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The Colchis Black Sea Littoral in the Archaic and Classical Periods

According to the analysis of written and archaeological data, the first Greek colonies along the Black Sea littoral appear in the second half of the seventh century while on the Eastern Black Sea coast as early as the mid-sixth century; it is connected to the colonizing endeavors of Miletus. However, the archaeological artifacts found in the Black Sea littoral as well as the information on Pontus in Greek literature (Eumelus, Hesiod) provide the background for justification of the assumption that there had been pre-colonial links as early as the eight-seventh centuries. Colchis is already mentioned in Greek poetry in the eighth century.

In the Archaic and Classical periods very little information can be found in classical authors about Greek cities and settlements along the Colchian coast. Literary tradition mentions three poleis along the coastline of Colchis: Phasis, Gyenos and Dioscurias that are identified with modern Poti, Ochamchire and Sokhumi respectively. The main landmark here is the River Phasis (modern Rioni), at whose mouth lay the city of Phasis that was located in the central part of the Colchis lowland whereas the remaining two were located north of the lowland. The sources also the name of the *oikistes* of Phasis, Themistagoras, and connect the foundation of Dioscurias with the mythical Dioscuri¹.

Archaeological study conducted along the Colchian coastline and its vicinity showed that local settlements in the coastline which accepted the Greek colonists had been developing there as early as the end of the second millennium B.C. They achieved high standards of development especially in metallurgy. Advanced Colchian material culture gives rise to the assumption for some scholars about the existence of a unified Colchian Kingdom here².

All the Greek colonies were founded on the coast, at the estuaries. Owing

¹ Lordkipanidze 1989; Tssetskhladze 1994, 111-135.

² Lordkipanidze 1989.

to the great number of Colchian rivers flowing into the sea, the Greek culture penetrated deep into the hinterland, thus making an impact on the development of Colchis and generally throughout Transcaucasia.

The sources do not mention those Hellenic settlements that are archaeologically revealed along the coast south to the river Phasis. The local settlements had been developing during millennia (since mid-third millennium B.C. at least) here. They show similar pictures of development to the contemporaneous settlements in north-western Colchis. However, unlike the north-western part of the Colchian coastline, vast cemeteries of Classical and Hellenistic periods have also been revealed that provide important information for the study of the issues on interaction between Colchis and the Greek world as well as the process of Greek colonization in general.

The traces of Greek colonial settlements have been revealed on the main archaeological sites (Kobuleti-Pichvnari, Petra-Tsikhisdziri, and Batumi Fort) on the eastern Black Sea littoral (Fig. 1). The archaeological study of the significant site of the Roman period Gonio-Apsaros is promising as well. The site is situated at the estuary of the river Chorokhi. Roman and Byzantine authors related the name and foundation of the ancient city, Apsaros, with the myth of the

