

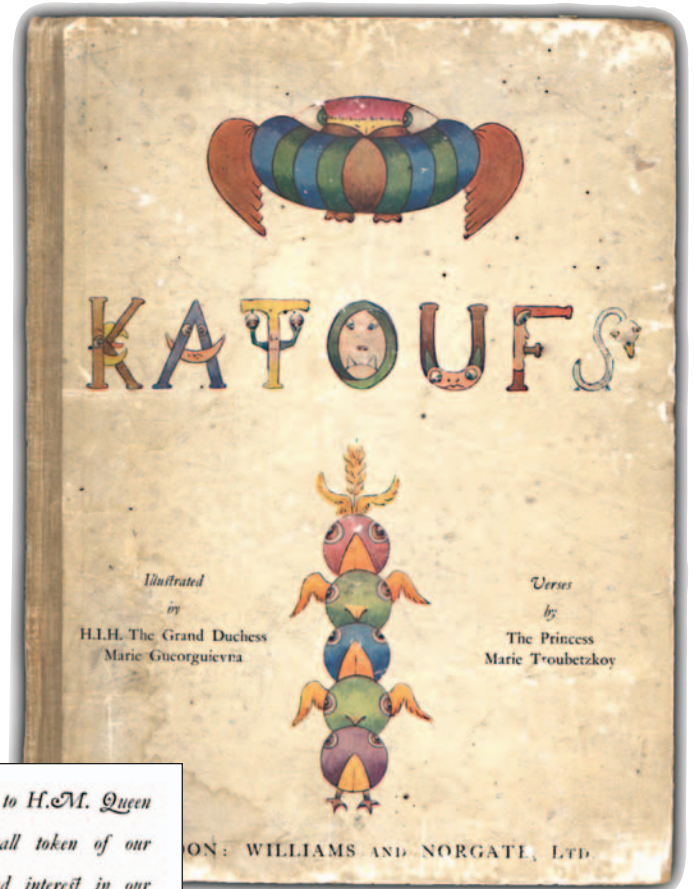
the artistic legacy of two grandmothers

The artistic legacy of two grandmothers

by David Chavchavadze



Princess Marie of Greece and Grand Duke George of Russia at the time of their wedding in 1900. (Right) In 1925 Princess Marie's drawings (which she called 'Katoufs') were published with rhymes by Princess Marie Troubetzkoy. (Inset) The dedication to Queen Alexandra from the book's creators, the two grandmothers of Prince David Chavchavadze (inset above).



We dedicate this book to H.M. Queen Alexandra as a small token of our gratitude for her kind interest in our work.

*Marie Gueorguievna.
Marie Troubetzkoy.*

My two grandmothers actually had a lot in common. In addition to both being named Marie, they were born only a year apart, maternal Marie in 1876 and paternal Marie in 1877. They both had Russian titles through marriage and they both lost Russian husbands to Bolshevik firing squads. They both had positions at the Imperial Russian Court and they both lived in St. Petersburg for many years. You'd think they would have met at some point; after all they both attended that last and most famous fancy dress ball at the Winter Palace in 1903. The Tsar and Tsarina and all the guests were dressed in costumes of the Tsar Alexei period in the mid-17th Century. Even the guard regiment on duty wore uniforms of the period. Seeing photos of this last great blast, a lot of people

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My other grandmother, born a Russian bearing the untitled but noble name of Rodzyanko, became a princess by marrying Prince Alexander Chavchavadze, and when they were divorced she married another Russian prince, Peter Troubetzkoy. I was instructed to call this grandmother "Babady," obviously some child's corruption of "babushka," which means "grandmother," not "kerchief" in Russian. She was the only sister of five younger brothers, all horsemen, athletes, and respected soldiers. Babady had three children, all by her first husband: my father Paul (1899), George, a concert pianist (1903), and Marina (1905).

assume that this was normal Court dress, but the costumes were worn for that one night only.

But no, it was only in London as refugees in 1922 that the two finally met face to face. The reason was that one Marie's daughter wanted to marry the other Marie's son, and vice versa, and there were some problems.

I think it is time to introduce you to these two ladies and give them, instead of Marie, the nicknames I was instructed to use for them.

