

ANCIENT PERSIA AND THE CAUCASUS¹

BY

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In the middle of the 6th century BC Cyrus the Great founded an empire which dominated the Near and Middle East for more than two centuries. Nevertheless, for a long time scholars emphasized the feebleness of Achaemenid traces in archaeological records. The Achaemenid imprint was hardly visible in most of the provinces. In the recent past this situation has begun to change². In the following I am going to present an area on the north-western periphery of the vast empire: the Caucasus.

In Russian terminology the region south of the Caucasus mountain range is called Transcaucasia. It includes the former Soviet republics Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Whereas Transcaucasia formed a kind of strategic unity from the Russian point of view, the geography as well as the (ancient) political history of these three countries have little in common. The region which the Russians call Cis-Caucasia, *i.e.* Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and the Kuban region, all still belonging to Russia, have been beyond the Persian sphere of influence in antiquity and will therefore be omitted here.

Until the present day there is no agreement among scholars upon the extension of the Persian Empire on its north-western border. Textual sources are rather quiet concerning the above-mentioned countries for the time of the Achaemenid Empire. Nevertheless, there is little reason to doubt that they became part of the empire some time in the later 6th century BC³.

¹ I dedicate this paper to the memory of Norbert Karg (november 27, 1954 – october 19, 2001), a brilliant scholar and archaeologist of the Ancient Near East and a very dear friend.

This is a slightly revised version of a paper originally presented as Vladimir Lukonin-Lecture in the British Museum on July 13th, 2004.

² Cf. Briant & Boucharlat, 2005.

³ Cf. Hdt. III 97; see already Knauss, 2001a, 125-126. 129-133.

The state of research

For different, not least language reasons, archaeological evidence from the Achaemenid period remained almost unknown to most western scholars until the collapse of the Soviet empire. And, until the present day, the interest of local archaeologists and historians in foreign, namely Achaemenid remains is rather small. Archaeology plays a vital role for the self-confidence of these peoples. Therefore their main goal is the investigation of indigenous cultures⁴.

In Armenia, which had been part of the Urartian kingdom until the early 6th century BC we knew a number of former Urartian residences in the southern part of the country that have been re-used with minor modifications during Achaemenid rule, such as Erebouni or Argishtikhinily. Azerbaijan was — and for the greatest part still is — archaeological *terra incognita* at least for the 1st millennium BC. Some spectacular finds from Georgia, from Kazbegi and Akhalkgori, had been published more than 100 years ago, but not before the last decade the impressing number of imports as well as local imitations of Achaemenid pottery, glass, gold, silver and bronze objects became known to a broader scientific public. The additional evidence, new sites and finds (fig. 23), partly are the result of recent excavations. The greater part has been investigated fairly earlier, but just recent publications or translations have made them known to western scholars⁵.

Georgia

Archaeological research in Georgia in the past has mainly focused on the prehistory, *i. e.* the Early Bronze Age Kura-Arax culture and the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti culture, while for the Iron Age, even in recent publications⁶, Georgia seems to be restricted to its western part, the ancient Colchis. This country is well known to all of us for the story of the golden fleece, which Jason and the Argonauts gained with the help of the local princess Medea. The story might have a historical core, which is reflected in the archaeological evidence: The production center of some bronze

⁴ Nationalism is virulent in all of these countries.

⁵ For an actual overview of recent publications on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in Achaemenid times see Knauss, 2005a.

⁶ Lordkipanidse, 1991; Braund, 1994.

figurines found in the sanctuary of Hera in Samos must have been in Western Colchis, where almost identical pieces came to light at several places⁷. These early contacts with the Greek world rose sharply in the 6th century BC, when the first Greek settlers reached the eastern shore of the Black Sea⁸. The exchange with the West never really came to an end. It even shows a significant increase in Late Hellenistic and Roman Times.

In the first half of the 1st millennium BC the material culture of Eastern Georgia had developed in relative seclusion. In the 6th century BC, however, it suddenly came into the sphere of influence of a mighty neighbour, Persia. Already in the 19th century spectacular finds attracted the interest of scholars from all over the world. Well known are the so-called Akhagori and Kazbeg treasure, which include Achaemenid metal vases and jewelry. Some items were made by local craftsmen, who copied such imports. Often, however, they created new shapes and motifs combining foreign and local elements. The great majority of these small finds reflecting some kind of Achaemenid influence in this region have been found in burials of the local Colchian and Iberian, *i. e.* East Georgian, aristocracy.

In 1877 a number of objects had been recovered near the village Kazbegi under difficult circumstances. They are now called “Kazbeg treasure”. Among the approximately 200 objects is an Achaemenid silver phiala with almond-shaped embossing, lotus palmettes, stylized swan heads and an Aramaic inscription on the rim⁹.

A rich burial of a woman which has been excavated in 1908 has been published as the “Akhagori treasure” or “Akhagori hoard”. By far the majority of the finds were made in local workshops, however, some pieces betray Greek and oriental influence. Four silver phialai (fig. 1) and a silver jar were made in Achaemenid workshops, the famous horse shaped pendants (fig. 2) are of local production, but the craftsmen had Achaemenid models in mind. The deceased lady was most probably buried in the late 4th century BC, but the inventory of the tomb — at least parts of it — has been made earlier¹⁰.

⁷ Mikeladse, 1995, 18-21 figs. 18-20.

⁸ Cf. recently: Sens, 2003, 237-240 (with extensive bibliography); Sens, 2005, 111-118.

⁹ Smirnov, 1909, 7 pl. III; Miron & Orthmann, 1995, 163-164; Boardman, 2000, 191 fig. 5.73a-b.

¹⁰ Cf. Smirnov, 1934; Abka'i-Khavari, 1988, 126; Lordkipanidze, 1991, 154. 156 pls. 53, 2-11; 54, 1-2; Miron & Orthmann, 1995, 161. 165-266. 305-306 Nr. 299-303 figs. 162. 166-167. 169; Gagoshidze, 1997, 123-125. 135; Lordkipanidze, 2002, 143-171. 182-185 figs. 2-16.

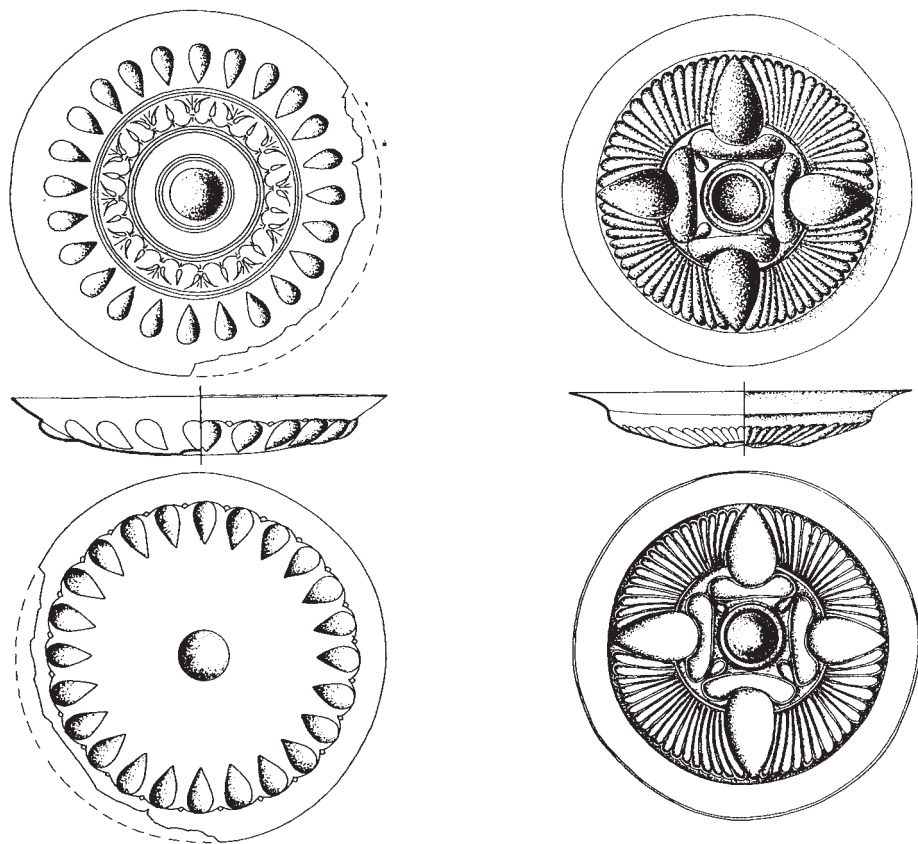


Fig. 1. Akhalgori, silver phialai.

In the village Mtisdziri a number of graves contained local products as well as imports and objects which must have been made by Colchian craftsmen who were strongly influenced by foreign models. A silver rhyton with a goat-shaped protome (fig. 3) was found in a burial which can be dated to the 4th century BC. Typologically it comes close to Achaemenid prototypes, however, some ornaments are of Greek origin. This combination as well as some local features make sure that this rhyton has been worked by a local craftsman¹¹.

¹¹ Lordkipanidse, 1991, 116. 125. 143 fig. 56,2; Gamkrelidse, 1999, 211-216; Knauß, 1999a, 218-222; Knauß, 2000, 161-189.