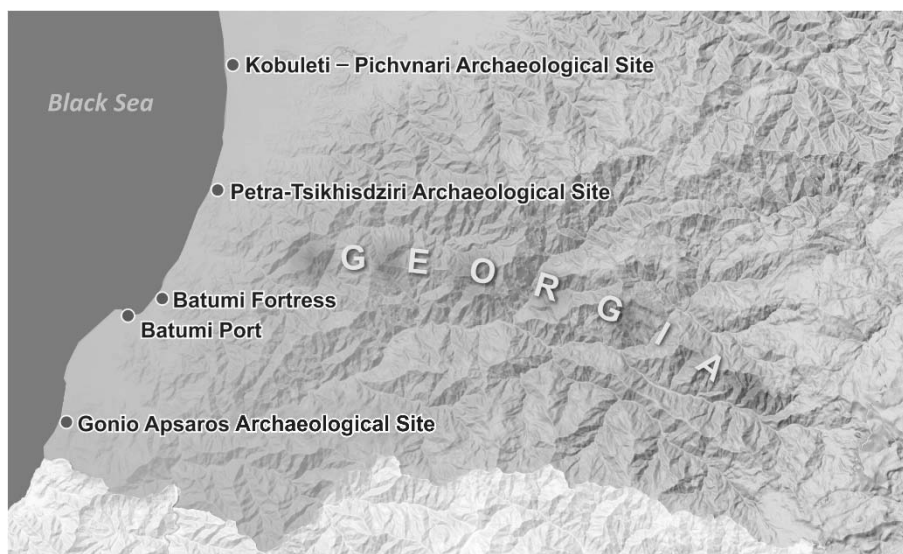


Fig. 1. Map of the Georgian south-western Black Sea coast with main archaeological sites.

Argonauts. According to the literary tradition (Arrian, Procopius), Medea's brother, Apsyrtus, was killed and buried there. It was Apsyrtus' tomb that was the main shrine of a once bustling city³.

Kobuleti-Pichvnari Archaeological Site

The Kobuleti-Pichvnari archaeological site occupying an area of 100 ha, lies on the South-eastern Black Sea coast at the mouth of the river Choloki some 28 km north of Batumi. Sites of various periods have been discovered and studied at Pichvnari and its environs since the 1950s.

The Ispani Early Bronze ancient settlement lying eastwards of the new Black Sea terrace (on which the modern city of Kobuleti is built), 1,5-2 km from the present sea shore is chronologically the oldest archaeological site along the Kobuleti-Pichvnari coastline. The settlement was covered with a 2,5-3 m deep peat layer that offered perfect protection of the organic materials (wood, bone). Dwellings made of logs have been found on the site. Archeological artifacts discovered here point to the well-developed production economy, namely agriculture (inserts to sickle flints, grinding-stones), animal husbandry and craftsmanship (hand-made pottery), nonferrous metal treatment (moulds of different tools, a small wooden model of an axe, fragments of crucibles and clay blast pipes). According to the imported pottery connections can be observed with the contemporaneous Kura-Araxes culture of the Early Metal Age in South Transcaucasia. The fertility deity (the clay anthropomorphic figurine) takes the leading role in the religious beliefs. The Ispani settlement began in the second half of the third millennium B.C. along the old coastline of the sea, and existed till the beginning of the second millennium B.C.⁴

In the following Middle Bronze Age (beginning of the second millennium B.C.), because of bogging up of the Colchis accumulative plain, especially its coastline, the settlers had to abandon the territory and migrate towards the foothills. In the middle of the second millennium B.C., during the regular sea regression, permanent settlers again appear in the Colchis accumulative plain coastline and we have their traces in the form of artificial hillock-settlements. On the vast territory of the vicinities of the rivers Ochkhauri and Choloki estuary a com-

³ Built in the first century A.D., Apsaros was the largest Roman fort on the east coast of the Black Sea. It was one of the principal forts of the developed *Pontic Limes*, which defended the Caucasian border. Since the twelfth century, Apsaros has been called Gonio and up to the Late Middle Ages was considered an important strategic area. Despite the regular archaeological excavations conducted on the territory lately, there are no remains of either Classical or Hellenistic settlements found yet.

⁴ Klerk Pim - Haberi - Kafke - Krebs - Machutadze - Minke - Schulz - Joosten 2009, 890-910; Mikeladze - Khakhutaishvili 1985, 3-20.

compact group of hillock-settlements of Late Bronze-Early Iron Age (second half of the second millennium B.C. – first half of the first millennium B.C.) appear, located 1-1,5 km away from the Ispani early Bronze Age settlement site. Most well studied among them is the so called ‘Namcheduri’ hillock consisting of six cultural deposits, the earliest of which (sixth deposit) dates back to the 16-17th centuries B.C. and the latest to the second century B.C.

