

Soviet Repressive Policy in Rural Areas: Kakheti, 1930s

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Abstract: *This study explores the mechanisms and scope of Soviet repressive policies in 1930s Georgia, focusing on the villages of the Telavi Municipality. It is based on archival materials from the Kakheti Regional Archive, which detail the administrative, social, and economic conditions of rural communities under Soviet rule.*

By the late 1920s, Soviet authorities sought to eliminate private property, dismantle individual farms, and establish collective farms, enforcing deep intervention in all aspects of rural life. Special attention was given to integrating the rural population into collective agriculture and suppressing “socially alien” groups, particularly middle and wealthier peasants.

Archival documents show that the revocation of voting rights and inclusion on “blacklists” often depended on the personal judgment of village council chairpersons, affecting merchants, peasants, clergy, and their families. These measures restricted access to education, employment, and social mobility, and forced clergy members to abandon religious duties.

Expulsion from collective farms and the requirement to provide “certificates of social status” further reinforced political and socio-economic control. Overall, the archival evidence demonstrates that Soviet repressions in 1920-1930s Kakheti were systematic and ideologically driven, combining political, social, and economic mechanisms, and had a profound impact on rural communities.

Key words: *Soviet repressive policy, Kakheti, rural population, 1930s, collectivization, disenfranchisement, archival research*

Text:

Telavi State University, through its internal funding program, undertakes a wide range of scientific and research projects dedicated to studying the history and modern development of Kakheti's villages. Over the years, we, as a team of researchers, have carried out several projects aimed ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity in Kakheti, at documenting and analyzing various aspects of the region's cultural and historical heritage. One of our recently completed projects is entitled: ‘The Villages of Telavi Municipality - Vardisubani, Ruispiri, Ikalto (History and Modernity)’. In this project, we examined the historical development and contemporary realities of these villages, providing a comprehensive insight into their social, cultural, and economic transformations.

The **archival materials** we have collected and analyzed also provide a **comprehensive insight** into the **main directions of the Soviet government's repressive policies** in the countryside during the 1930s.

As is well known, by the **late 1920s** the **Soviet authorities** pursued a policy in the countryside aimed at the **elimination of the remnants of private property** and the **dismantling of individual farms**, with the ultimate goal of establishing **collective farms**.

This **deliberate and targeted policy** of the authorities implied a **deep intervention in all aspects of rural life**. Particular emphasis was placed on the **elimination of private property** in the countryside and the **forced involvement of the rural population** in implementing the **Soviet political and economic agenda**. The ultimate objective of these measures was not only the **centralization of economic resources** but also the **eradication of entire social strata**, particularly the **wealthier and middle peasantry**.

A **striking example** of the **repressive policies** pursued by the Soviet authorities during this period is the **confiscation of land and other property** from the rural population. For instance, according to the **minutes of the meeting** of the **Village Council of Vardisubani** in the **Telavi district**, dated **January 11, 1927**, the lands owned by Vardisubani residents **B. Chichashvili, G. Tushishvili, and M. Margalitashvili** were **confiscated** due to their engagement in **commercial activities**. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,20: 134)

During the **1920s and 1930s**, the **Soviet authorities** actively sought to **identify opponents of the regime** among the rural population, with the ultimate aim of subjecting them to **further repression**. A telling example is provided by the **minutes** of the **Village Council of Ikalto**, dated **April 12, 1933**, where the council discussed the **"revision of the collective farm membership"** and **"character references"** concerning several individuals considered **"unreliable."** Among those labeled as **"unreliable"** was A. Mrelashvili, a local resident, described as *"a member of an cooperative,, married, arrested in 1930 for desertion to Armenia, and maintaining connections with anti-Soviet elements."* Among those designated as **"anti-Soviet elements"** were Gigla Arsenashvili, who was noted as having *"served time in a correctional facility (prison) for political reasons,"* and Gigla Papalashvili. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 17,4:2) It is particularly noteworthy that Gigla Arsenashvili had served for many years as a teacher at Ikalto Secondary School, while Gigla Papalashvili was a soloist and musician of the Telavi District Ensemble in 1932.

