoring Georgia's state independence.

Discussion. The study of the August 1924 Uprising during the Soviet period was subject to significant ideological and political constraints. Soviet historiography evaluated the period of Georgia's independence and the anti-Soviet movement strictly within defined ideological frameworks, preventing many aspects of the national resistance history from being fully reflected in scientific literature.

From the second half of the 1980s, alongside the revitalization of the national movement and the process of restoring historical memory, interest in the problems of Georgia's modern history increased. After 1991, Georgian historiography actively began researching issues that were understudied during the Soviet era. Particular attention was paid to the 1924 Uprising, whose political, military, and social aspects were discussed in numerous works (Mazniashvili, 2014; Suladze, 2010; Nozadze, 1989; Sharadze, 1991, 1993; Khositashvili, 2024; Jikia, 2012).

Prior to this historiographical process, significant episodes of Giorgi Chitaia's political biography were largely unknown to the broader scientific community. Among these, his participation in the struggle for the liberation of Batumi, his connection with the Federalist Movement, and his attitude toward the events of 1924 had not been properly studied.

Memoirs of students who were like-minded contemporaries of Giorgi Chitaia reveal that for a certain period he was associated with the Federalist Party. Supporting this political orientation was a natural choice for a section of the Georgian intelligentsia of that era (Sh. Nutsubidze, I. Kipshidze, Ak. Shanidze, G. Akhvlediani, V. Kotetishvili, and others). Representatives of the Federalist Movement shared the national-state ideas of Ilia Chavchavadze and sought to find new political paths for their implementation under changed historical circumstances. Accordingly, their political position did not constitute a rejection of Ilia's national program; rather, it was considered a distinct attempt to continue and develop this program in line with the new reality.

Giorgi Chitaia's autobiographical notes and memoir materials constitute an important source for the study of the socio-political processes of the first quarter of the 20th century. They preserve information about individual episodes of the struggle for the liberation of Batumi, relations with representatives of the national movement, and the political situation of the time (Chelebadze, 2025, pp. 185-200).

Following the Sovietization of Georgia, Giorgi Chitaia ceased his active political work and devoted himself entirely to scientific endeavors. However, his autobiographical notes reveal that he continued to closely observe the ongoing processes in the country, noting important events and assessing their political significance. His national position and past political connections were known to the Soviet authorities, as evidenced by the fact that he was arrested twice. Nevertheless, due to unproven charges and his scientific authority, he was released.

The trust placed in Giorgi Chitaia within national-patriotic circles was particularly demonstrated in the period leading up to the 1924 Uprising, when he was offered leadership of the Abkhazian Front. This fact indicates that he was regarded by representatives of the national movement at the time not only as a prominent scholar, but also as a figure possessing political experience and organizational capabilities.

The distinguished Georgian scholar Giorgi Chitaia was involved in national and public affairs from his youth. During the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, he served for a time as the Mayor of Poti, which, upon the recommendation of Niko Nikoladze, reflected the high level of trust extended to him.

Thus, along with the study of Giorgi Chitaia's scientific heritage, the analysis of his socio-political activities is also essential. His participation in the statehood processes of independent Georgia, issues concerning the defense of territorial integrity, and his attitude toward the 1924 Uprising constitute an important, yet still insufficiently studied, issue in Georgian historiography.

During Giorgi Chitaia's lifetime, the period of 1918-1924 was effectively omitted from the official version of his biography. Yet, these years constituted the historical era that the scholar evaluated with particular emotional weight in the final stage of his life. It emerges from his memoirs that May 26, 1918, was for him the brightest day in the history of Georgia, which was subsequently followed by disappointment, a sense of national tragedy, and a feeling of spiritual emptiness.

Fully expressing his political past in the Soviet ideological environment was difficult for Giorgi Chitaia. This was likely conditioned not only by his personal humility, but also by the caution he exercised toward his fellow thinkers and close acquaintances. Nevertheless, key events of this period, as well as preceding and subsequent years, political processes, and recollections of individual figures, were reflected in his autobiographical notes.

The publication of Giorgi Chitaia's autobiographical work became possible after the restoration of Georgia's independence. In 1991, the "Metsniereba" Publishing House issued his memoirs titled *"On the Roads and Paths of My Life"*. A special contribution to the preparation of this publication was made by Giorgi Chitaia's student, ethnologist Professor Tamila Tsagareishvili, whose dedication the scholar gratefully noted: "And finally, I must thank God for sending me a person like you" (Chitaia, 2001, p. 426).

Accounts related to the August 1924 Uprising generally align with the evaluations presented in Chitaia's memoir notes. At the same time, it must be considered that records created during the Soviet era could not fully reflect all of his views and information, as the author was compelled to exercise a certain degree of caution.