My mother's mother was Princess Marie of Greece and Denmark, daughter of King George I and Queen Olga of the Hellenes. I called her Amama, the name Danish children used for grandmothers.

King George of Greece had started life as Prince William of Denmark, brother of Queen Alexandra of Great Britain and Empress Marie of Russia. Probably the reason the Greeks elected him



1933: Grand Duchess George of Russia (Princess Marie of Greece) with grandson Prince David Chavchavadze and daughter Princess Xenia.



Princess Maria Chavchavadze neé Rodzyanko dressed for the famous 1903 Imperial Ball held by Tsar Nikolai II and Tsarina Alexandra at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg.

king.

His parents put off telling him. They knew their son to be just the adventurous type who would want to pop off to a distant, barbaric country. But young William found out about his selection by reading the scrap of Danish newspaper in which his sardine sandwich was wrapped at the Danish naval academy he attended. There was no stopping him! And he ruled Greece from 1863 to 1913, when a Turk assassinated him. A long time for any king, especially in that part of the world.

Some embarrassment was caused by the fact that William-George became King of Greece before his father became King of Denmark. All

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Prince David Chavchavadze's grandmother, Maria Chavchavadze, with her three children - Marina, George and Paul.



of George's seven children grew up as fanatic Greek patriots. Amama cried when she was told she had no Greek blood!

The new King of Greece made a trip to Russia and immediately fell in love with sixteen year old Grand Duchess Olga Konstantinovna, daughter of Tsar Nikolai I's second son Constantine. She was just as enthusiastic about him, though she still played with dolls when she arrived in Athens. Over the years they had seven children of whom Amama was the youngest - five boys and two girls. Her older sister Alexandra married Russian Grand

Duke Paul and died in child-birth in 1891.

Amama was very close to her five brothers: Constantine, George, Nicholas, Andrew (whose son is Philip, Duke of Edinburgh) and Christopher. All the Greek royal children had a broad education and were very well versed in the history of Greece.

When Amama married her mother's cousin Grand Duke George Mikhailovitch, she insisted that the marriage take place in Greece, which the Tsar allowed. Then she became Grand Duchess George of Russia and an Imperial Highness. The Russians and Greeks shared the same Orthodox religion, which made things a little simpler.

Amama and her husband Apapa produced two children, Nina (my mother) and Xenia, born in 1901 and 1903.

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chief" in Russian. She was the only sister of five younger brothers, all horsemen, athletes, and respected soldiers. Babady had three children, all by her first husband: my father Paul (1899), George, a concert pianist, (1903), and Marina (1905).

Amama as a child was taken on many trips abroad: to Germany and Denmark to visit with Grandpapa Christian IX and Grandmama Louise. King Christian was already being called "the grandfather of Europe." And trips to France, Britain, and Russia. Lots of uncles, aunts, and cousins there - all the numerous kin of her Romanov mother. She probably

met her future husband Grand Duke George, but he was thirteen years older and did not interest her. But there were sparks from him about her. And then back to Greece, Loud cheers! She had command, in addition to Greek, of French, English, and German, as well as some Danish and Russian.

At the turn of the century Amama was twenty-four, the only girl left in the family. Princesses were supposed to marry foreign princes, but marriage outside of Greece did not attract her. Grand Duke George kept proposing. Very nice fellow, but . . . He ran a museum in St. Petersburg and was a famous coin collector. She finally gave in. You can judge how excited she was by what she wrote in her memoir: "The Grand Duke George of Russia proposed and was accepted." Period.

At first they lived in his father's palace outside Petersburg, so large that they bicycled through the halls to visit relatives. Amama spoke English to her daughters, French to her husband, and Russian as little as possible. The daughters spoke Russian to their father and everybody around them.

In 1905 they moved to a newly built small palace in the Crimea, on the Black Sea coast, designed by the well-known architect Krasnov. They were happy there. Amama had given the estate a Greek name, Harax, and discovered that there were ancient Greek ruins in the area. The Tsar's palace by the same architect, Livadia, was not far and the children played with each other and with other cousins in the area.

The idyll lasted for nine years. Then, in June 1914, Amama took the girls to England, to Harrogate, where Xenia needed treatment. Just in time for World War I. They never saw Russia or Apapa again.