In the same document, F. Khutsurauli is also identified as an **"unreliable"** individual, described by local representatives of the Soviet authorities as a *"former member of the Shavsiebi group."* It is noted that in 1930, he had refused to merge his farm into the collective farm. Additionally, Grigol Bakhsroliani is mentioned as another **"unreliable"** person, characterized as a *"middle peasant and former member of the Shavsiebi group."* (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 17,4:2)

The terms **"Shavsieli"** (*"blacklisted"*) and **"Khma Agdgenili"** (*"voice restored"*) are associated with the electoral practices of the Soviet era. The point is that the Soviet authorities organized elections at various levels; however, these elections were largely formal in nature and were frequently employed as an instrument of passive repression against the population. By the late 1920s and the early 1930s, elections conducted by the Soviet authorities increasingly served as a mechanism of passive repression. For elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as well as to local governing bodies, voter lists were compiled. Excluding, omitting, or failing to include an individual in these lists meant that the person not only lost the right to participate in elections but was also deprived of other fundamental civil rights. Such individuals faced restricted access to higher education for themselves and their family members, were officially considered unreliable persons, and were often denied employment opportunities, particularly within state institutions.

The fact that **removing individuals from electoral lists** became one of the key mechanisms of **indirect repression** in the **Soviet reality** is further confirmed by the policy of **Tbilisi State University**: for the **1933-1934 academic year**, only those individuals who **possessed the right to vote** were permitted to **take the entrance examinations**. (*Komunisti* 1933, No. 152)

This type of practice is further evidenced by a series of petitions submitted by residents to the Village Council of Vardisubani, dated July 29, 1931. For instance, T. Gogoshvili, a resident of the village, filed a petition requesting:

"Please issue a certificate confirming that my father has no outstanding tax obligations for the year 1931 and that he is not included in the list of those deprived of voting rights. I need this certificate to present to the educational institution."

The above statement was attested and confirmed by members of the Village Council who were also residents of the same community. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,2:2)

The archives of the Executive Committee of the Telavi District contain numerous petitions from the same period, submitted by individuals classified as "khma agkvetili" or "khma chamortmeuli" - meaning those deprived of voting rights. Among these documents, several are of particular significance, as they vividly reflect the political realities and social attitudes of the time. These materials often reveal not only individual tragedies but also the systematic persecution of specific social groups, thereby illustrating the local manifestation of Soviet repressions in the Kakheti region during the 1920s and 1930s.

On February 11, 1930, a petition was sent to the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Georgian SSR by K. Kurashvili, a resident of the village of Ikalto. In the petition, he lists his possessions — including one horse, one cow, and a two-room house - and states that his right to vote had been revoked in 1929 "by mistake" during the elections. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,20: 6) According to Kurashvili, his electoral rights were withdrawn due to the personal negative attitude of a member of the Village Council towards him.

K. Kurashvili also sent another petition addressed to the Village Council of Ikalto, in which he once again lists his possessions and declares that he is "not opposed to the Soviet government", requesting the restoration of his voting rights. He concludes his letter with a desperate plea: *"Do not doom my children."* The information provided in Kurashvili's petition was verified and endorsed by 231 residents of the village of Ikalto, each providing their signature in support. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,20: 7)

Thus, K. Kurashvili's petitions clearly reflect both the social conditions of the rural population and their attitudes toward the Soviet authorities in the 1920s and 1930s. Kurashvili sought to prove that he did not belong to a "socially alien" element and, accordingly, requested the restoration of his voting rights. His detailed enumeration of property and his demonstration of loyalty to the Soviet government reveal just how painfully the rural population perceived inclusion on the "blacklist" — that is, the revocation of electoral rights — both from a political and a social standpoint.

Moreover, the **petition signed by 231 residents** of the village further demonstrates that the process by which **local representatives of the Soviet authorities** classified individuals as **"kulaks"** often **did not align with the perceptions of the local population** and was, in many cases, **unjust**.