In the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age agriculture remained as the leading economic activity. Simple wooden ploughs and their fragments have been found. A Spelt carbon wheat sheaf has been found on the Namcheduri hill. It seems to have been kept in the attic of a dwelling. Some hominy grains burnt by fire have also been found in clay vessels. Grinding-stones and flint inserts for sickles have also been discovered. According to the remains of the bones, the existence of animal husbandry – cow, sheep and goat breeding – is confirmed. Near a log-dwelling, a woven fence which seemed to have enclosed the cattle corral was found with a great number of acorns, hazelnut and chestnut shells as well as a large quantity of animal bones, bone pipe and wooden vessels of a local type connected to animal husbandry.

According to the Choloki-Ochkhamuri archaeological finds, pottery is the most popular and developed field of craftsmanship. Pottery of that period is made on a potter’s wheel and is distinguished by diverse décor prevailing in geometric shapes performed with different techniques. According to scholars, pottery becomes an independent trade of craftsmanship from the end of the second millennium B.C.

Weaving was one of the important craftsmanships in the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age. It is attested by a number of clay and stone spindle whorls and textile-imprint ceramics. Flax is one of the ancient plants in Georgia and is met since the Bronze Age. The special value of Colchian linen is well described by Classical authors (Herodotus, Xenophon, Strabo, etc.).

Proximity to the sea, the rivers rich in fish and forests full of beasts determined the significance of fishery and hunting. Items connected with fishing and hunting are often found: stone net-weights, fishing-hooks, arrowheads as well as the remains of the bones of dolphins, wild boars, wild goats and wildfowls.

In the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age metal casting and smithies often functioned in Choloki-Ochkhamuri settlements where agricultural tools and jewelry were made using casting and forging. As for the iron-melting centers, their remains are confirmed on both banks of the River Choloki as well as in the upper part (about 8-10 km away east from the settlements), in the foothills where the raw materials like fireproof clay and wood could have been obtained.⁵

To the west of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age settlements, near the sand

⁵ Mikeladze - Khakhutaishvili 1985.

dunes, the so called cult squares (24 sq/m area) are found that are contemporaneous with the Namcheduri V deposit (beginning of the first millennium B.C.). On these squares, which seem to have been chapels, sacrifices used to be offered. In the deposit blackened with fire were found stone tools (grinding-stones, net-weights) and fragments of clay horn-like stands, phallic figures, ritual bread-baking multi-part pans and richly ornamented vessels the pieces of which were broken and mixed together during the ritual ceremonies. The ritual sites were damaged later by the individual pit burials of the Hellenistic period.

The Pichvnari complex of archaeological sites also comprises the so called settlements of textile-ware type in the dunes, hard by the sea, on the new Black Sea terrace. Similar types of sites that the scholars generally date to the first half of the first millennium B.C. are confirmed along the entire eastern Black Sea littoral and, as a rule, near the estuaries. It is considered that the people living in dune settlements used to practice seasonal activities and performed rituals that are confirmed by altars built of horn-like stands arranged in tiers or platforms for offerings. However, their main dwelling places should have been nearby hill-ocks. Generally, there are two main opinions suggested on the production activities: obtaining salt from the sea-water or the extraction-processing of ores (flotation) – magnetite sand – for iron-smelting centers. The functioning of dune settlements abruptly ceases by the sixth century B.C. It coincides with the arrival of the Greeks and the beginning of Greek colonization in the eastern Black Sea littoral.⁶

Thus, based on the archaeological data, scholars conclude that at the beginning of the Greek colonization (sixth-fifth centuries B.C.) a significant dwelling, religious and crafting center existed in the zone of Choloki-Ochkhamuri estuary, that later in the fifth-fourth centuries B.C., became the nucleus of quite a big urban settlement and lasted till the second century B.C.

An urban settlement existing on the territory of Pichvnari-Choloki in the fifth-second centuries B.C. was stretched over a vast territory. It comprised earlier artificial hillock-settlements on both sides of the river Choloki and the right bank of the river Ochkhamuri. The upper deposits of the settlements contain the materials of the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Farming areas were directly attached to the urban settlement and represented one of the backgrounds for its existence. In the fifth-second centuries B.C. this urban center used to have active trade-economic and cultural relations with the principal production centres of the Aegean and Mediterranean world as well as the Black Sea region. A role in these affairs was played by a Greek community that settled on the territory of the anonymous city of Pichvnari-Choloki from the very beginning of the fifth century B.C.