After three years of inspecting troops and passing out St. George's crosses for valor after the war started, he was arrested by the Bolsheviks and, in 1919, was shot along with a brother and two cousins.

When the war started Amama opened a hospital in Harrogate for British and Canadian enlisted men, then, gradually, four other hospitals. All were very successful. After the revolution in Russia had cut off funds, Queen Alexandra kept the hospitals going.

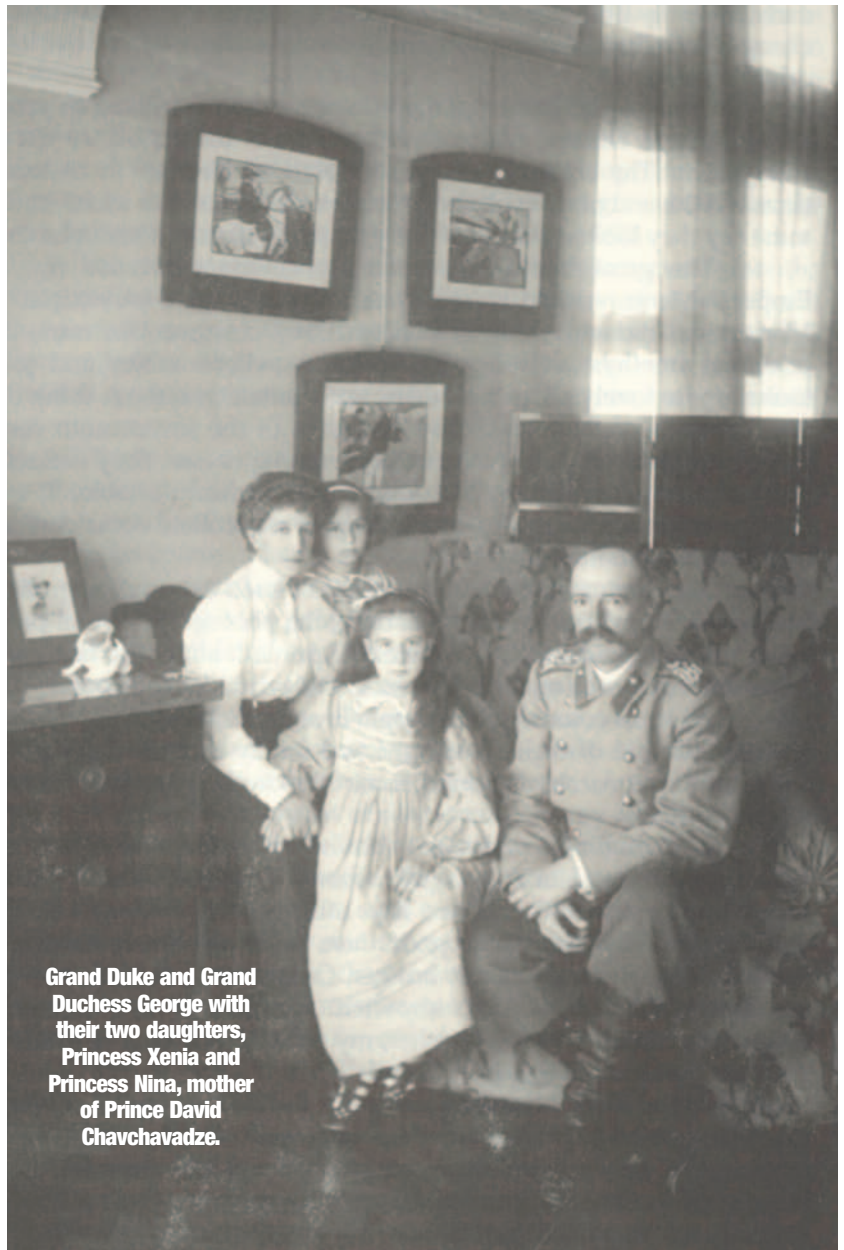
In 1920 Amama took her daughters to Greece on a Greek destroyer. Her brother Constantine was being restored to the throne after three years of exile. Happy Amama said she would marry the first Greek she saw. That was difficult. There were too many of them. But she did marry the captain of the destroyer, Pericles Ioannidis.