To further substantiate these conclusions, we present a petition dated 1930 from G. Tushishvili, a resident of the village of Vardisubani, addressed to the Chairman of the Telavi Executive Committee. In his letter, he writes that two years earlier, he had owned a small shop in Vardisubani where he sold various small goods. Because of this, his right to vote had been revoked during the elections. Tushishvili explains that for the past two years he had ceased trading and had been unemployed. He requested the restoration of his voting rights so that he could obtain a job:

"...to be accepted as a guard in some institution, so that I can save my six family members from starvation. I hope you will give due consideration to my request and restore my voting rights."

At the bottom of the petition, a resolution was added:

"Submit a petition for the restoration of his voting rights, as he has not been engaged in trade since 1925." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,20: 38)

Particularly noteworthy is the petition author's expressed desire to work as a guard once his voting rights were restored. This detail reflects the harsh reality faced by individuals who had been deprived of electoral rights. The petition illustrates that the loss of voting rights not only restricted political freedoms but also created a significant barrier to economic activity. Those labeled as "deprived of voting rights" were often considered unacceptable to employers, even for low-paid positions such as that of a guard.

Thus, the **revocation of voting rights** served as one of the **forms of repression** employed by the **Soviet authorities**. Individuals **deprived of electoral rights** were effectively **excluded from public life** and left to face **poverty and unemployment**.

Individuals deprived of voting rights actively sought ways to regain their electoral “voice.” One such example is a petition dated February 11, 1930, addressed to the Chairman of the Telavi District Council, submitted by B. Jashiashvili, a resident of the village of Vardisubani. He writes:

“Last year, due to some misunderstanding, we were placed on the blacklist. We submitted a petition requesting that our situation be reviewed and our voting rights restored, but no attention was paid. I am now resubmitting my petition and listing all my real and movable estate, as verified by the members of the Village Council, in order to have my voting rights reinstated. Movable property: none. Real estate: a two-room house, a shop, arable land: four days’ worth. Our household consists of six members, with two laborers.” (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,18: 34)

As the **analysis of the documents** reveals, during this period the **electoral lists** - as well as the **lists of individuals deprived of voting rights** (“*khma chamortmeuli*” / “*khma agkvetili*”) - were **submitted by the electoral commissions of the village councils to the district center**. Such documents were, as a rule, **signed by the chairpersons of the village councils**.

In order to clarify who was included in the lists of individuals deprived of voting rights, we present the content of the minutes from one of the meetings held by the electoral commissions: “*Minutes No. 2. On December 8, 1930, a meeting of the Electoral Commission of the Village Council of Ikalto was convened. Agenda:*

1. *Review of the list of individuals deprived of voting rights*
2. *Miscellaneous matters*

Heard:

Regarding the inclusion of individuals in the list of those deprived of voting rights.

Resolved:

The following individuals are to be included in the list of those deprived of voting rights:

1. *S. Jordanishvili, together with his family, classified as deprived of voting rights since 1927 for the use of hired labor.*
2. *M. Khakhutashvili, together with his wife and children, classified as a merchant-middleman; his voting rights revoked since 1927.*
3. *D. Dzamukashvili, daughter of David, classified as a servant of a religious cult.*
4. *S. Tatilashvili, together with his family, deprived of voting rights since 1927 as an employer and dekulakized during the complete collectivization period.*
5. *S. Papunashvili, taxed individually as an employer; he was not deprived of voting rights in the previous year.*
6. *S. Raibuli, taxed individually as the owner of a mill, where hired labour was employed.*
7. *D. Dzamukashvili, taxed individually, noted for the purchase and sale of sickles.*
8. *Igumen Ioseb Mazmanishvili, classified as a servant of a religious cult.*
9. *V. Enukidze, together with his wife and children, classified as a servant of a religious cult.*
10. *N. Lachashvili, also classified as a servant of a religious cult.*
11. *S. Bachiasvili, identified as a merchant, deprived of voting rights since 1926.*
12. *Makashvili, a former nobleman.”* (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,18: 29)

As it turns out, it was not solely the electoral commission that determined who should be included in the lists of individuals deprived of voting rights. The chairpersons of the village councils, who also served as heads of the electoral commissions, often made such decisions based on their personal judgment.