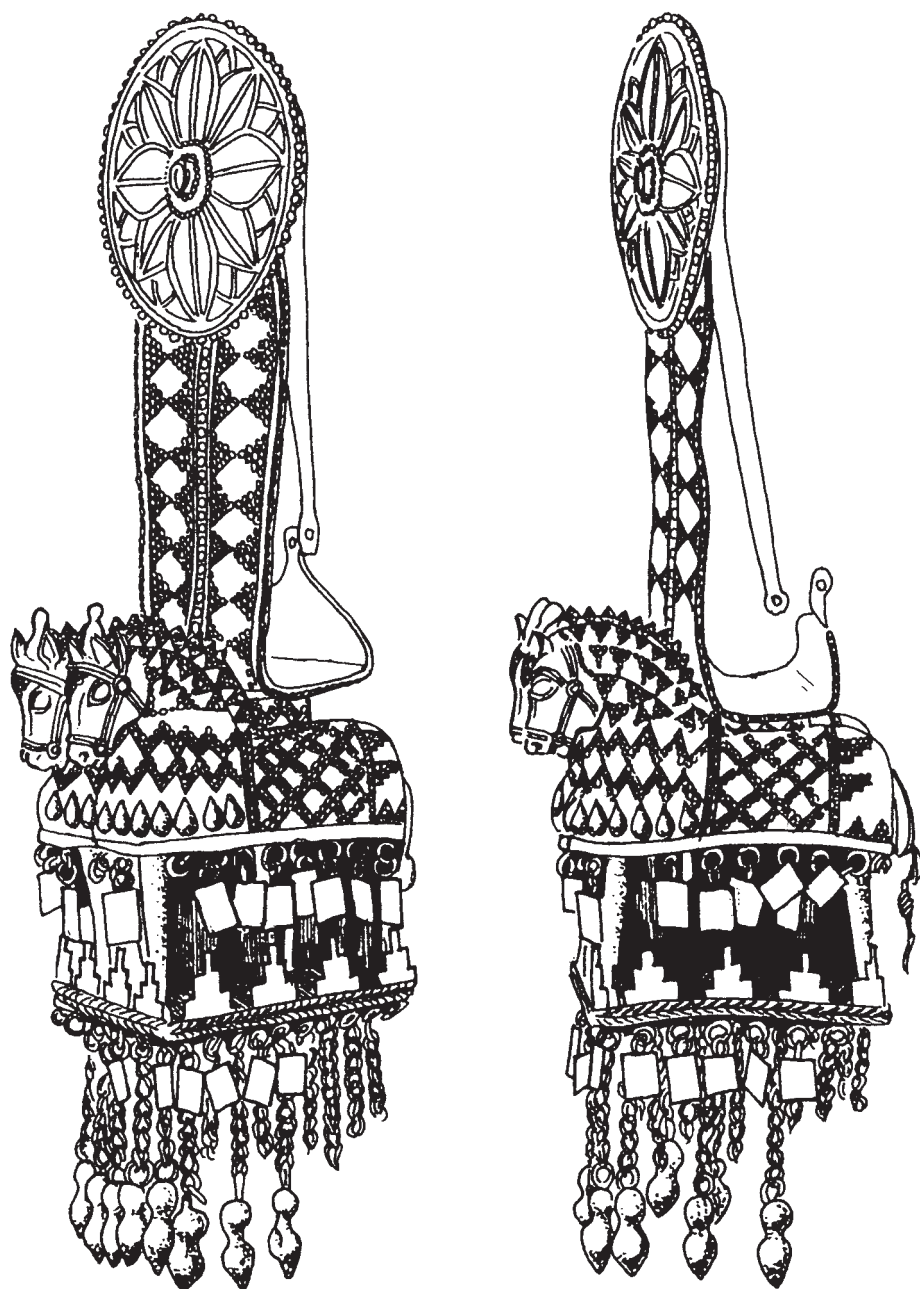


Fig. 2. Akhalgori, golden horse-shaped pendant.



Fig. 3. Mtsdziri, silver rhyton.

Not far from Mtsdziri is the important site of Vani in Western Colchis. It developed from a modest settlement to become one of the major centres. Many of the rich burials of the local aristocracy contain Greek imports, mostly pottery. In the 5th–4th centuries BC Persian gold and silver objects are numerous. Local products, painted pottery, gold and silver bowls as well as jewelry (fig. 4), show significant influence by oriental, *i.e.* Achaemenid models¹².

¹² Cf. recently Braund, 1994, 122-151; Lordkipanidze, 1995a, 353-401; Lordkipanidze, 1995b, 49-52 fig. 14; Lordkipanidze, 2002, 173 figs. 17-18.

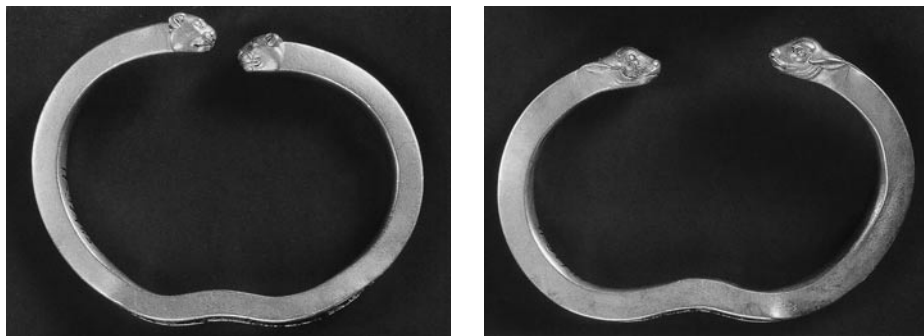


Fig. 4. Vani, golden bracelets from Achaemenid workshop.

The rich inventory of a number of burials in Itkhvisi in Eastern Colchis (5th–3rd centuries BC) supports the assumption that they belonged to members of the local aristocracy¹³. Products of local workshops as well as Greek imports were among the grave goods. However, some objects apparently follow Iranian prototypes, *e.g.* locally made small jugs (fig. 5) imitating shape and decoration of the ‘Classical Triangle Ware’.

North of the village Takhtidsiri a cemetery has been excavated. The burials of the 4th century BC contained Greek as well as oriental (Iranian) imports and local imitations of those. Again, we find triangle ware and an amphora-rhyton (fig. 6), which has been inspired by prototypes from Persia¹⁴.

Near Tsintsqaro in the Algeti valley in Southern Georgia a rich burial of the 4th century BC was discovered, which contained an Achaemenid glass bowl (fig. 7) as well as two silver phialai¹⁵. Not far from there, in Enageti, another cemetery was excavated. Among the small finds were a so-called Kohl-tube (fig. 8), a characteristic Achaemenid glass container for makeup, and a Greek glass amphoriskos. The burial may be dated to the end of the 5th/beginning of the 4th century BC.

While Juri Smirnov already in the early 20th century claimed an Achaemenid origin for some of the finds from Transcaucasia Otar Lordkipanidze and some of his Georgian colleagues persistently deny a significant Achaemenid

¹³ Braund, 1994, 101-102; Gagošidze, 2001a, 57.

¹⁴ Gagošidze, 2001a, 51-58.

¹⁵ Gagošidze & Saginašvili, 2001, 67-68, figs. 1,2; 2,1; 3,2; Lordkipanidze, 2002, 180, 182, fig. 24.

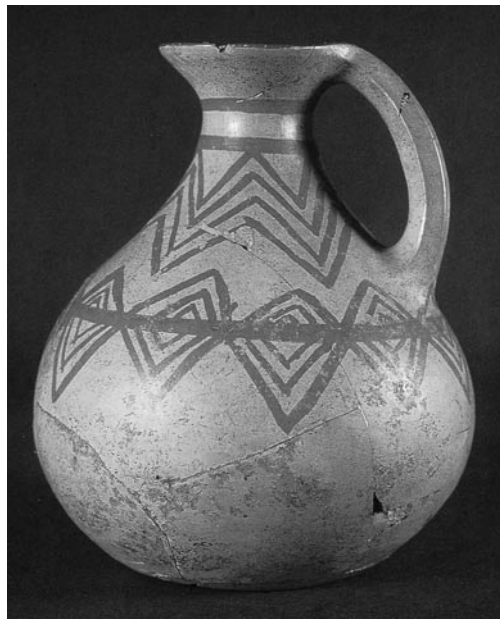


Fig. 5. Itkhvisi, small jug

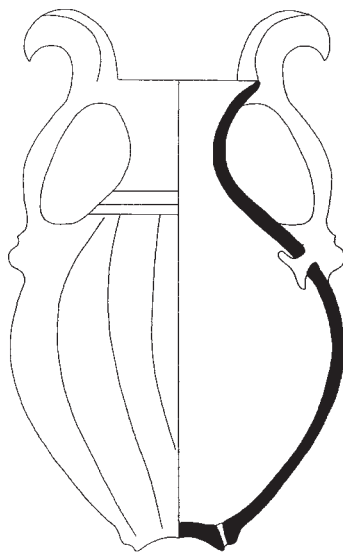


Fig. 6. Takhtidsiri, amphora-rhyton

impact on the material culture of Georgia¹⁶. They insist that most of these objects are of Hellenistic date — without a plausible explanation why Georgian craftsmen should have copied Achaemenid models after the fall of the empire. Although numerous finds come from graves and hoard finds which have been deposited in the late 4th century BC or even later, there can be no doubt that most of the well known gold and silver vessels have been worked in Achaemenid times. Some of them are imports from Achaemenid workshops in Persia or Anatolia, others have been made in Colchis and Iberia by local craftsman who often gained their inspirations from concurrent Persian models, *e.g.* the famous horse-shaped pendants from Akhalkgori (fig. 2) were locally made. Such precious objects give ample proof of close contacts with the Achaemenid empire. Nevertheless, they may have found their way to Georgia through trade or as diplomatic gifts.

However, the discovery of monumental architecture in Eastern Georgia and Western Azerbaijan, — closely related to models from the centre of

¹⁶ Lordkipanidze, 2001, 4-12; Lordkipanidze, 2002, esp. 182-185.

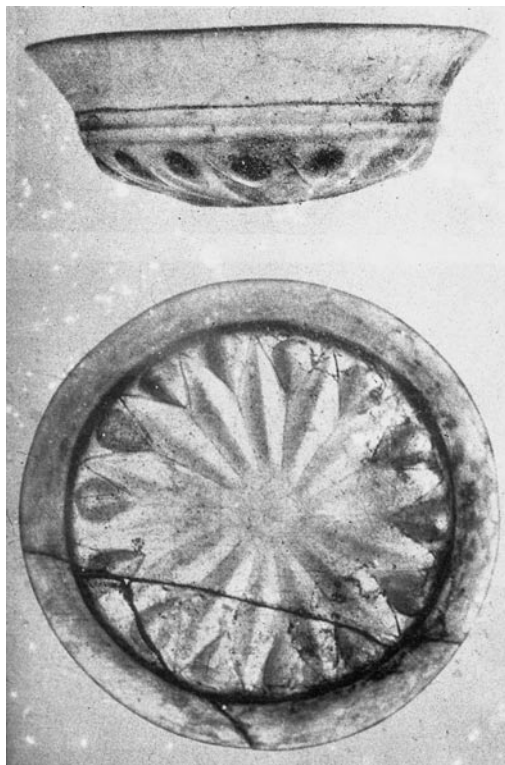


Fig. 7. Tsintsqaro, glass bowl



Fig. 8. Enageti, Kohl-tube

the empire — prove at least temporary Persian presence on the north-western border of their empire.

Until the 1970's excavations of Iron Age settlements were almost completely lacking in Georgia. The Georgian archaeologist Julon Gagoshidze was the first to emphasize the important role of the Achaemenids in this region when he compared the tower temple (fig. 9) in Samadlo, Central Georgia, with similar buildings in the Urartian and Achaemenid empire¹⁷. The excavation of another huge building in Gumbati, Eastern Georgia, provided further evidence for his assumptions. In the meantime we know about monumental architecture closely related to Achaemenid

¹⁷ Gagoshidze, 1983, 1-3, fig. 1; Lordkipanidze, 1991, 148-153, figs. 69; 70,1-5; 71; Kleiss, 1992, 91-94; Gagoshidze, 1996, 129-130. 133-134, fig. 3, pl. 13,3-4; Knauß, 1999b, 94.