After her two daughters had moved to the United States and her aunt Queen Alexandra had died, Amama and her husband, now an admiral, moved to Rome and lived there for many years. Why not Athens? Good question! I really don't know. In 1940 they did go to Athens because they were thrown out of

Italy as enemy aliens by Mussolini. Amama arrived in Athens just at the time the Greeks smashed the invading Italian troops. But then came the Germans. Amama died and was buried in Tatoi just before Greece was overrun by them. She was sixty-five.

But seven years before her death, she did come to the United States for a couple of months. She seemed to believe that New York was full of gangsters except for Long Island where she was staying and parts of east side Manhattan. The rest of the country consisted of cowboys and possibly Indians.

I got mad at her once and said something like "Shut up you dumb Greek!" I was nine. As my father threw me out of the room, I heard Amama's delighted laughter. She was happy that I thought of her as a Greek. After that visit I never saw her again.



Grand Duke and Grand Duchess George with their two daughters, Princess Xenia and Princess Nina, mother of Prince David Chavchavadze.

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A photograph from 1908 of Grand Duchess George of Russia.

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he had not personally been present. Pavel's behavior was one reason the Rodzyankos were called notorious.

Pavel followed his wife to Switzerland every year, but his Russian soul craved wide-open spaces, and in Switzerland you could not turn around without bumping into a tourist or a cow. He complained to the Russian Legation and was narrowly dissuaded from cabling the Tsar that he had seen a sign that said "Park closed to dogs and Russians". He was particularly incensed that "Russians" trailed "dogs" in this sign.

One of my favorite stories about him happened on his way back from Switzerland. He stopped off in the Berlin Zoo to feed champagne to the lions and promise them their freedom. The Berlin police were not amused.

But we must not forget Pavel's record in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Since the Imperial Guard was not committed, Pavel raised cash from his wife's bank and put together a hospital train equipped with pretty nurses and plenty of champagne. In this he travelled wherever there were railroads in the Far East, picking up wounded. Once the train was almost captured by the Japanese but Pavel managed to get the wounded, nurses, and champagne to safety.

Babady was only nineteen when she met a handsome Georgian dragoon officer on the Black Sea, who followed her all the way to Finland where her parents owned a resort. This was Prince Alexander Chavchavadze, my grandfather to be. His proposal was happily accepted all around and approved by her parents.

They thought he was attractive, amusing, his father was a very senior and famous general, and his mother and all her family had been kidnapped by the forces of Iman Shamil (leader of the anti-Russian Moslem tribes of the Caucasus) and kept prisoners in the mountains for ransom for months in 1854.

Alexander's grandmother was a Bagration, a granddaughter of the last Georgian king, George XIII, of the dynasty which had ruled Georgia for fifteen hundred years. These Chavchavadze's had a nice estate soon to be reclaimed from

Babady's mother, born Princess Golitsine, was one of the richest people in St. Petersburg, having inherited one fifteenth of the vast Stroganov fortune from her Stroganov mother. This family's chef did indeed invent a famous beef dish, but they had been accumulating wealth since the 16th Century, when they conquered a large hunk of Siberia and presented it to the Tsar. To come to think of it, they must have already been rich to afford a private army.

Babady's first memories were of Russian troops triumphantly returning from the Turkish War of 1877. When she was five she saw the killers of Alexander II being taken to the gallows. She spoke Russian, French, and English. Her father, Pavel Rodzyanko, commanded a posh guards regiment, but mostly was a threat to his wife's money. Gifted musically, he wrote a march called "CasseTout" (Break Everything). All the best restaurants had the music to it and when they played it there was a deafening sound of crockery breaking as diners hurled it to the floor. He cheerfully picked up the bill, even if

the Crown Lands when the sum the paid for ransom to Shamil on the family's behalf would be paid back. "We can help with that", said Pavel ignoring his wife's dirty look. The estate was called Tsinandali, a great wine producer.

Oh yes, the young man's great grandfather was Catherine the Great's godson, a famous general, and a great poet in Georgian and friend of Lermontov, Pushkin, and Griboyedov, who had married his daughter - "Enough for us. Maroussya, you have a great catch there!"