⁶ Tavamaishvili 2012.

The burials excavated here provide important information about the Colchian and Greek communities living in Pichvnari-Ochkhamuri in the fifth-fourth centuries B.C. According to the excavator of the site A. Kakhidze, each ethnic group possessed its own, independent necropolis where only the members of the community were buried. In the Hellenistic period (end of the fourth century B.C. and third century) a certain ethnic levelling of the communities, assimilation of the population can be observed that finds expression in the burial inventory and levelling of burial rituals.

According to the excavator, three major cemetery areas have been brought to light in Pichvnari, which occupy the territory to the west of the settlements. Lying to the west, across the river Choloki, these cemeteries together occupy an area of up to 20 ha. The North or 'Colchian' Cemetery is situated on a natural elevation called Napurvala by local residents, and has apparently local burials of the fifth century. About 250 m away the West or 'Greek' Cemetery contains many burials of the fifth-fourth centuries. To the south lies the South, or Hellenistic Cemetery. Up to date about 1000 pit burials have been discovered in Pichvnari so far. It is important to note that burials and ritual platforms have been well-preserved.

Graves in the Pichvnari necropolises were dug in sandy soil. It should be noted that no organic material such as skeletal, wooden or textile remains survives on account of the sandy soil and the climatic conditions. Burials for the most part were arranged in rectangular (rarely ovoid) pits. Burial pits were of different size. The size of each burial was clearly conditioned by specific factors, not least the social position of the deceased. Nearly all the inhumation burials are of single individuals. Some corpses are buried in wooden coffins, others in roofed or plain pit-burials. In contrast to the 'Colchian' cemetery, several cremation burials have been found in the 'Greek' necropolis. In two instances the cremation was performed at special sites, and afterwards the ash container (a crater) was placed in a specially dug pit. In another instance the vessel (a *hydria*) containing the ashes was placed in a pit dug at the cremation site itself. There are instances of cremation directly in burial pits. A small number of amphora burials were found. Amphoras were evidently used for burying infants.

The deceased in the 'Greek' necropolis were placed on their backs in a supine position, mostly with the head to the east in keeping with Greek burial ritual. In the 'Colchian' cemetery the majority of the dead are buried in a bunched position (on the right or left side). Most graves point to the North, but there are some graves with western, eastern and southeast orientations.

Pichvnari was the only site in the Black Sea area where the dead were buried with the so-called 'Charon's obol' from as early as the mid-fifth century B.C. In other Black Sea areas this custom is recorded only in the fourth century burials. The majority of the coins are local issues, the so called "*kolkhidki*", but a number of coins from various cities of the Black Sea littoral has also been found.

An important component of the burial ritual in the 'Greek' necropolis is the ceremony of the funeral feast, traces of which survive in the vicinity of many of the graves in the form of burnt patches containing calcified bones and fragments of ceramics, the so-called 'ritual platforms'. In the area employed in the second quarter of the fifth century B.C. there are collective ritual platforms as well as individual ones. The number of such areas increased from the mid-fifth century B.C. Social differentiation of the population for this period is more visible. The relatives of some could arrange elaborate funeral feasts with fine black-glazed bowls and drinking cups while the relatives of others might be content with a more modest meal and three or four vessels for the ritual, while the rest, not wishing to break the tradition of the funeral feast, could only afford to bring almost worthless pots to the grave. No areas for funeral feasts have been discovered so far in the fifth century B.C. 'Colchian' necropolis. The rite of the funerary feast was performed in the 'Greek' necropolis of the fourth century B.C., and from the Hellenistic period it was shared by the local population.