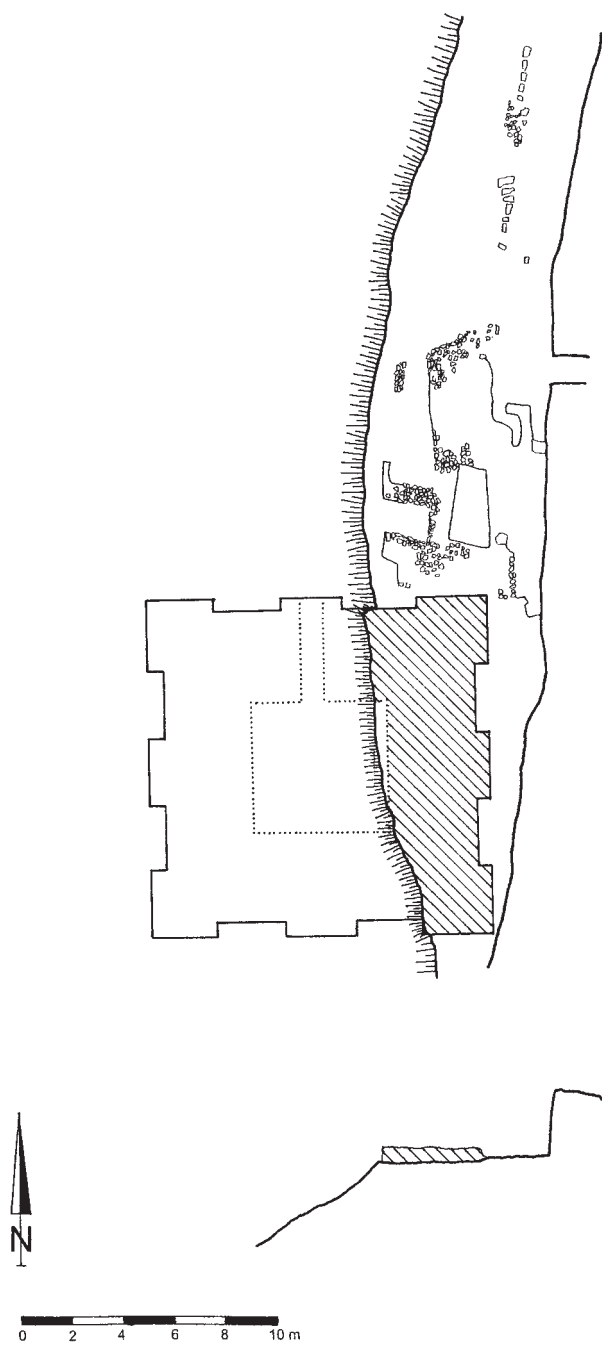


Fig. 9. Samadlo, tower

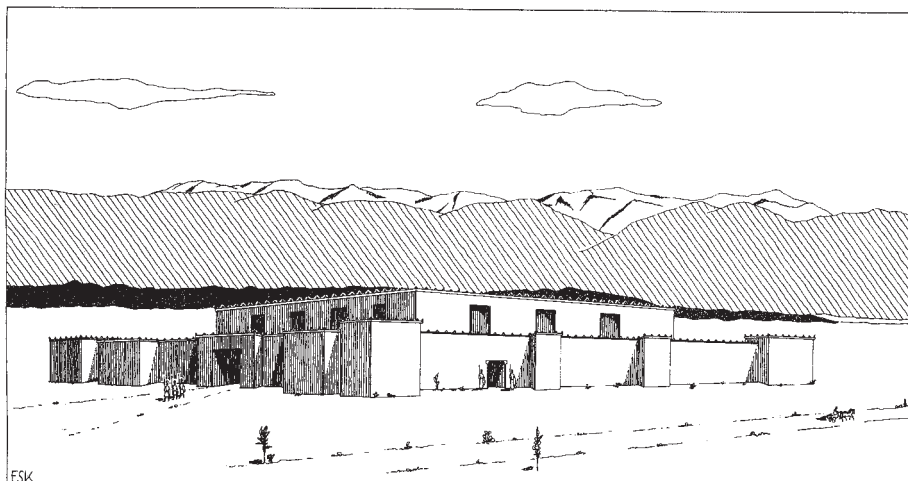


Fig. 10. Gumbati, “palace”, reconstruction

prototypes from at least five sites in Central and Eastern Georgia (Sairkhe, Samadlo, Zikhiagora, Uplistsikhe, and Gumbati), which prove the presence of Persians in Iberia (Eastern Georgia) for a longer time. Similar plans and architectural ornamentations are known exclusively from Achaemenid palaces, temples or similar official buildings.

Samadlo is situated on the banks of the river Kura. In the 5th or early 4th century BC the above-mentioned tower had been erected on top of the hill. It is most likely that this has been a tower-like building, just as its architectural prototypes in Persia, the Zendan-e Sulaiman in Pasargadae and the Kaabah-e Zardusht in Naqsh-e Rostam. The archaeological context supports a religious function of the tower; earlier buildings in the immediate vicinity have been convincingly interpreted as temples¹⁸.

In 1994 a German-Georgian joint-expedition (“Kakheti-expedition”) started to carry out archaeological excavations in Kakheti, the easternmost region of modern Georgia. In the Alasani valley at a site called Gumbati the remains of a monumental building (fig. 10) were uncovered. It has been erected in the 5th or early 4th century BC¹⁹. The ground plan measures approximately 40 by 40 metres.

¹⁸ Gagošidse, 1979, 41. 50-51 pl. VIII.

¹⁹ Furtwängler, 1996, 177-211; Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 363-381; Gagoshidze, 1996, 129-130, fig. 2 pl. 13,1; Knauß, 1999b, 81-114; Knauss, 2001a, 125-143; Knauß, 2001b, 119-130; cf. K’ip’iani, 1998, 113.



Fig. 11. Gumbati, column base

Fragments of at least five bell-shaped column bases (fig. 11) as well as a torus made of local limestone have been found, unfortunately none of them *in situ*²⁰. Three of the bell shaped bases had a maximum diameter of approximately 84 cm, two were a little bit smaller with a diameter of 73 cm. One might suspect that there were two columned halls or porticoes, *e.g.* an entrance hall in the west and a main hall in the center. Whether the central part was completely roofed or, if the interior had been designed as an open courtyard, has to remain unanswered due to the insufficient archaeological evidence.

There can be no doubt that an edifice of this size and with such architectural ornaments must have been primarily an official building. Although it may have incorporated ritual functions, neither its architecture nor any finds make us believe that it was a temple. The towers and protrusions on

²⁰ Furtwängler, 1996, 188-194, figs. 10-11 [Knauß]; Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 374-376. 377, figs. 9-10.

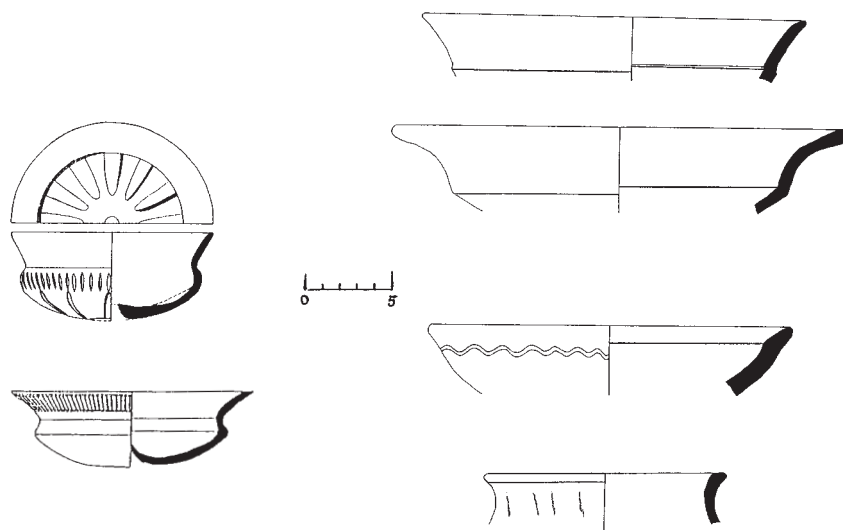


Fig. 12. Gumbati, pottery of the “palace”-period

its exterior lend this building a fortificational character, but at least the column bases show that it has not been a fortress. It must have been a kind of palace in the sense of a representative building, which had to combine public with residential functions. The possibility that even a small military detachment had been stationed here cannot be ruled out.

The prototypes of such monumental architecture are royal palaces in Persepolis and Susa²¹. Architectural plan and small finds make it probable that the great building in Gumbati served as the residence of a Persian officer or a local chieftain — as vassal of the Great King. Anyway, it gives ample proof of Persian presence in this region.

The pottery (fig. 12) is of local provenance, but some bowls copy Achaemenid metal prototypes²². The ceramic material from the “palace”-level dates to the later 5th or early 4th century BC. However, the historical background suggests that the Persians gained control over Eastern Georgia already in the time of Dareios I²³.

²¹ Knauß, 1999b, 92-100; Knauß, 2001a, 130-132; Knauss, 2001b, 126-127.

²² Furtwängler, 1996, 180-185; Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 169-170; Ludwig, 2005.

²³ See below, p. 103, with note 41.

Extensive archaeological investigations have been carried out on a hill called Zikhiagora since 1971. There was an architectural complex encircled by a stone-wall with rectangular towers. Most scholars are convinced that it once was a sanctuary, but only two buildings can be regarded as temples. Most of the monumental buildings, which have been excavated so far, were probably erected in Hellenistic times. However, some finds seem to be of an earlier date, for instance a fragment of a bell-shaped column base, of the same type as those found in Gumbati. The famous bull protome capital (fig. 13) was found in a 3rd/2nd century BC level of the main (fire) temple, but in secondary use. It is not unlikely that it belonged to an earlier building in Achaemenid times²⁴. It is a provincial copy of the Achaemenid capitals in Persepolis and Susa.

Near the village Sairkhe in the easternmost part of Colchis the remains of a temple building have been unearthed. Until the present day a plan of the architecture has not been published. Two limestone-capitals from this building are now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Tbilisi. Brian Shefton proposed that they have been worked in late Achaemenid workshops²⁵.

The settlement at Sairkhe, which existed at least since the 8th/7th centuries BC, had become a regional centre in the 5th century BC. On a hill named Sabaduris Gora there is a necropolis where burials of the local aristocracy have been excavated in recent years. The small finds in these rich graves of the 5th-4th centuries BC (golden pendants with depictions of Ahuramazda [fig. 14], a glass phiala, etc.) give further support to the theory that Sairkhe played a major role in the Colchian kingdom which most probably stood under Persian supremacy at that time²⁶.

At Uplistsikhe in Central Georgia in a crevice a chariot burial of the 4th or 3rd century BC was found. The remaining parts of the wheels (fig. 15) belong to a type of chariot well known from Assyria and Achaemenid Persia. Among the small finds in this grave was a Greek terracotta figurine from Tanagra (?)²⁷.

²⁴ Lordkipanidse, 1991, 152-154, fig. 72,1; Gagoshidze, 1996, 132-134 fig. 4; Knauß, 2000, 180-181; Gagošidze & Kipiani, 2001, 59-64, figs. 1,7-8; 2; 3.

²⁵ Shefton, 1993, 178-209; Boardman, 1994, 221-222, fig. 6.52; Gagoshidze, 1996, 133, fig. 5, pl. 13,2.