Maroussya's grandson would call her Babady, but that was later. Only one idea was introduced that called forth thought, "Maroussya is a maid in waiting to both the Tsar and the Dowager Empress, she will have a small role to play in the coronation." But Maroussya-Babady had the last word, "I am not interested in that little role. I can't stand the young Tsarina anyway. We will go on our honeymoon and then go to Moscow for the coronation."

Alexander agreed with some enthusiasm. And it was remembered that this young man had agreed to leave his beloved family Nizhegorodsky Dragoon Regiment in the mountains and transfer to His Majesty's Guards Hussar Regiment so Maroussya need not leave Petersburg. They practically carried the Prince off on their shoulders.

They went to France and England for their honeymoon. Sasha (as now everybody called him) spoke Russian, German and French; his Georgian was very weak. When his bride asked him how he intended to talk to people in England he replied that everybody knew that English was just a mishmash of German and French. Maroussya shook her head but said, "I will be glad to speak for you in England if they are puzzled by your words, darling."

So they had a nice honeymoon and ended up in Moscow for the 1896 coronation of Nikolai II, and attended the French Ambassador's ball, which many thought should have been cancelled to honour the people crushed that morning in a rush to pick out the Tsar's presents brought out for them.

Babady thought that the most beautiful woman at the ball was young Queen Marie of Romania. It was 1896. Within ten years their marriage had soured. Another woman had entered Sasha's life though he kept saying that she was of no importance. Babady frequently took her three children to a resort in Rijeka, then in Austria-Hungary. Sometimes trips were a little delayed because one of Babady's huge hats would not fit a train entrance and she refused to remove it.

At Petersburg, when not in Rijeka, Babady was one of the ladies picked to sew shirts for soldiers under the Tsarina's supervision in the Winter Palace.

The Japanese War was on. One day soon after this started, Babady walked up to the Tsarina and said, "Does your Imperial Majesty not think that these white shirts we are sewing here would make excellent targets for Japanese riflemen?" The Tsarina looked up not very pleasantly and said, "I shall consult my husband." It worked, though. Khaki shirts

replaced white ones.

Babady had quite probably saved some lives but the Tsarina's lack of cordiality bothered her. The Dowager Empress had never treated people like that. This one acted as if Babady had made a gaffe, or thought she was a busybody. Not a word of thanks.

Babady and Alexander were divorced, which was still considered an indecency in Society though allowed by the church. Babady felt forced to leave Petersburg with the children to live with the family of a friend who happened to be Governor of Moldavia.

So they went to Kishinev, the capital. While there she married Prince Peter Troubetzkoy, an entomologist turned soldier and a childhood friend. During the Great War, Peter was stationed with the staff of General Brusilov in Kiev, not far away. Alexander was not far away either, now in command of the Circassian Regiment of the "Savage" Caucasian Cavalry Division, fighting against the Austrians.



Grand Duke George of Russia (11 August 1863 - January 30, 1919), was a first cousin of Emperor Alexander III of Russia and a general in the Russian army. He was the third son of Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaievich of Russia and Olga Fedorovna of Baden. On January 29, 1919, George was moved to Peter and Paul Fortress in Petrograd, and in the early hours of the following day he was shot there by a firing squad, along with his brother, Grand Duke Nicholas Mihailovich, and his cousins Grand Dukes Paul Alexandrovich and Dmitri Konstantinovich.

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From left to right: Princess Nina, Grand Duchess George, Princess Xenia.

The children visited their father when his regiment was in reserve. Little Marina never forgot dancing with the officers while they let off steam by shooting at the roof with their revolvers. Afterwards they cheerfully paid the owners of the house for a new roof.

Back in Moldavia, after the revolution had started in 1917, a gang of men calling themselves Bolsheviks came into the house where Babady and the children lived, looking for things to steal. They announced that when they were through robbing the house, they would not hurt anybody, but that naturally, since they were Bolsheviks, they would kill the Princess.

Babady showed what she was made of. She refused to show fright throughout this experience. They put a knife to her throat and then pointed a pistol at her. She said: "Don't try to frighten me with that ancient Smith and Wesson." Finally the leader said: "We have robbed and killed many ladies, but none as brave as you."