For example, G. Chibalashvili, the chairman of the Ikalto Village Council and simultaneously the head of the Ikalto Electoral Commission, sent the following petition to the Telavi District Executive Committee:

“To the Telavi District Electoral Commission: We inform you that during the review of the lists by the electoral commission, the name of E. Bachiasvili, a resident of Ikalto, who had been dekulakized, was overlooked. We request that this person, together with his family, be included in the list of individuals deprived of voting rights.

Family composition: wife Babe, son Vaso. Chairman of the Ikalto Electoral Commission, G. Chibalashvili. Secretary Pareshishvili. December 1930.” (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,18: 28) The

inclusion of individuals in the lists of those deprived of voting rights based on subjective judgment often led to confusion and disputes. It appears that this was precisely why G. Kurtsikashvili, the Chairman of the Telavi District Executive Committee and simultaneously the Chairman of the Telavi District Electoral Commission, requested the removal of several individuals from the Ikalto list of those deprived of voting rights:

“To the Ikalto Electoral Commission:

The lists of individuals deprived of electoral rights in your villages have been approved by the District Electoral Commission. You are hereby instructed to post the lists publicly, in accordance with Form No. 4, excluding the following individuals: G. Papunashvili, K. Qurashvili, and M. Dzamukashvili, along with their family members.

Furthermore, you are required to submit an explanatory note clarifying the reasons why these individuals were originally included in the list of those deprived of voting rights.

Chairman of the Telavi District Electoral Commission - G. Kurtsikashvili Secretary - Khelashvili.” (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 1469,18: 25)

The petition of G. Margalitashvili, a resident of the village of Vardisubani, clearly illustrates some of the other reasons why individuals were often listed among those deprived of voting rights. In his petition, Margalitashvili stated that *“about five years ago, when the shops still operated, I used to travel to Tbilisi and bring back fish, which I would give to my neighbors.”* According to his account, this activity caused his inclusion on the blacklist. Margalitashvili appealed the decision, and his voting rights were initially restored. However, he was subsequently removed from the electoral lists once again. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,2: 2)

Margalitashvili’s petition clearly demonstrates that the **inclusion of individuals in the lists of those deprived of voting rights** was often linked **not only to their property status** but also to their **past social and economic activities**.

As seen above, the population commonly referred to the list of individuals deprived of voting rights as the “blacklist.” The minutes book of the Vardisubani Village Council contains a petition by S. Jashiashvili, who requested to be “released” from the list of those deprived of voting rights, i.e., from the “blacklist.”

During the relevant session, the Vardisubani Village Council resolved:

“Deny removal from the blacklist, as the petitioner maintains ties with a deportee.”

At the same session, the council also reviewed a petition by Sh. Tushishvili, who likewise requested removal from the blacklist. In this case, the resolution stated:

“Submit a petition to the Executive Committee recommending rehabilitation, as the individual is deemed worthy of being whitened.”

In this context, the term “whitened” referred to the removal of a person from the “blacklist”. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,9: 5)

It is not explicitly stated **in what way this individual was “rehabilitated.”** However, it can be assumed that, like many of his fellow villagers, he **accepted the rules and regulations imposed on the peasantry by the Soviet authorities** — possibly by **severing ties with individuals considered undesirable by the regime, abandoning trade or craftsmanship, or transferring his privately-owned land to the collective farm, and etc.**

The **majority of individuals deprived of voting rights** belonged to the following **categories: merchants, middle peasants, clergy, and their family members.** Within the framework of the **Soviet anti-religious policy**, members of the clergy were classified as **“socially alien elements.”** Consequently, they were **removed from electoral lists and denied the right to participate in elections.** The **revocation of electoral rights** had a **direct negative impact** on the **social status and living conditions** of these individuals and their families. As a result, **many clergy members were forced to abandon their religious duties.**

This is **confirmed by archival documents** preserved from the period. Among them is a record from the **minutes of the Presidium of the Vardisubani Village Council**, dated **September 1932**, which contains the following information:

“Reviewed the petition of former priest Raman Mtvarelishvili regarding the restoration of his

voting rights. Resolved: Restore the voting rights of former priest R. Mtvarelishvili. A copy of the minutes is to be sent to the Presidium of the Telavi District Executive Committee for confirmation."