²⁶ Nadiradse, 1990, 213-222; Braund, 1994, 123. 126-127. 129-131. 145; Gagoshidze, 1996, 133, fig. 5, pl. 13,2.

²⁷ K'ip'iani, 1999, 7-18; K'ip'iani, 2000b, 74-95.

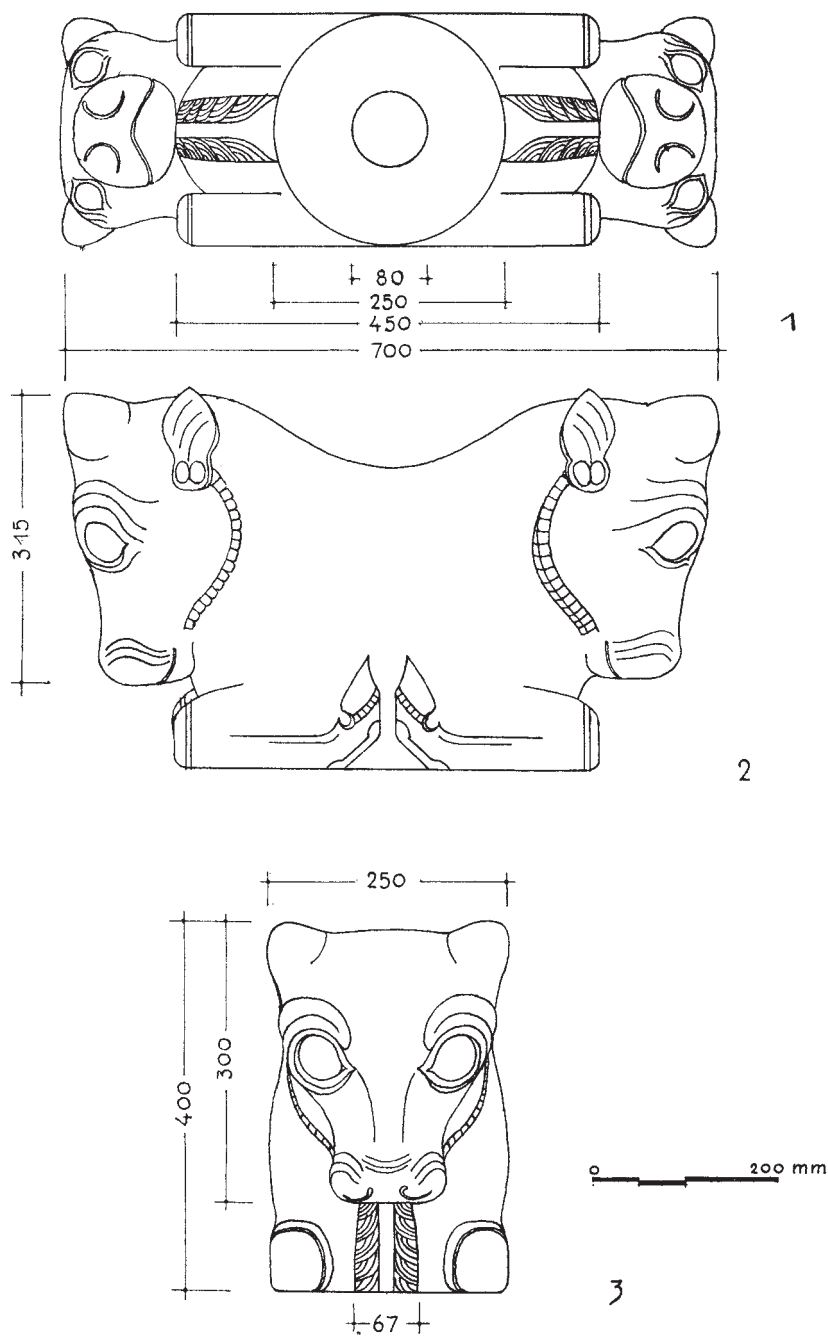


Fig. 13. Zikhiagora, bull protome capital



Fig. 14. Sairkhe, golden pendants



Fig. 15. Uplistsikhe, metal fittings

Recent excavations have shown that the architecture of the early Iron Age in Central and Eastern Georgia was rather modest. It must not be linked with the monumental buildings described above²⁸. From Central Georgia we know only few architectural monuments from this period, such as the dwellings in Samtawro. Since 1996 investigations of the Kakheti-expedition focus on settlements of the early 1st millennium BC in the Shiraki plains. Excavations of pre-Achaemenid sites in this region (at Ciskaraant Gora, Nazarlebi, Noname Gora, Didi Gora, Uzun Dara) provide at most ring-shaped rampart complexes, which can be interpreted as regional sanctuaries and refuges, as well as modest private houses with pisé-walls. In the 8th-7th centuries BC many of these settlements were destroyed by mounted nomads, probably Cimmerians or Scythians²⁹. It is worth to be mentioned that there are no traces of influence from the neighbouring Urartian kingdom in the field of architecture³⁰.

The local Pre-Achaemenid architecture not only lacks the monumental size of the abovementioned buildings in Samadlo, Gumbati and Zikhiagora but also a number of constructional details: regular mud bricks, recesses, stepped walls and stone masonry. The quality of execution makes us suspect that at least some of the craftsmen were foreigners. For example, the incisions on the bottom of a base from Gumbati (fig. 16) indicate, that they have been made by experienced stone-cutters. The purpose of those incisions was to divide the area of a circle into four identical sections, using geometrical considerations. At the resulting points the stone-cutter made a notch on the exterior. These notches are often still visible at the end of the spandrels. The column bases and capitals show that the builder-owners had close relationships to the Achaemenid empire. From the archaeological record we may conclude that before the arrival of the Persians there were no large supraregional political institutions, which would have been able to create monumental architectural complexes³¹. In a region without any prototypes of monumental mud brick and stone architecture buildings such as the palaces in Sari Tepe and Gumbati and the temple tower in

²⁸ Knauss, 2005b.

²⁹ Furtwängler & Knauß, 1998, 353-387; Furtwängler, Knauß & Motzenbäcker, 1999a, 309-364; Furtwängler, Knauß & Motzenbäcker, 1999b, 233-270; Ludwig & Tauscher, 2003, 5-10.

³⁰ Kleiss, 1992, 94; Knauß, 1999b, 96-97; against: Lordkipanidse, 1991, 73. 83.

³¹ Knauß, 2005b.

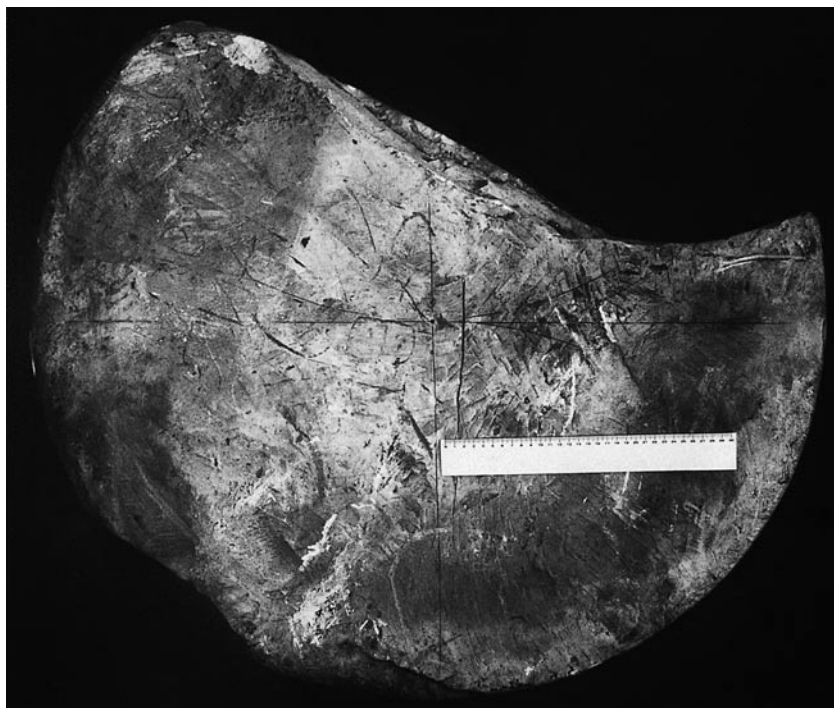


Fig. 16. Gumbati, column base, bottom

Samadlo must have been planned and built by architects and craftsmen trained in Iran, Mesopotamia or Anatolia.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan the situation may have been similar, as the few published results from Sari Tepe and Qaradshamirli suggest, but until the present day there has been no archaeological investigation of late Iron Age sites worth mentioning east of Lake Mingechaur.

On the outskirts of the modern town Kazakh in the Kura valley Ideal Narimanov conducted archaeological excavations in the late 1950's at a site called Sari Tepe³². He uncovered the western part of an extensive

³² Narimanov, 1960, 162-164; Chalilov, 1985, 44, pl. I; Furtwängler, 1996, 183-184; Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 374-376, fig. 10; Knauß, 1999b, 94-96. 101-103, figs. 9. 10c. 11. 15.

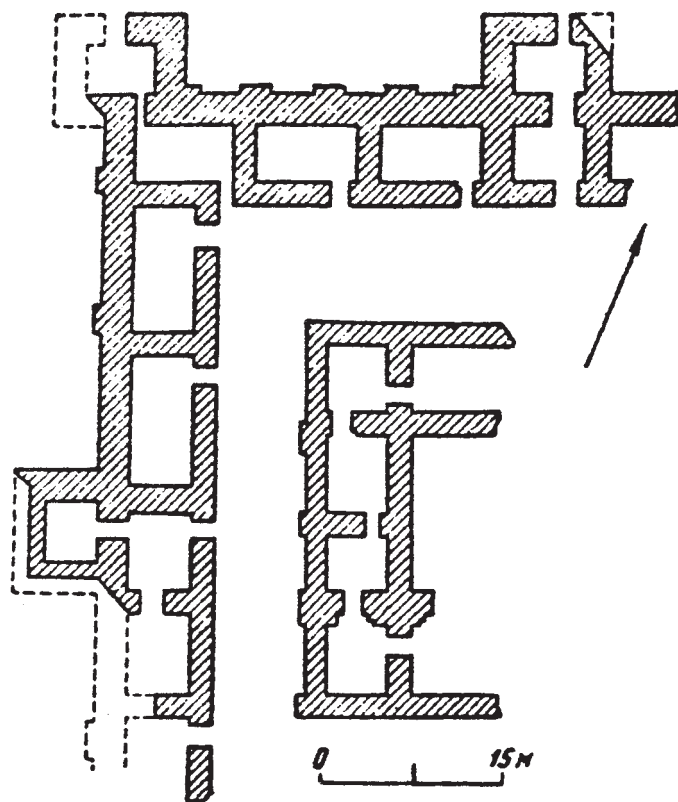


Fig. 17. Sari Tepe, "palace", plan

structure (fig. 17) which reminds us of Achaemenid palaces. Two bell-shaped column bases — today in the Historical Museum of Baku — as well as the pottery support this impression. The specific shape of the column bases is well known from Susa in Persia, as well as from Gumbati and a number of sites in Transcaucasia.