The finds from the Greek cemetery show that the first settlers tended to be poor. From the mid-fifth century B.C., presumably thanks to profitable trading arrangements, the status of certain groups improved, but most of the population were still poor. On the one hand, there are burials with fine imported pottery and jewelry of precious metal and other indications of luxury, while on the other the number of graves with no goods is on the increase.

As for the 'Colchian' cemetery of the fifth century B.C., it is believed that burials of the wealthier part of the population have not so far been discovered. It is supposed that they were perhaps buried elsewhere. The larger part of the cemetery is occupied by the graves of ordinary people who were placed in graves with wooden roofs more frequently than wooden coffins. Their grave goods consisted of two or three items. A considerable part of the cemetery is occupied by graves of members of the poorer classes. In most cases the graves lack any goods. Some parts of the cemetery were used by people of moderate means. They were buried in wooden coffins with burial goods typically consisting of fine local ceramics as well as amphorae from different centers, pieces of decorated ceramic, gold, silver and bronze adornments and other luxury goods.

From the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. the economic conditions of Pichv-nari grew worse. Grave goods of the fourth century B.C. tend to be poorer. Amphorae from various production centres are often found at the burials, but decorated pottery rarely, and golden ornaments and silver or bronze vessels practically disappear. Burials are provided in the main not with expensive goods but objects of everyday use. The number of burials without grave goods increases.

Numerous and diverse archaeological artefacts (silver and bronze vessels, Attic painted vases and black-glazed pottery, gold and silver jewels, polychrome core-made glass vessels, terracotta figurines, *amphorae*, gold and silver coins,

engraved finger-rings, items connected with the palaestra, etc.) found in settlements and burials in Kobuleti-Pichvnari indicate that the second half of the fifth century B.C. was the period of prosperity for the urban settlement of Kobuleti-Pichvnari⁷.

There is some disagreement among scholars as to whether the evident differences between the more or less contemporary cemeteries are the result of ethnic distinctions⁸ or the result of socio-economic differentiation⁹.

According to Prof. D. Braund's opinion Pichvnari burial grounds indicate the fundamental changes in burial practice in Colchis through the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. While the burials at Pichvnari site were largely individual inhumations, many earlier burials excavated in Colchis were collective cremation-burials. 'Charon's obol' had no place in traditional burial practice in Colchis. Burial contents including *lekythoi*, *aryballoi*, and strigils suggest the coexistence of the culture of the *gymnasium* with a local culture. By the end of the fifth century, a developed taste for Greek artefacts can be observed. Greek letters penetrated into the hinterland of Colchis. The case of Pichvnari indicates that in the sixth century B.C. proto-colonial relations hardened into settlements in which Greek and Colchian cultures interacted and amalgamated¹⁰.

Petra-Tsikhisdziri Archaeological Site

At about 18 km distance to the north of Batumi along the sea coast in the village of Tsihisdziri one of the most important archaeological sites of the Eastern Black Sea Littoral is located. Different archaeological sites and artifacts have been discovered here. Most of the scholars identified remains of the Tsikhisdziri fort with the famous Byzantine city-fortress of Petra from Byzantine literary sources from sixth to ninth centuries (*Novellae Justiniani*, Procopius' *Wars* and *On Buildings* and *Notitia Episcopatum*). Owing to its strategic location, Petra played an important role in the sixth century A.D. during the Byzantine-Persian war for Lazica. Moreover, it was the main trading hub of Lazica¹¹.

⁷ See the publications of the results of the archaeological excavations of Pichvnari burial grounds: Tsetskhladze 1996; Vickers - Kakhidze 2001; Vickers - Kakhidze 2004; Kakhidze 2007; Kakhidze - Vashakidze 2010; Kakhidze - Khalvashi 2010, 135-137; Kakhidze - Kakhidze 2014; Vickers - Kakhidze 2014; Inaishvili - Khalvashi 2012, 487-509.

⁸ Kakhidze 2007.

⁹ Braund 1994, 112-114.

¹⁰ Braund 1994, 114-118.