Giorgi Chitaia's evaluations demonstrate that he assessed the prospects of the 1924 Uprising from a standpoint of military-political realism. His refusal to lead the uprising in the direction of Abkhazia was not an expression of political passivity; it was based on an analysis of the existing balance of forces and the conviction that an armed uprising would lead to heavy losses. Subsequent events demonstrated that his forecast was not unfounded.

Giorgi Chitaia possessed information that an armed uprising was being prepared. As a former political figure from the period of independent Georgia, he was under the special surveillance of the Soviet authorities. Initially, he was arrested, though later released; despite this, he once again became a focus of attention for the repressive organs. It emerges from his memoirs that he evaluated the prospects of success for the 1924 Uprising skeptically, believing that the existing political and military situation was not yet ripe for a large-scale armed movement.

In early 1924, the Soviet authorities intensified their campaign against anti-Soviet forces. During this period, 38 active Mensheviks were arrested, which significantly weakened the political circles involved in preparing the uprising (Endeladze, 2004, pp. 17-18). The Georgian Extraordinary Commission (Cheka) was aware that the Parity Committee was preparing an action against Soviet rule. According to information received in May 1924, an uprising was planned for May 26.

Although Giorgi Chitaia withdrew from active political life and left Poti following the Sovietization of Georgia, his past political connections and public authority conditioned ongoing surveillance by the Soviet authorities.

During the events of August 1924, Giorgi Chitaia was in Meskheta, specifically in Zarzma, on a scientific expedition. While working alongside the architect Shavishvili, he learned of the outbreak of the uprising, as well as the closure of the Surami Pass and restrictions on roads leading to Batumi (Chitaia, 1991, p. 54; Chitaia, 2001, p. 204). Following this, he was arrested. By decision of a "Troika," he was sentenced to death by firing squad, though the sentence was ultimately not carried out. The scholar himself regarded this fact as "a second gift of life from Providence." His survival was partly facilitated by his scientific and public authority –

Gabunia, the secretary of the Akhaltsikhe District Committee, remembered him from Poti (Chitaia, 1991, p. 55; Chitaia, 2001, p. 214).

Information preserved in Giorgi Chitaia's memoirs clearly shows that he was well aware of the preparation process for the 1924 Uprising. As he notes:

"I noticed – I had been informed that the opposition parties were preparing an uprising, and were making corresponding preparations, but I did not know the date when they were to begin. In fact, the Parity Committee offered me the leadership of the uprising in Abkhazia, but I categorically refused for a specific reason: this will be an adventure, the people will be slaughtered, while the Parity Committee will survive" (Chitaia, 1991, p. 55).

This evaluation is important not only for understanding Giorgi Chitaia's personal political stance, but also from the perspective of the historical evaluation of the 1924 Uprising. His attitude closely paralleled the position of Niko Nikoladze, who likewise opposed an unprepared armed movement and urged the Damkom (Independence Committee) to exercise restraint. The outcomes of the uprising, followed by heavy casualties and the arrest and execution of political organizers, partially confirmed the views of those who evaluated the expediency and viability of the movement skeptically.

It is evident that Giorgi Chitaia possessed significant political experience and the ability to evaluate events. He saw the organizational weaknesses of the 1924 Uprising, assessed the political situation both within the country and abroad, maintained connections with the émigré intelligentsia, and held information regarding ongoing processes. It was precisely these factors that enabled him to realistically determine the probable outcomes of an armed movement.

The events of 1924 exerted a significant influence on the subsequent trajectory of Giorgi Chitaia's life. Following these events, he permanently withdrew from active political work and dedicated his efforts entirely to science and the study of Georgian culture and national heritage. Thus, his experience of political struggle was transformed into another form of national service – scholarly endeavor.

Giorgi Chitaia's political biography remains insufficiently studied to date. Beyond the scale of his scientific activities, there emerges a figure who actively participated in protecting the state interests of Georgia in his youth, and later experienced the consequences of political pressure during the Soviet period. This experience left a significant imprint on his worldview and subsequent scientific work.

Conclusion. Thus, the precision and consistency in describing the events of the first quarter of the 20th century in Giorgi Chitaia's memoir notes indicate that in the final years of his life, the author conveyed a thoroughly reflected historical experience preserved in long-term memory. At the same time, it must be considered that the Soviet ideological environment did not allow for the full documentation of such a political biography.

Giorgi Chitaia's autobiographical notes serve as an important primary source for studying the Georgian national movement, the struggle for independence, and the period following the Soviet occupation. Alongside his scientific heritage, these materials allow us to highlight those aspects of his socio-political activity that have not yet been properly investigated in Georgian historiography – including his participation in the struggle for the liberation of Batumi and his attitude toward the August 1924 Uprising.

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