Northeast of Šamkir in Western Azerbaijan near the village Qaradshamirli a local peasant had found a column base (fig. 18) of Persepolitan type. Cut into two pieces it now rests in the courtyard of his farm³³. The material (limestone) as well as the execution of several details suggest that it had been worked in the same workshop as the bell-shaped column bases

³³ Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 374-376, figs. 9-10.



Fig. 18. Qaradshamirli, column base

from Gumbati 60 km to the north. There have been no regular archaeological investigations at the site. However, ceramic chance finds on a flat mound near the find spot of the base hint at a middle or late Iron Age settlement. The dimensions of the mound as well as the location of the site in a broad valley near the river Kura can be compared to Gumbati, as well.

There are quite a few Iron Age fortifications in Nahicevan, getting bigger and more sophisticated from about the middle of the 1st millennium BC onwards. Oglankala is one of the largest fortified sites that has been thoroughly investigated. The preliminary analysis of the pottery may suggest a date in the time of the 'Median' or Achaemenid empire. Simultaneously with significant changes in the architecture of Nahicevan one can observe similar changes of the local pottery as in Central- and Eastern Georgia. Reddish and black-polished hard-fired wares slowly replace the typical low-fired grey wares of early Iron Age³⁴.

At Kara Tepe, situated in the Mil steppe, not far from Oren-Kala, a settlement of the 6th – 1st centuries BC has been excavated between 1954 and 1958. The architecture does not show significant influence from Achaemenid Persia. Among the ceramic assemblage, however, three bowls of local manufacture (fig. 19) closely resemble Achaemenid prototypes³⁵.

³⁴ Schachner, 2001, 310-311. 313. 318.

³⁵ Ismizsade, 1965, 215-217, fig. 19,1-3.

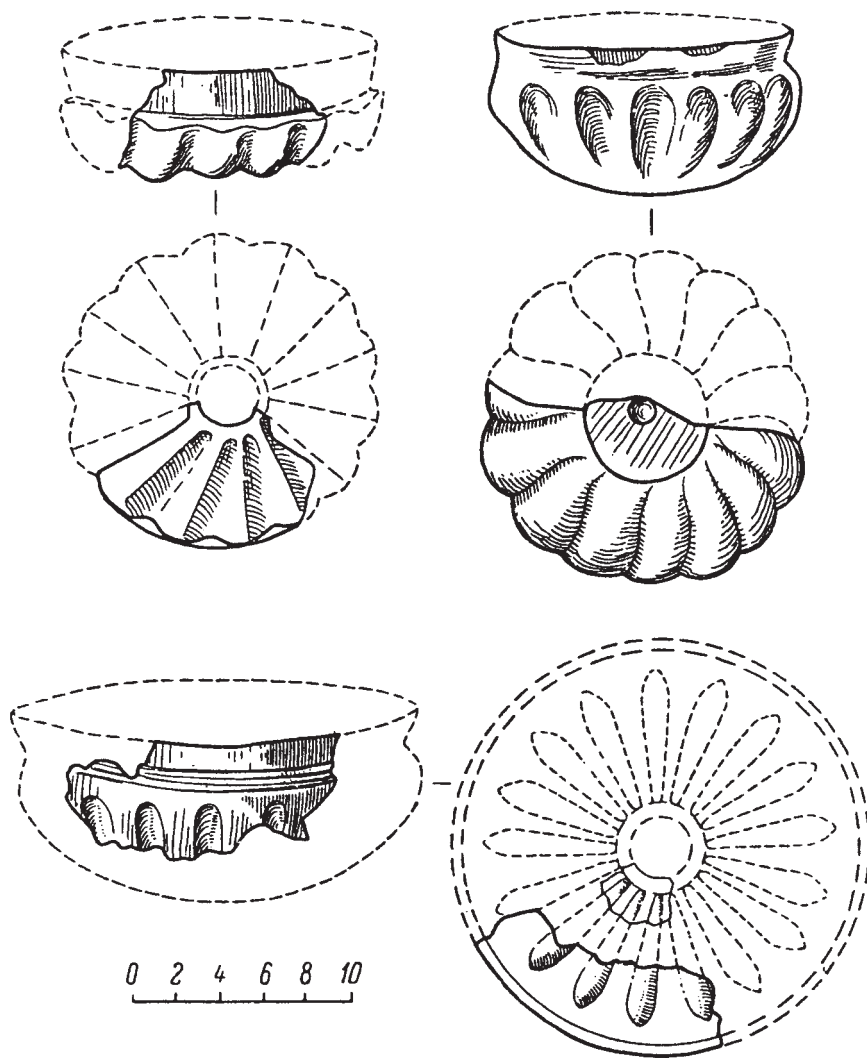


Fig. 19. Kara Tepe, ceramic bowls

The archaeological remains at Qaradshamirli and Sari Tepe in Western Azerbaijan show significant parallels to the “palace” in Gumbati concerning their location, building plan, architectural sculpture and the ceramic material. The lack of systematical archaeological investigations does not allow us to draw a representative picture of Azerbaijan in Achaemenid times.

Armenia

The Persian conquest of Armenia on the other hand didn't have such far-reaching effects on the material culture. Yet, an analysis of the transition from Urartian (via Median) to Achaemenid rule still has to be done. So far, it seems that the local tradition of Armenia has been much stronger than in Georgia and Azerbaijan. This is true not only for the architecture — especially in the south often former Urartian residences have been re-used with minor modifications by the new rulers, such as Erebouni (fig. 22), or Argishtikhinily (fig. 21) — but also for the applied arts. Achaemenid bowls, rhyta and bracelets sometimes inspired Armenian gold- and silver-smiths but the pottery, for example, does not display any external influence³⁶.

About 10 km southwest of Kumairi in north-western Armenia Felix Ter-Martirossov uncovered several monumental architectural complexes at a site called Benjamin since the late 1980's³⁷. Three different stages of a huge building can be distinguished (5th-1st centuries BC). The earliest levels must be contemporary with the "palaces" in Sari Tepe and Gumbati. The shape of the column bases (fig. 20), worked in local black tufa, is reminiscent of the finds at these sites. The excavator assumes that this building had cultic functions in the first stance. This interpretation remains uncertain as no significant cultic installations or small finds have been observed. Even a palatial use seems possible.

Bell-shaped column bases seem to belong to this earliest phase, however, simple bases with a torus profile as well as capitals decorated with leaves can not be ascribed to any building phase with certainty.

Regular archaeological excavations at Argishtikhinily (today called Armavir) started as early as 1964³⁸. Once an important Urartian centre, the ancient city lost its prominent role after the fall in 585 BC. However, in Achaemenid times the top of the hill was still inhabited. It is difficult to define an "Achaemenid" level, but several renovations, *e.g.*, a hall in the western part of the citadel (fig. 21), can be linked with the Achaemenid occupation. The ceramic assemblage sometimes shows close affinities to Achaemenid shapes. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether these

³⁶ Santrot, 1996, 196-213 cat.nos. 180-194.

³⁷ Zardarian & Akopian, 1994, 187, fig. 6; Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 377, fig. 10; Ter-Martirossov, 1996, 187-189; Ter-Martirossov, 2001, 158-161, figs. 4-5.

³⁸ Martirosjan, 1974; Kafadarjan, 1975; Kanetsyan, 2001, 145-153, figs. 3-6. 9.



Fig. 20. Benjamin, column base

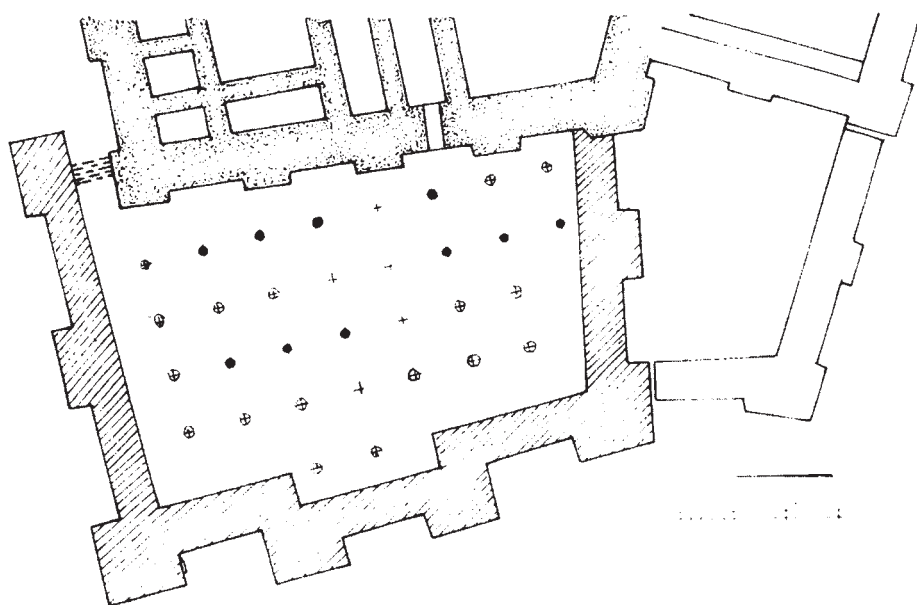


Fig. 21. Argishtikhinily (Armavir), citadel, western hall

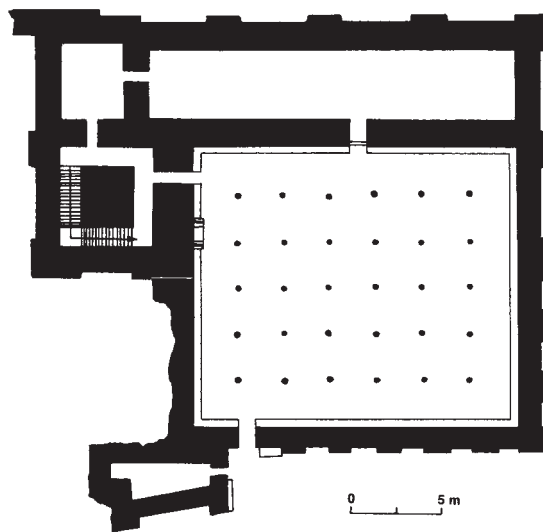


Fig. 22. Erebuni, column-hall

vessels have been made in Achaemenid or already in Hellenistic times. Some of the cuneiform tablets with Elamite texts date from the 6th or 5th centuries BC. The content of these documents, however, is a matter of debate³⁹.

The Urartian fortress Erebuni on a hill called Arin Berd is situated on the eastern outskirts of Erevan. Archaeological investigations began in 1950. According to the archaeological evidence the fortress has not been destroyed at the time of the fall of the Urartian empire, whereas Karmir Blur (Teišebai URU) on the northwestern border of Erevan, residence of the Urartian governor of Transcaucasia, was razed to the ground and completely abandoned in the second half of the 6th century BC. In Achaemenid times Erebuni was an important administrative centre. In the 1990's Felix Ter-Martirossov started to dig at this site again. His investigations mainly focus on the Achaemenid levels. According to Ter-Martirossov it is unquestionable that under Persian rule a number of column-halls have been redesigned in a characteristic manner (fig. 22)⁴⁰.