¹¹ On the acropolis of Petra, fortifications have been found situated on two hills and connected to each other with double walls. Furthermore, an Early Byzantine basilica, a bath-house, household cisterns and a Middle Byzantine church have also been revealed. The following has been discovered north to the acropolis, on the seaside buildings dated from the fourth-sixth centuries:

The remains of ancient Colchian settlement have been excavated at the foot of the natural hill located north-eastwards of the Petra acropolis. The settlement was revealed during the works for widening the motorway in the area following the cutting of the western slope of the hill. As a result of a small-scale archaeological excavation four cultural deposits have been revealed that correspond to different periods of human life on the site.

The earliest fourth deposit dates back to the Early Iron Age (ninth-seventh centuries B.C.) and contains Colchian pottery characteristic of this period (*pithoi* with grooved surface, vessels with zoomorphic handles). The fragments of ritual clay horn-like stands, stone plummets for nets, grinding-stones and building plasters belong to this deposit as well.

The third deposit dates back to the second half of the sixth-fifth centuries B.C. and apart from the local Colchian pottery (*pithoi*, pitchers, jugs, pots, etc.) contained imported ware as well (fragments of Chian and Samian *amphorae*, Ionian banded vessels and Attic black-glazed pottery).

Tsikhisdziri settlement is similar to the contemporaneous Colchian hillock-settlements of the south-eastern Black Sea littoral – Kobuleti-Pichvnari (upper deposits of Namcheduri and Choloki), Batumi Fort, Makhvilauri, etc. Life on the Tsikhisdziri settlement site must have begun in the ninth century B.C. continuing to the sixth century A.D. inclusive, when a significant Byzantine military-political center was established here in the form of the Petra city-fortress¹².

The excavation of the Tsikhisdziri cemetery, which is synchronous with the Pichvnari cemeteries, is very important for the study of the history of south-western Colchis in antiquity. To the north-west of the Petra acropolis and ancient settlement, 500 m away, a cemetery has been revealed in the lowland coastline area that stretches along the old dune (New Black Sea terrace) line from the south northwards. However, the northern, southern and eastern borders of the cemetery have not been identified yet.

In total 315 burials have been excavated in Tsikhisdziri cemetery the most part of which (305 burials) date to the Classical and Hellenistic periods. The burials are arranged rather compactly in one wide strip from north-east towards south-west. Like other coastal areas of the eastern Black Sea littoral, traces of dune settlements have also been identified in Tsikhisdziri on the territory of the cemetery. Only a small portion of the area has been studied so far. An altar for

bathhouses, a villa, a church, as well as Christian burials and a vast cemetery from the Classical and Hellenistic periods (fifth-second centuries B.C.). The vicinity of Tsikhisdziri is also rich in accidental archaeological discoveries including the following significant finds: hoards of bronze items from 15th -10th centuries B.C.; hoard of gold items from second-third centuries A.D.; a Roman stamped brick and a rich collection of Greek, Parthian, Roman, Sassanian, Byzantine, Arabic and Eastern coins as well as Byzantine lead seals. See: Inaishvili 1974; Inaishvili 1993.

¹² Inaishvili 1974.

cult ceremonies with clay horn-like stands has been excavated here, together with ritual vessels engraved with animal images. Into the dune settlement deposit, which is dated to the eight-seventh centuries B.C., intruded pit-burials of the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

Two types of burials are mainly found in the Tsikhisdziri cemetery: inhumation pit-burials and amphorae-burials. Only two cases of cremation have been revealed. The cremation of the deceased must have been performed in the burial pit itself. In the other case the cremation of the deceased (newly-born baby) was performed in another place and later calcite bones were irregularly put on a small fragment of Colchian *pithos*.

The most part of the burials used to have wooden roofing that is confirmed by finding iron nails on the upper level. Inhumation burials – with few exceptions – are eastwards oriented. Likewise, *amphorae*-burials are also put in pits. All the vessels were covered by fragments of amphorae walls, sometimes by flat stones too. Some *amphorae* were surrounded by cobble-stones.