And then they went away. A short time later



Queen Olga of Greece with her granddaughters. From left to right: (top) Elizabeth, Xenia, Olga, Theodora, Nina, Margarita. (Centre) Cecilie, Irene, Queen Olga, Sophie, Helen. (Sitting) Katherine, Marina.

the Royal Romanian Army marched into Moldavia, and there were no more Bolsheviks to worry about there. The Romanians stayed until the end of World War II.

Babady and her brood (eventually including Peter Troubetzkoy) moved on to Bucharest, and then in 1921, with the aid of the beautiful Queen Marie of Romania, to London. There my father met my mother while Babady opened a clothing shop, specializing, of course, in hats.

Babady came to visit us in Manhattan in 1934. She loved to be taken to Harlem restaurants where there was a lot of singing. She insisted on going alone to Seventh Avenue to hunt for bargains for her shop in London. My parents warned her - those people were tough and nasty. Don't go alone! She paid no attention. Nothing could scare her now. She returned with her large hat askew and agreed that it was pretty bad. But "I told them off!" she said. "How? What did you say to them?" I simply said, "You are all knaves!"

Whatever happened to Babady's first husband, Sasha Chavchavadze? Very sad. He returned to Georgia during its short independence, and when the Red Army under Stalin came, he was jailed for ten years and then shot, in 1931.

I visited Babady several times after World War II. They had moved out to Dorset, where they were raising Welsh Corgies. I enjoyed listening to Babady singing Russian songs while she accompanied herself with a lute. Peter Troubetzkoy did all the housework. When he took out the garbage a lady who lived across the street would come out and make a deep court curtsy, probably thinking, "I know how to behave with Royalty!" Nobody spoiled the lady's fun by explaining that the Troubetzkoy's were princes, but not royal. That would have spoiled Peter's fun too. It was probably the best part of his day. Babady died in 1958. She was eighty-one years old.

By 1922 Amama was used to taking the buses in London. My mother waited for her to be halfway up the outside stairs before saying "I am engaged to Paul Chavchavadze." By the time Amama found a seat and arranged her skirts, she had simmered down and even agreed that the boy could come to dinner. After that she had to agree that the "Caucasian prince" was a nice young man, well brought up by his mother, one of the notorious Rodzyanko clan.

This was grudging approval of Babady. But problems continued. Grand Duke Michael, a brother of George resident in London, appointed himself family chairman and invited Babady to lunch. He came right to the point: "I hear you lost all your money in the revolution." "Your Imperial Highness is misinformed," Babady replied, "we are very rich indeed." "Your side of the family?" asked the puzzled Grand Duke. "Of course," said Babady. My father was horrified: "How could you have lied to him?" "I did not lie!" said Babady with indignation, "We are very rich - in spirit."

Amama invited Babady to dinner. Amama was relieved not to have to speak Russian. They found mutual friends. And at some point Babady discovered the Katoufs - scores of small

drawings in colour of exotic people and animals.

"A hobby of mine," said Amama. "I call them 'Katoufs'." "But they are delightful! So imaginative, amusing, and well drawn! You should publish them!" Amama was pleased. "Well, I need some text added to them." "With your permission, I would like to make up a rhyme for each Katouf."

They remained friends. Well, at least until the Katoufs book came out in 1925 with Babady's clever rhymes. It was dedicated to their first grandchild, me, now one year old. There were no more grandchildren for Babady, though Amama acquired a granddaughter from Xenia, Nancy Leeds, born the year the Katoufs was first published.

David Chavchavadze

The entire KATOUFS art collection has been periodically exhibited. This included a major children's geared themed exhibition 'KATOUFS - From Royal times to Nursery Rhymes' at the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center in Chicago. It is hoped that a museum to permanently exhibit and house this original collection and children's attraction will be found. More information can be obtained by visiting www.katoufs.com



Grand Duchess George's final years were spent in exile. Her husband was one of the victims of the Russian revolution. She married a second time to a Greek naval officer named Pericles Ioannides in 1922. They lived in Italy until the outbreak of World War Two forced her to return to her native Greece, where she died in 1940.