³⁹ Diakonoff & Jankowska, 1990, 102-123; Koch, 1993, 219-236; Mahé, 1996, 1279-1312; Vallat, 1997, 258-270.

⁴⁰ Personal communication with the excavator. Cf. Oganessian, 1961, 75-79; Oganessian, 1980; Kanetsyan, 2001, 145-153, figs. 1-2; Ter-Martirossov, 2001, 157-158. 160, fig. 3.

The impact of Achaemenid rule

The distribution of Transcaucasian sites with Achaemenid architecture suggests that there existed a kind of network of administrative centers. Xenophon (*Anabasis IV 5. 9-10*) reports that on their way through Armenia he and Cheirisophos met a “κώμαρχος”, apparently a representative of several villages. One might think of a traditional local post, but Xenophon explicitly stresses that he spoke Persian. Perhaps such a “κώμαρχος” represents a government official on a lower level of the administration of the empire. In nearby Kakheti and in the Kura valley we possibly had similar political structures and Gumbati, Sari Tepe, Qaradshamirli and Benjamin were centers of administrative districts with a “κώμαρχος” on top. Maybe tributes for the Persian king have been gathered in those residences.

During the unsuccessful expedition of Darius I against the Scythians in 513/12 BC at least one part of the Persian army went through Georgia⁴¹. From Herodotus (III 97; cf. VII 79) we know that the Persian rule reached as far as the Caucasus in the 5th century BC. The inconsistent political structures in Georgia did not constitute neither a military nor a political problem for the Persians⁴². The exposed position of the palace in the middle of the Alasani valley is ample proof that the conquerers felt quite comfortable in Gumbati.

The great number of sites and the amount of finds related to the Achaemenids (fig. 23) enables us to draw a lively picture of the development of the material culture in Achaemenid times. We may even draw conclusions concerning the development of society⁴³. The density and quality of Achaemenid monuments in this region, especially in Eastern Georgia, is striking. It isn't less impressing than what we know from Western Anatolia for example. Genuine Achaemenian architecture on the periphery of the empire is most remarkable, since similar buildings outside of Persia (and Babylon) are very small in number⁴⁴.

The art and architecture of Georgia reflects a paradigmatic process of acculturation, not only of the local elite, but of the common people, too. The impact of Achaemenid rule (and Greek colonization) on the cultural development in Georgia was the deciding factor for the formation

⁴¹ Jacobs, 2001, 93-101.

⁴² Knauß, 2005b.

⁴³ Gagoshidze, 1996, 135-136.

⁴⁴ Furtwängler & Knauß, 1997, 374-377, fig. 10.

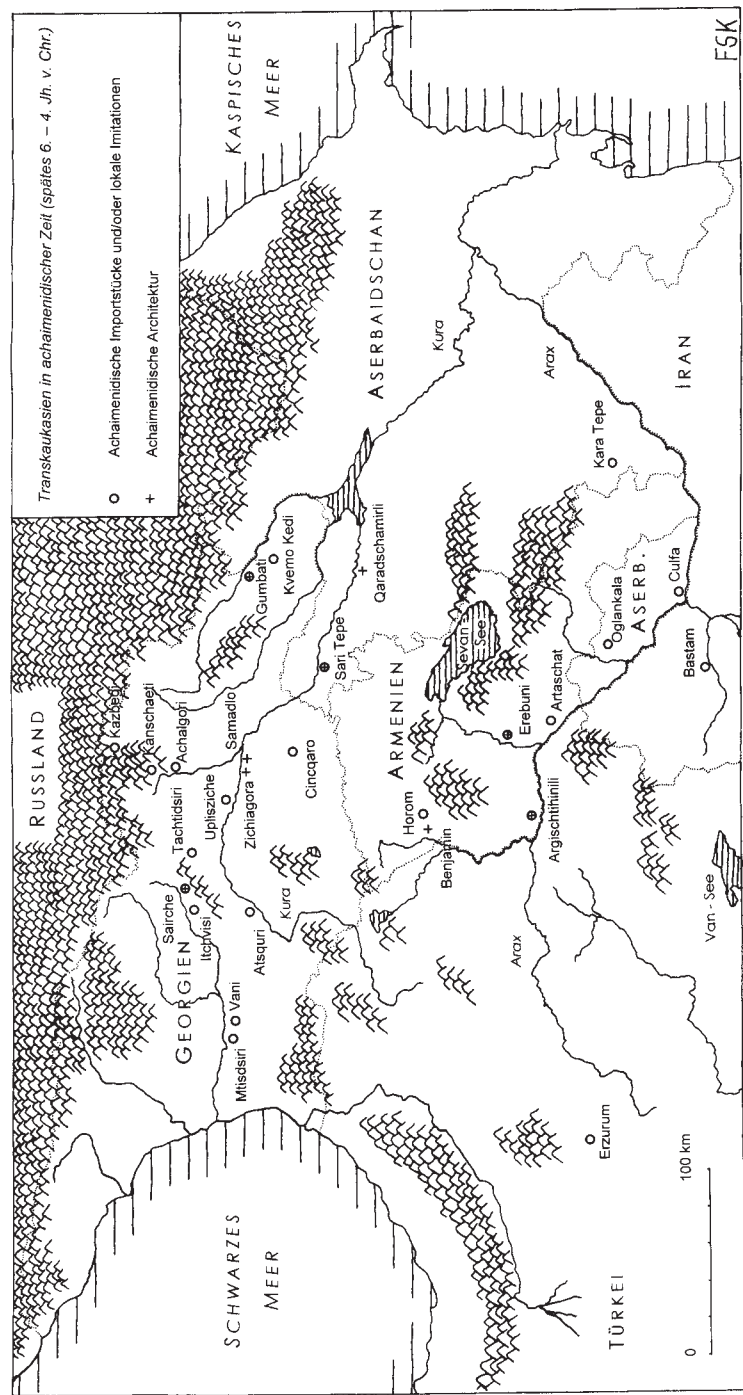


Fig. 23. Achaemenid monuments in Transcaucasia

of the first Georgian state, a process which took place probably in the 2nd century BC. When the Persians conquered Babylon, Egypt, or Lydia they rather adopted the local models than trying to implement their own eclectic art and architecture which hardly existed at that time. But for the local vassals or Persian officials who built their residences in Sari Tepe, Qaradshamirli, Gumbati and Zikhiagora it was not the point whether to take over the residences of the former local leaders or not. There didn't exist anything like a 'palace'. In none of the above-mentioned Achaemenid sites the excavators have found monumental architecture of the Pre-Achaemenid era. The similarity of these huge buildings in Gumbati and Sari Tepe with royal palaces in Iran itself demonstrates that in rather remote areas, where the local tradition did not provide an impressive architecture, the governors or vassal kings rather closely imitated the royal Achaemenid models. In other parts of the empire, where the Persians met with developed cultures (*e.g.* Anatolia, Syria or Palestine), local traditions dominated.

Whereas in many cases 'Persian tolerance' towards indigenous cultures and habits⁴⁵ serves as an usual explanation for the extensive lack of discernible Achaemenid art and architecture, in Georgia we find almost the whole panoply of genuine Achaemenid art.

The archaeological record which has been presented above proves that, already since the late 6th century BC, the local aristocracy received precious diplomatic gifts from the Great king or his satraps in order to ensure the loyalty of these peoples. Local workshops, for instance the highly developed gold smiths, immediately copied such objects⁴⁶. The adoption of Achaemenid models didn't remain superficial. We know that in Hellenistic times at least in Central and Eastern Georgia the official religion of the kings and the local aristocracy as well as the mountaineers was Iranian-Mazdian⁴⁷. The tower in Samadlo (fig. 9) indicates that some people already in the 5th century BC may have adopted the religious beliefs of the foreigners. The Persian presence even had effects on the ordinary people. Since the 6th or early 5th century BC reddish hard-fired pottery replaced traditional greyish, low fired wares. New

⁴⁵ Usually, Achaemenid rule adapted itself to the particular local traditions and circumstances in the vast empire: Tuplin, 1987, 109-166; Briant, 1996, 79-81. 406. 409-410.

⁴⁶ Gagoshidze, 1996, 128-129; Gagoshidze, 1997, 134-136.

⁴⁷ Gagoshidze, 1996, 135-136.

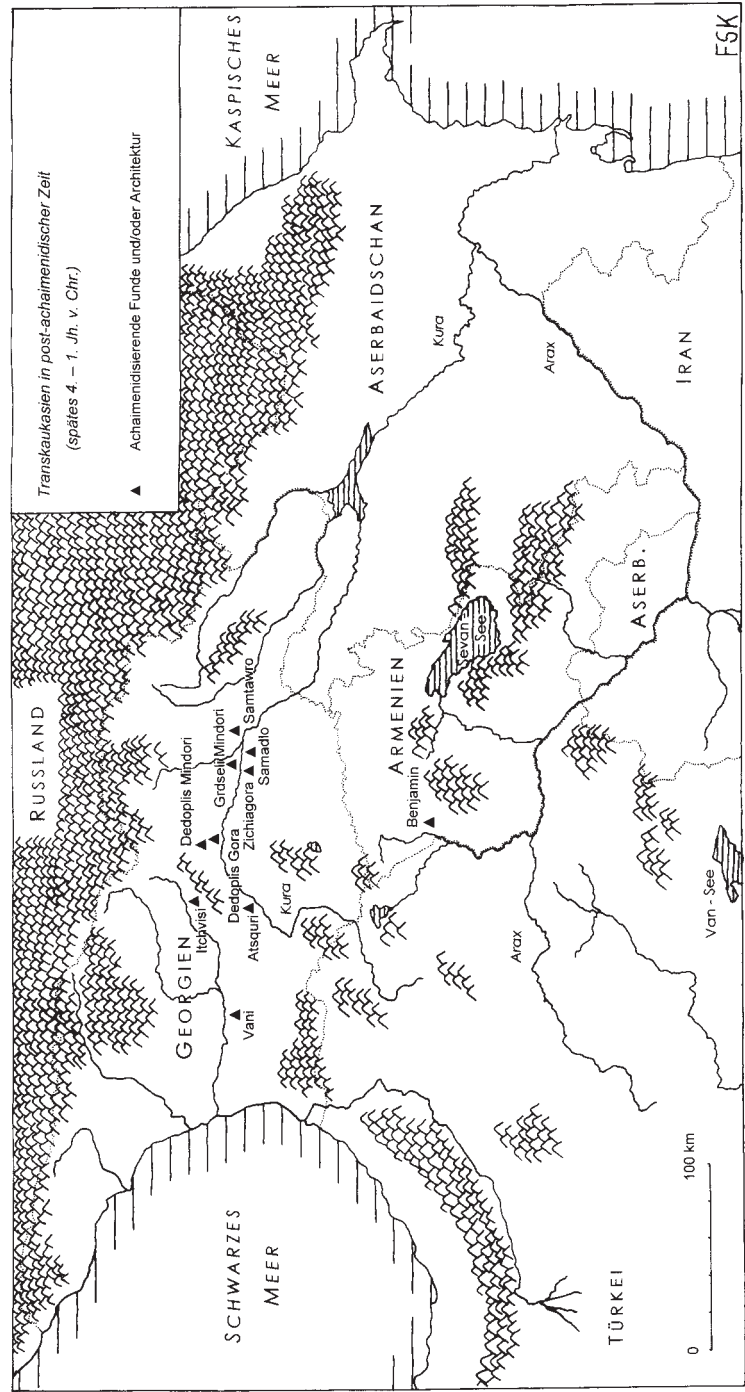


Fig. 24. Post-Achaemenid monuments in Transcaucasia

firing techniques from Iran were introduced as well as some new shapes closely following Achaemenid prototypes⁴⁸.