Owing to the impossibility of preserving organic materials (wood, bone) in sandy soil, we can only judge about the position of the dead according to the burial size, wooden coffin or roofing nails as well as the arrangement of burial items. Hence we can suppose that most part of the dead are buried in the bunched position (on left or right side) whereas the rest are on the back in a supine position.

Two ritual platforms were found in the cemetery. One of them was represented by a burnt place that contained no archaeological material. On the other one, a big painted cylinder *lekythos* and *hydria* were broken to pieces while performing the feast ceremony.

The majority of burials contain grave goods. Several burials are without inventory. The archaeological material includes local ceramic wares and Greek painted and black-gloss pottery, metal jewelry (neck rings, earrings, bracelets and finger rings), gemstones, glass beads and pendants, terracotta figurines, polychrome core-made glass vessels, Colchian and Sinopean coins. Infant *amphorae*-burials, as a rule, contain no grave goods. However, in two amphorae-burials imported clay miniature vessels – *skyphoi* – were still found¹³.

According to the grave goods analysis the Classical and Hellenistic burials on the Tsikhisdziri cemetery are chronologically placed within the fifth to the second-first centuries B.C. Almost half of the 295 burials with the finds belong to the fifth-fourth centuries B.C. To this period belong the *amphorae*-burials of different centers (Chios, Mende, North Aegean, Lesbos) as well as cremation burials with ritual platforms containing Greek painted and black-glazed pottery, terracotta figurines and glass perfume vessels. The second big group is made up

¹³ Inaishvili - Vashakidze 2010, 151-152.

by the Hellenistic burials in which Greek imported pottery is found in relatively less quantity while the local ware, metal jewelry, beads and coins prevail.

The analysis of the burial goods revealed on the so far investigated territory of the Tsikhisdziri cemetery shows that most of the burials were of ordinary people. Mourners for the most part can afford plain burials, in some cases with wooden coffin or a wooden roof. Within the burials they placed a few local and occasionally imported clay vessels. Many burials, however, contain no grave goods at all. In this respect it differs from the Pichvnari cemetery with mostly rich burials. Some of the peculiarities of burial customs as well as the grave goods point to the existence of a Greek ethnic element. However, in the Hellenistic period the process of Hellenization is more obvious.

Batumi Fortress

There are only a few references about ancient Batumi in literary sources. We come across the earliest literary evidence about Batumi in Aristotle's *Meteorology*, where Batumi is mentioned as τὰ κολούμενα βάθρα that means *the so called Deeps*. In Greek-Roman sources the Korolistkali river, which joins the sea near Batumi is called the Bathys river. Pliny the Elder points out that Colchian tribes lived near the Bathys river. He also mentions a city of Matium. According to the point of view of some scholars, Pliny's Matium can be related to Aristotle's Bathea. In the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (a Roman road map), compiled in the fourth century, *Portus Altus*, which is the Latin equivalent of Greek *Bathys Limen* meaning a deep harbour, is mentioned at the place of Batumi. Batumi did have one of the deepest and most convenient harbours among the ancient cities lying on the East coast of the Black Sea¹⁴.

Due to the limited evidence of written sources archaeological research of Batumi Fortress was of great importance in terms of the study of the ancient history of Batumi. Batumi Fortress is located where the River Korolistkali (ancient *Bathys*) flows into the Black Sea. The fortress was erected on a high, natural hill on the coast. In the 1960s archaeological excavations were carried out in this area. Defensive walls and cultural layers of Batumi Fortress were preserved in a very poor condition because of the man-made destruction of the environment.

Archaeological research revealed that the hill which preserves the ruins of the fortress was a site of the oldest settlement discovered on the territory of Batumi. The settlement was inhabited from the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age to the Late Middle Ages and lost its significance in the 18th century when the original

¹⁴ Kakhidze - Khakhutaishvili 1989, 5-41; Braund 2012, 219-222.

harbor moved towards Batumi bay¹⁵. According to the analyses of the written sources and archaeological data scholars identify Batumi Fortress with Losorium fortress constructed by Emperor Justinian in Lazica to protect the limits of the Byzantine Empire together with other fortresses built or reconstructed by him on the south-east coast of the Black Sea¹⁶.