In other words, **R. Mtvarelishvili** had **abandoned his clerical duties**, and, as a result, he was **"reinstated" into the electoral lists**. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,2: 17)

Middle peasants were classified as **"kulaks"** and **"alien elements."** Individuals who **owned private property** and **employed hired labour** were regarded as **exploiters**.

The above-mentioned information concerning **individuals deprived of voting rights** clearly illustrates the functioning of the **ideologically driven repressive mechanisms** of the **Soviet system**. In addition to the **inclusion of individuals** in the **lists of those deprived of voting rights** - a form of **indirect repression** - the Soviet authorities also employed **other methods of direct repression** against the rural population, such as the **expulsion of individuals from collective farms** for various reasons. For example, according to the **minutes of the Vardisubani Village Council** dated **1935**, those who **failed to pay taxes** were labeled **"obstructionists."** Such individuals were **expelled from collective farms**, and their **cases were referred to the courts**. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,9: 3)

As it appears, the **expulsion of individuals from collective farms** was **not an isolated practice**. In **July 1936**, at a **general meeting of the members** of the **Ikalto collective farm**, attended by **50 people**, the assembly reviewed the issue of **"expelling disobedient members from the collective farm."** The resolution stated:

"Since they simulate illness and refuse to work on the collective farm, and having been repeatedly warned by both the administration and the general assembly, they are hereby expelled from the collective farm."

The minutes also include a **list of about ten individuals** whose names were recorded as expelled. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,11: 24)

Another common reason for the **expulsion of individuals from collective farms** was their **refusal to work in the collective fields**. For example, at a **general meeting of the members** of the **Taghlauri collective farm**, held on **June 15, 1936**, the case of collective farm member **V. Bachiashvili** was reviewed. The resolution stated:

"V. Bachiashvili is to be expelled from the collective farm, as he had received several warnings for failing to participate in corn hoeing. After these warnings, his workdays had been reduced, yet he still refused to come to work. For this reason, he is hereby expelled from the collective farm." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,11: 34)

It is noteworthy that in the village, **peasants working in collective farms** received their **wages in the form of agricultural products**, based on the **number of workdays** they accumulated.

The same document also notes the **expulsion of another individual** from the **collective farm** who had **left to pursue studies**:

"Since he left to continue his education without the permission of the collective farm, his assigned work plans were left incomplete — for example, the hoeing of corn and other tasks. As he deceived the collective farm, he is hereby expelled from its membership."

Individuals were also **expelled from collective farms** for **working elsewhere without permission**. For example, one resolution stated:

"S. Bachiashvili is to be expelled from the collective farm as he failed to assist with the hoeing of the collective farm's cornfields and left, without the farm's consent, to work elsewhere." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,11: 34)

On **December 28, 1936**, at a **general meeting of the members** of the **Taghlauri collective farm**, attendees listened to a report by **Lavrenti Beria**, delivered at the **Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia**, titled *"Measures for the Further Strengthening of Georgian Collective Farms."* The speakers at the session emphasized that:

"Starting today, the collective farm must reorganize its work in accordance with the report and implement specific measures."

At the same meeting, **V. Bachiashvili** addressed the assembly, speaking about his **expulsion from the collective farm**. He stated:

"I was expelled from the collective farm without justification. I am physically weak and unable to work, yet they demanded that I work in the cornfields. Likewise, my wife could not work due to pregnancy, and because she had not accumulated the required workdays, she (wife) too was expelled." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,11: 50)

The **archival materials** also contain **other petitions**, some of which reveal that, in order to be **admitted to educational institutions** or to obtain **employment**, **village residents** were often required to provide **certificates verifying their "social origin."** The **"certificate of social origin"** was also commonly referred to as a **"certificate of poverty."** Among the **archival materials** we examined is a **petition dated 1931** from **V. Sumbadze**, a native of **Vardisubani** who was residing in **Telavi** at the time. In his petition, he requested a **"certificate of social origin"** to submit to an **educational institution**. He indicated the following information:

"My father was a land labourer, an extremely poor peasant, who passed away early. As a result, I was dependent on the support of my uncles. Until 1925, I studied at the Vardisubani school, and in 1925, I became an apprentice to a shoemaker." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,3: 15)

A similar **certificate - "statement of social status"** was requested in **1935** by **I. Chikvaidze**, a resident of **Vardisubani**, for submission to a **school**. In his petition, he also described his **family's social and economic situation**:

"Our household consists of a one-room house, two buffaloes, one cow, one bull, and two days' worth of arable land. There are four family members in the household, with one labourer." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,14: 133)

A similar **certificate regarding the family's "social status"** was also requested by **T. Sozashvili**, a resident of **Vardisubani**, who likewise provided information about his **family's property status** in his petition:

"Our property consists of a two-room house, a cowshed, five head of cattle, and two days' worth of arable land." (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,14: 54)

In a **1936 petition**, **B. Jashiashvili** also requested a **"certificate of social status"** from the **Village Council** for submission to an **educational institution**. In the petition, he likewise provided details regarding his **family's property status**. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,3: 85) A **similar petition** was submitted by **Margalitashvili**, requesting a **"certificate of social status"** to be presented **for his child's admission to an educational institution**. (Kakheti Reg. Arch, 79,27: 5)

Thus, the **analysis of archival materials** confirms that, during the **1930s**, the **Soviet authorities** actively pursued a **repressive policy** against the **rural population**. The **confiscation of private property**, **collectivization**, and the **revocation of voting rights** for individuals deemed **"unreliable"** were among the **primary mechanisms** through which the Soviet regime **exercised control over the countryside**. The lists of individuals deprived of voting rights, the practice of expelling members from collective farms, and the requirement to present "certificates of social status" or "poverty certificates" for admission to schools and workplaces all confirm that Soviet repressions constituted a systematic and ideologically driven mechanism. This mechanism was designed to exert political as well as socio-economic control over the rural population.

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საბჭოთა რეპრესიული პოლიტიკა სოფლად: კახეთი 1930-იანი წლებში

სიმამილი თენგიზ

იაკობ გოგებაშვილის სახელობის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, თელავი

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აბსტრაქტი

ნაშრომის მიზანია საბჭოთა ხელისუფლების რეპრესიული პოლიტიკის მექანიზმები და მასშტაბების გამოკვლევა 1930-იან წლებში საქართველოში, თელავის მუნიციპალიტეტში მდებარე სოფლების მაგალითზე. კვლევა ეფუძნება კახეთის რეგიონალურ არქივში დაცულ საარქივო მასალებს, რომლებიც დეტალურად ასახავენ სოფლის ადმინისტრაციულ, სოციალურ და ეკონომიკურ ვითარებას საბჭოთა მმართველობის პერიოდში.

კვლევის მეთოდოლოგია მოიცავს საარქივო დოკუმენტების ანალიზს. როგორც გამოირკვა, საბჭოთა ხელისუფლება სისტემატურად იყენებდა სხვადასხვა სახის რეპრესიულ ზომებს მოსახლეობაში გავლენის განსამტკიცებლად. 1930-იან წლებში სოფლად მცხოვრები მოსახლეობისთვის კერძო საკუთრების ჩამორთმევა, მათი იძულება გაერთიანებულიყვნენ კოლმეურნეობებში და „არასანდო“ პირებისთვის საარჩევნო უფლების შეზღუდვა წარმოადგენდა, იმ ძირითად მექანიზმებს, რომლის საშუალებით საბჭოთა ხელისუფლება ახდენდა სოფლის მოსახლეობის პოლიტიკურ, სოციალურ და ეკონომიკურ კონტროლს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: საბჭოთა რეპრესიული პოლიტიკა, კახეთი, სოფლის მოსახლეობა, 1930-იანი წლები, კოლექტივიზაცია, ხმის უფლების შეზღუდვა, საარქივო კვლევა