Transcaucasia after the fall of the Persian empire. The period of local power centers in Early Hellenistic times (c. 330 – 200/150 BC)

All these above described phenomena might be found in a similar way in some other parts of the empire. The development of Transcaucasia (especially Georgia) in Post-Achaemenid times, however, is unique. We observe that at least some of the local vassals of the Great King were able to maintain their regional position of power which they had gained in the period of Persian dominance (fig. 24). The archaeological evidence at Sairkhe, Zikhiagora and Samadlo argues in favour of continuity rather than a break — only the “palace” in Gumbati is abandoned in the late 4th century BC. Such a continuity becomes obvious in monumental architecture, toreutics and ceramics. The material culture still very much relies on Achaemenid prototypes, new developments such as painted pottery in central and eastern Georgia emerge from late Achaemenid sources (‘triangle ware’). It has already been mentioned that some kind of Zoroastrianism was the religion of the ruling class. Fire temples at several sites testify to this assumption. It is characteristic that in most parts of the former empire only few Achaemenid artistic elements survived, usually in a distinct hellenized form (*e.g.* glass and silver bowls). After the Macedonian conquest the ruins of the palaces in Persepolis and Susa hardly served as models any more. Achaemenid elements in the arts were almost imperceptible even in Persia. All the more it is amazing that the Achaemenid legacy was flourishing in the art and architecture of Georgia at this time. This region never had been touched by the Macedonian army during Alexander’s campaigns. A part of Media was left to the satrap Atropates. We would like to know whether Media Atropatene was another stronghold of Achaemenid tradition. Unfortunately, not a single site from this period in Azerbaijan has been excavated.

At Samadlo several buildings from the late 4th to the mid-2nd centuries BC have been unearthed. A limestone relief carved in an oriental style as well as painted pottery of the so-called “Samadlo-Style” belong to an early Hellenistic phase (4th-3rd centuries BC)⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Ludwig, 2005.

⁴⁹ Relief: Gagošidse, 1979, pl. III; Gagošidse, 1981, pl. XIX. — “Samadlo Style” pottery: Gagošidse, 1979, pls. IV. XIV-XVII colour pls. I-II; Gagošidse, 1981, pls. XIV-XVIII.

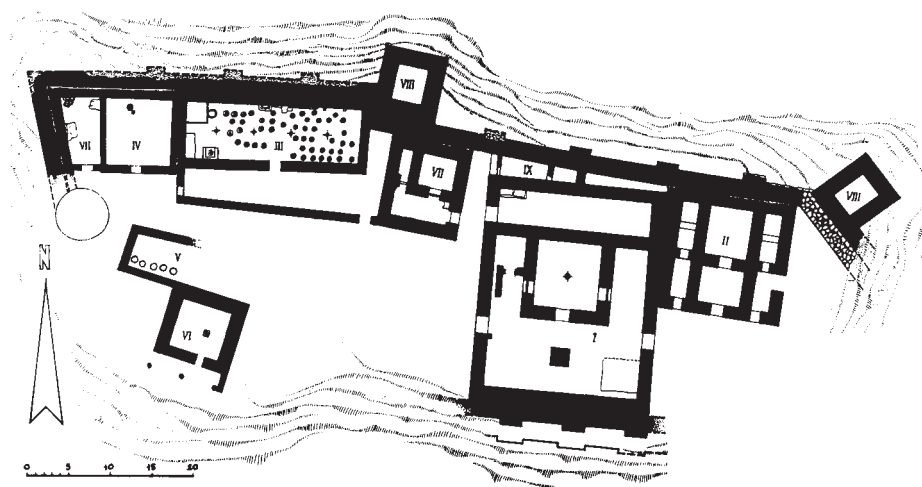


Fig. 25. Zikhiagora, "sanctuary"

The sanctuary at Zikhiagora has been connected with Zoroastrian religious habits. Most of the monumental buildings, which have been excavated so far, for instance the two temple buildings (fig. 25), have been erected in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. The groundplan of the main temple (I) reminds us of Eastern models⁵⁰. Another building (VII) probably had religious functions, too. Its groundplan is square. From the entrance an L-shaped corridor gives access to the only, square room. We find similar structures in Achaemenid Persia in some of the rooms of the so-called Harem in Persepolis and, even earlier, in the "temples carrés" in Tshoga Zambil⁵¹. A circuit wall with square towers is surrounding the complex. The rhythmization of its exterior façade by means of bays and piers is already well known from the tower in Samadlo (fig. 9) and the palace in Gumbati (fig. 10). If the above-mentioned bull protome capital (fig. 13) has been sculpted in Post-Achaemenid times, as many scholars say, this would be an impressive proof of the extraordinary longevity of Achaemenid prototypes in Georgia⁵².

⁵⁰ On Zikhiagora in general, see recently Zkitiřvili, 1995, 83-98, fig. 1; Maxaraje, 1999, 57-66; Macharadze, 2001, 143-158. On Iranian prototypes K'ip'iani, 2000a, 35-40, pls. 38-40,3. The plan of the fire temple is almost identical to that of a modern Zoroastrian fire temple in Teheran; Gropp, 1969, 149, fig. 2.

⁵¹ Schmidt, 1953, figs. 102-103. 105; Van den Berghe, 1966, fig. 16; Ghirshman, 1966, 105-107, fig. 60 plan I-III.

⁵² See above, p. 92 with note 24.

The local rulers residing in Samadlo, Zikhiagora or Sairkhe had every reason to hold onto the Achaemenid symbols and traditions even after the fall of the Persian empire. Thanks to the Achaemenids they had gained their regional position of power. Perhaps even their legitimation rested upon the foreign rulers. They had to choose either to keep up the acquired high standard of living or to get back to their former rather simple life.

The birth of 'Iberian' art and architecture (c. 200/150 BC – 60/80 AD)

It took almost another 200 years until the kingdom of (Caucasian) Iberia, as it was called in Greek and Latin sources, the first state that included wide parts of modern Georgia, was born in the mid 2nd century BC⁵³. The legendary first king, Pharnavas (Pharnabazos), was of Iranian descent. The administration in Iberia followed Persian prototypes, as did cultic terms and habits. While during Achaemenid times local craftsmen and artists often had just copied or combined foreign (*i.e.* Persian and Greek) models, in the meantime a new material culture had developed in Iberia. For instance, in Early Hellenistic times monumental architecture in Iberia in some respects still stood in the tradition of the older Achaemenid complexes. However, local elements were prevailing and Greek influence became stronger⁵⁴. From the mid 2nd century BC on we find evidence of widespread and intensive building activity. The complexes concerned have only rudimentary connections to the origins of monumental architecture in this region. In many of the former centers, but above all, in a number of until then less important places new complexes in a previously unknown sophistication arose, which no longer remained isolated from their surroundings. Numerous bridges and fortification walls were built, indicating that there were conscious and consistent efforts to develop and control the country. Now indigenous and foreign elements were amalgamated, thus, in the final stage, forming an unmistakable and homogenous new art and architecture. It is not merely accidental that this happened contemporary

⁵³ Meißner, 2001, 203; against: Lordkipanidze, 2001, 12-16.

⁵⁴ Roof tiles and the technique of fastening stone blocks to one another by means of clamps is an innovation adopted from Greek architecture, although the shape of the earliest clamps in Georgia is rather strange; Gagošidse, 1979, 55 (clamps). 61-62 (roof tiles); Gagošidse, 1981, pl. LVIII 604.

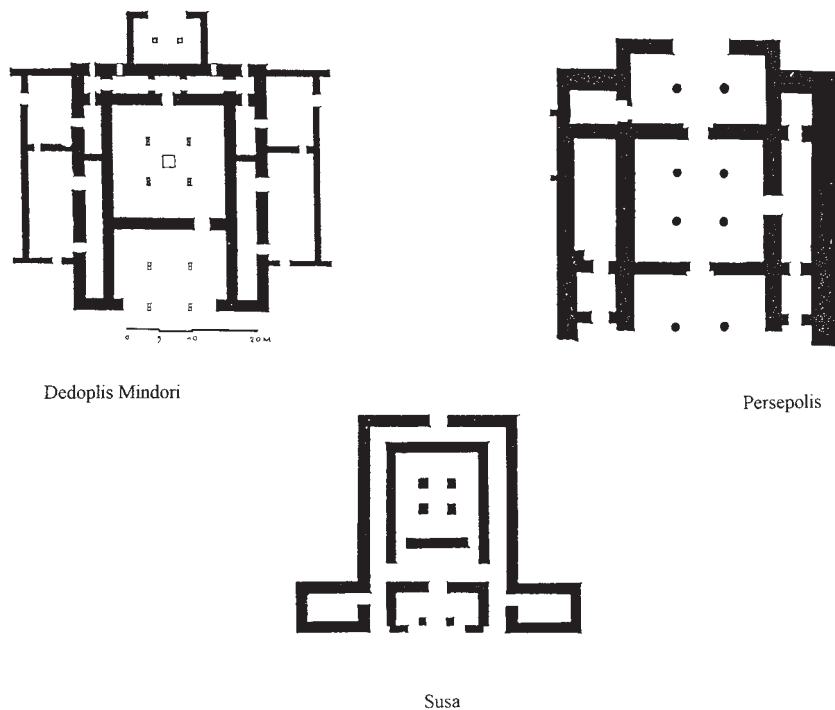


Fig. 26. Dedoplis Mindori, main temple and potential forerunners in Persia

with the evolution of an Iberian kingdom. In some cases, however, the Achaemenid roots of Iberian art and architecture are still discernable.

A huge temple complex was situated in the plains between Eastern and Middle Prone, tributaries of the Kura. The name of the site, Dedoplis Mindori, means “queens meadows”. Dedoplis Mindori reached its climax when a vast sanctuary was built in the late 2nd century BC. The temple complex alone takes up an area of 180 by 250 m. This complex has been interpreted as ‘private’ sanctuary of the Iberian royal family⁵⁵. The architectural plan of the main building (fig. 26) as well as the small finds let us assume that it was a ‘Zoroastrian’ fire temple⁵⁶. In the northern part of the

⁵⁵ Gagoshidze, 1992, 27-48; Gagoshidze, 2001b, 260.