The ancient cultural deposits of the Batumi settlement dated to the eight-seventh centuries B.C. included a lot of local pottery, metal ware and other items. From the imported artifacts of the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods the fragments of Early Chian decorated *amphorae*, Chian *amphorae* with bulging neck type, Samian, Thasian, Lesbian, Mendean *amphorae*, as well as *amphorae* with so called “tumbler-shaped” feet can be noted. Among the other imported wares East Greek banded ceramics and small number of pieces of Attic black glazed pottery were found.

The archaeological survey in the surroundings of Batumi revealed the remains of other ancient settlements of the same period in the villages Gantiadi, Zemo Jocho and Makhvilauri.

For the history of Batumi accidental discoveries in the vicinities of Batumi kept at the Batumi Akhvlediani State Museum are very important. Among them are: hoards of bronze items of Late-Bronze-Early Iron Age from the villages Gantiadi and Zemo Jocho; fully preserved fourth century B.C. *amphora* of Herakleia Pontike with englyphic stamp and Late Roman brown-clay *amphora*; also a great number of coins of Antique and Middle ages¹⁷.

According to the archaeological data Batumi settlement used to be the oldest political, economic and trade centre of the valley of the river Korolistskali. This urban settlement was mainly focused on the service of the ships going along its coast and undoubtedly stopping in the harbor¹⁸.

Thus, archaeological study of the principal sites of the south-eastern Black Sea littoral (Kobuleti-Pichvnari, Petra-Tsikhisdziri, Batumi Fort) revealed that the coast line and the surrounding area have been populated since the Late Bronze Age at least. The appearance of Greek colonies in these areas from the end of the sixth century B.C. can be observed. All settlements were located at the mouth of the rivers which played an important role in their development since the mouths of the rivers were used as harbors. On the one hand, the junction of the sea and the river routes was pivotal for the development of urban settlements, and on the other, facilitated the spread of Greek culture in the hinterland. Kobuleti-Pichvnari was the most advanced urban colonial settlement in the

¹⁵ Kakhidze - Khakhutaishvili 1989, 42-57.

¹⁶ Lekvinadze 1974, 169-186.

¹⁷ Kakhidze - Khakhutaishvili 1989, 59-125.

¹⁸ Braund 2012, 219-222.

Classical and Hellenistic periods. Due to their strategic locations, Gonio-Apsarus gained particular importance in the Roman period and the city-fortress of Petra in the Early Byzantine period. The physical geography of the South-eastern part of the Black Sea littoral helped the region integrate into the Pontic world, and thus, become a part of the Greek, Roman and Byzantine spheres.

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The Colchis Black Sea Littoral

Abstract

The article deals with the review of principal archaeological sites of the south-eastern Black Sea littoral (Kobuleti-Pichvnari, Petra-Tsikhisdziri, and Batumi Fort). Archeological study of these sites revealed that the coastline and the surrounding area have been populated since the Late Bronze Age at least. The appearance of Greek colonies in these areas from the end of the sixth century B.C. can be observed. All settlements were located at the mouth of the rivers which played an important role in their development since the mouths of the rivers were used as harbors. On the one hand, the junction of the sea and the river routes was pivotal for the development of urban settlements, and on the other, facilitated the spread of Greek culture in hinterland. Kobuleti-Pichvnari was the most advanced urban colonial settlement in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Due to their strategic locations, Gonio-Apsarus gained particular importance in the Roman period and the city-fortress of Petra in the Early Byzantine period. The physical geography of the eastern part of the Black Sea littoral helped the region integrate into the Pontic world, and thus, become a part of the Greek, Roman and Byzantine spheres.