⁵⁶ Cf. Achaemenid and Post-Achaemenid temples and gateways: Schippmann, 1971, fig. 38 [temple near Susa]; Schmidt, 1953, figs. 51-52 [‘Triple Gate’ at Persepolis]; Pitschikjan, 1992, figs. 1a-b. 4a-c; Litvinskij & Pičikjan, 2002, figs. 3. 5-6. 32, pl. 4,2 [Oxus Temple at Takht-e Sangin]; Schippmann, 1971, fig. 37 [Seleucid-Parthian temple at Bard-e Nishande].

sanctuary there are another small temple and at least six more buildings of similar plan. Their function is not clear yet. However, they may have been used as temples, too. The gate in the north of the great courtyard, again, typologically reflects much older (Persian) models, as well as Early Hellenistic predecessors in simplified form⁵⁷. The temenos walls with their monumental gates and all other buildings have a stone sockle. The upper part of the walls had been built with mud bricks. The temples as well as the gates had a tiled roof.

A great number of fragments of stone capitals (fig. 27) were found in the ruins of these gates as well as in the other temple buildings. The shape of these capitals reminds us of the column bases found in several Achaemenid “palaces” in Transcaucasia (figs. 11. 18. 20)⁵⁸.

In its spaciousness the sanctuary looks Hellenistic, but a similar concept can only be found in the fairly later Sassanian sanctuaries in Surh Kotal and Qasr-e Shirin⁵⁹.

Nearby, on a natural hill called Dedoplis Gora, situated on the banks of the Western Prone, a huge architectural complex had been erected at the end of the 2nd century BC on the ruins of chalcolithic, late Bronze Age and early Iron Age settlements⁶⁰. This “palace” was destroyed at the same time as the nearby sanctuary of Dedoplis Mindori, probably in the second half of the 1st century AD.

The “palace” was encircled by a strong wall. All the rooms are connected by a porticus, which is open towards a courtyard in the centre. The sockle of the walls consists of a timber revetment with rubble core — similar to the so-called “*murus gallicus*” —, above there are regular mud bricks. This manner of building has been established in Georgia in the late 4th or early 3rd century BC in Samadlo and Zikhiagora. In Dedoplis Gora the outer walls have an additional stone facing in the lower part. Roof tiles as well as arrowhead-shaped clamps which connected the ashlar betray Greek influence. On the other hand some altars and small finds might be linked with Zoroastrian rituals.

⁵⁷ Kipiani, 2000, 45. 47-52, pls. 48. 52,2-3.

⁵⁸ Lordkipanidze, 1991, 160-161, fig. 7,7-8; Gagoshidze, 2001b, fig. 5.

⁵⁹ Schlumberger, 1969, fig. 26 (Surh Kotal); Van den Berghe, 1966, fig. 29-30 (Qasr-e Shirin).

⁶⁰ Gagoshidze, 2001b, 259. 261-267, fig. 2.

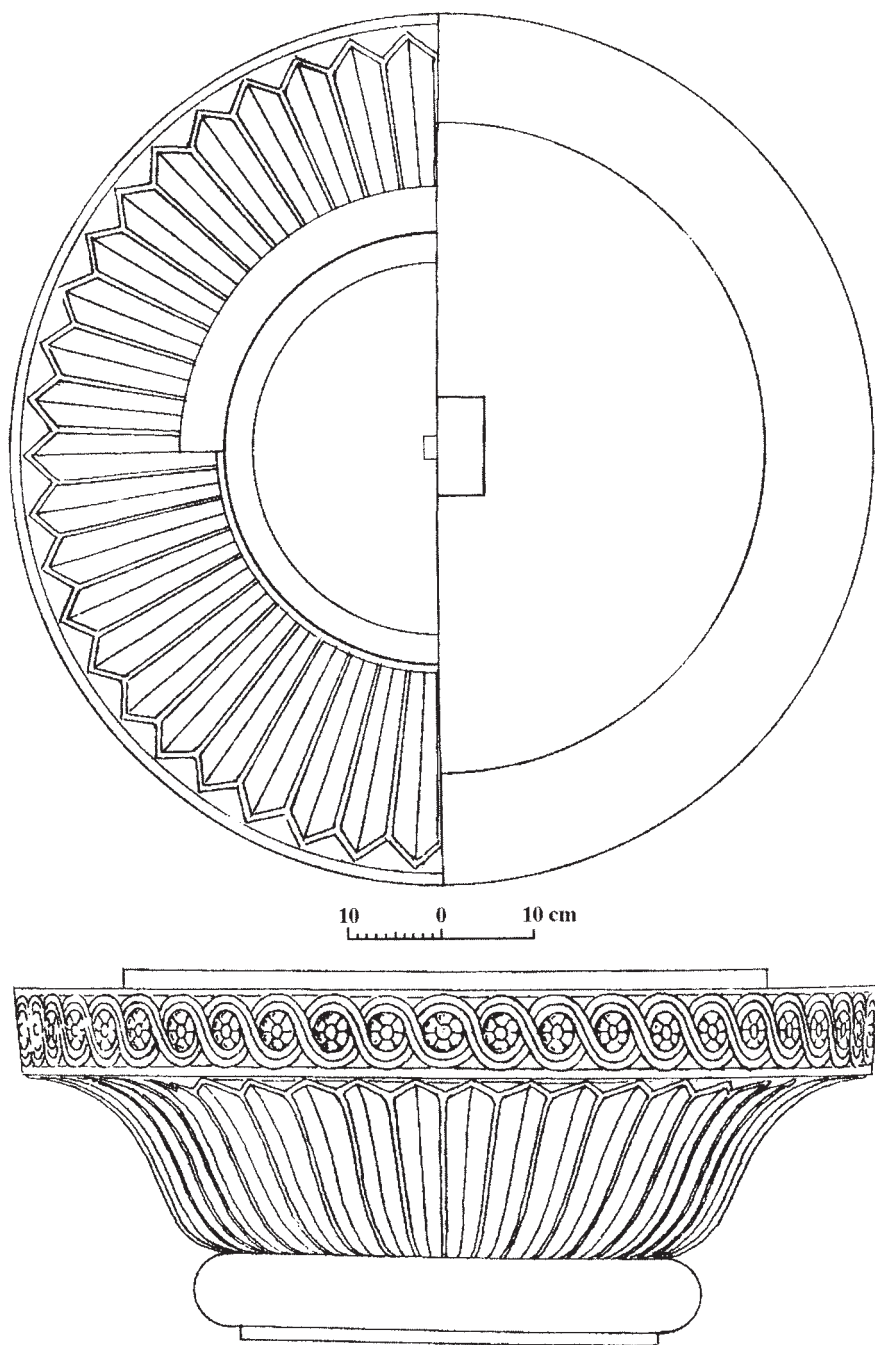


Fig. 27. Dedoplist Mindori, capital

Extraordinary rich small finds demonstrate both the high status of the owner of this building and his close contacts with the western (Hellenistic-Roman) as well as with the eastern (Iranian) world⁶¹. Dedoplis Gora must have been the fortified residence of a high official of the Iberian king. It even may have served as a royal residence when the Iberian king and his entourage visited the sanctuary of Dedoplis Mindori. The groundplan can neither be observed in palaces in the Near East nor within the Greek cultural sphere. Typologically as well as functionally so-called “batarejkas” (Russian for “fortresses”), which have been built on the Taman peninsula since Mithridates VI Eupator, may have served as models⁶².

Even great parts of Colchis seem to fall within the Iberian kingdom in Late Hellenistic times. Vani at this time experiences its greatest expanse and its most magnificent building-phase⁶³. Here, further west, the Greek influence has traditionally been stronger than in the central and eastern parts of Georgia. Frequent use of marble, tiled roofs, acroteria, antefixes, lion-head water-spouts, and the form of the capitals leave no doubt about their origins. However, even here, we find Iranian elements, namely in the Great Temple on the Lower Terrace, which has been interpreted as a fire temple⁶⁴. Furthermore, we find a relief with the depiction of a chariot carved in an Oriental style, which reminds us of the Graeco-Persian stelai from Daskyleion⁶⁵.

The architecture at several sites recalls Achaemenid and Post-Achaemenid temples and gateways. The name of the Iberian capital Armazistsikhe, which means “castle of Armazi/Ahuramazda”, again, proves that Georgia further received decisive impulses from Iran. The date of the first monumental buildings at this site has not yet been conclusively determined. A Great Hall has probably been built in the 1st century AD. It might be contemporary with the great fortification walls with square towers, which have been brought into connection with the fortificatory work of Roman engineers, who were employed in the Iberian capital by order of Vespasian and Titus in the year 75 AD⁶⁶. They have been built of mud brick on a foundation of ashlar blocks. The latter were connected by swallowtail-clamps.

⁶¹ Gagoshidze, 2001b, 267-275, figs. 7-9, 11-12.

⁶² Saprykin & Maslenikov, 1995, 277-281, figs. 2,1-2.

⁶³ Kipiani, & Amashukely, 1995, 6-10, 32.

⁶⁴ Kipiani & Amashukely, 1995, 7, figs. 1-2, 7-9.

⁶⁵ Lordkipanidse, 1995b, 49-52, fig. 14.

⁶⁶ Miron & Orthmann, 1995, 173-175 fig. 179; cf. Braund, 1994, 227-230, pl. 17.



Fig. 28. bronze ibex from Samtavro

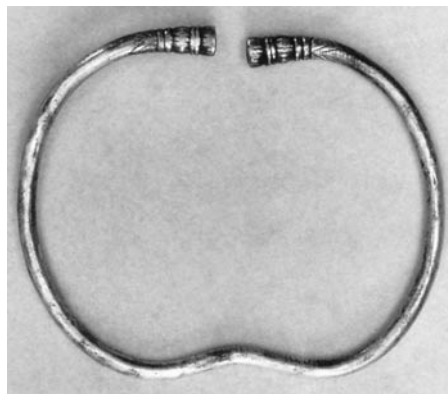


Fig. 29. silver bracelet

It is especially remarkable that in Iberia Achaemenid traditions do not end before the 1st century BC. For instance, Iberian toreutics (figs. 28-29) and glyptic art of the 1st century BC still follow Achaemenid prototypes⁶⁷. The long tradition of Zoroastrianism in Georgia (until the 19th century) may be explained by steady contacts with Persia and Media Atropatene. However, the continued existence of Achaemenid architectural elements and iconography in Post-Achaemenid times is amazing, all the more no similar traces of Achaemenid art and architecture can be found in Persia itself at that time.

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⁶⁷ About the spreading of bracelets with concave back in Post-Achaemenid Georgia, see already Kuftin, 1941, 32-33; Gagoshidze, 1996, 129. For the continuity of Achaemenid iconography in Iberian glyptic art, see Gagoshidze, 2000.

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