

On the Shoulders of Prometheus



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International collaboration and the
archaeology of Georgia

Edited by

Emanuele E. Intagliata and Paul Everill

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-531-4
ISBN 978-1-80327-532-1 (e-Pdf)

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Cover: Cover caption to add as follows: Georgian and British staff and students working together next to the standing fortifications of Nokalakevi-Archaeopolis (P. Everill)

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The Georgian Archaeological Monograph series is intended to provide a focal point for the publication of excavation reports, single and multi-authored research volumes, conference proceedings, and doctoral theses relating to all aspects of Georgian archaeology and cultural heritage. Submissions are also welcomed on topics relating to the archaeology of the wider Southern Caucasus, particularly fieldwork reports and research currently unavailable in English. The monograph series embraces the full spectrum of interdisciplinary contributions to our understanding of the archaeology of the Southern Caucasus including, but not limited to, historical research; excavation/ fieldwork; environmental/biological/ artefactual analysis; and new scientific methods.

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Introduction

Emanuele E. Intagliata¹ and Paul Everill²

Despite some high-profile exceptions, the archaeology of the South Caucasus (present-day Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) remains marginalised and often overlooked – not receiving the wider exposure it deserves. Its higher profile at the moment probably owes as much to conflict in Syria and Ukraine in recent years, which has forced a number of international projects to relocate to more favourable locations, as it does to greater awareness. This situation is partly a consequence of decades of occupation and academic isolation, and partly because of an unfortunate (and incorrect) perception that the South Caucasus is simply peripheral to the archaeologies of Europe and Asia.

This volume originated in a conference session, organised by the editors for the 21st annual meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (Kiel, 6-11 September 2021), dedicated to the archaeology and history of the South Caucasus. Its goal was to raise awareness of the growing number and variety of studies dedicated to this region. The session showcased examples of collaborative working in the South Caucasus, projects which have enabled the cross-fertilisation of ideas and scholarly traditions, helping to develop new methodologies, and bringing new technology and scientific advances to bear on regional archaeological debates. It was a celebration of both the archaeology of the South Caucasus and of the power of international scholarly cooperation to bridge divides and widen horizons.

The scope of this volume has changed slightly from the conference session that inspired it. The original aim was to publish a collection of all the papers presented at the EAA; however not all were submitted for publication to the editors, and none with a focus beyond Georgia. Additional contributions were, however, added to the collection, though these studies were also situated in Georgia. The resulting volume, therefore, presents a diverse miscellanea, with clear yet narrow geographical and chronological boundaries. Despite this evident limitation, the following contributions demonstrate the high level of connectedness of this region with the rest of the Southern Caucasus and, indeed, Asia and Europe. They all highlight the research potential of Georgia, as well as the benefits that international collaboration can bring to our understanding of the history and archaeology of the Caucasus more generally.

The publication of this volume also marks the beginning of a new book series through Archaeopress, dedicated to the archaeology of Georgia. The Georgian Archaeological Monographs (GAM) series was established to provide a focal point for the publication of excavation reports, single and multi-authored research volumes, conference proceedings, and doctoral theses relating to all aspects of Georgian archaeology and cultural heritage. The series will also publish on topics relating to the archaeology of the wider Southern Caucasus, particularly fieldwork reports and research currently unavailable in English. The monograph series will embrace the full spectrum of interdisciplinary contributions to our understanding of the archaeology of the Southern Caucasus including, but not limited to, historical research; excavation and fieldwork; environmental, biological and artefactual analysis; and new scientific methods. Many of these approaches to the study of the past are represented within the pages of this, the first volume of the monograph series.

The contributions in this volume follow a broad chronological order. Chapter 1, by P. Biagi and R. Nisbet, presents the results of a series of surveys conducted in the Javakheti Plateau, which uncovered the remains of a wide variety of Bronze Age sites. The contribution deals with the nature

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and complex relations that may have occurred between these sites, some of which are obsidian mining fields.

Chapter 2 (K. Campbell, D. Naskidashvili, K. Turchin, and V. Licheli) presents the results of the excavations of four earthen buildings dated to between the late 2nd millennium BC and the 3rd century BC at Grakliani Gora (Shida Kartli) and associated archaeobotanical analyses. The result draws a picture of a rural community whose way of life changed little over the course of a millennium despite the upheavals and geopolitical reshufflings that characterised this period.

The chapter by S. Arnhold, P. Bukhrashvili, F. Blocher, and S. Davitashvili (Chapter 3) provides an overview of what is known about the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age east Georgian sanctuaries. These monumental compounds, of which only nine have been excavated, appear to be characterised by a standardised plan and rich assemblages. New excavations conducted by a Georgian-German team at Nazarlebi (Kakheti), whose preliminary results are presented in this contribution, are currently helping to fill in the gap left by past scholarship on the chronology and architecture of these monuments.

Chapter 4 by S. Brodbeck-Jucker and R. Kunze presents the results of investigations at Udabno (Kakheti – east Georgia), a complex of five Late Bronze/Early Iron Age rural settlements of which three (Udabno I-III) have been partially excavated since 2000. The contribution provides insight into the everyday lives of these sites' inhabitants, who were mostly self-sufficient and lived off the products of their land while maintaining trade connections with the southwest Caucasus.

Chapter 5 (P. Everill, N. Murgulia, D. Lomitashvili, I. Colvin, and B. Lortkipanidze) offers an overview of the research conducted at Nokalakevi-Archaeopolis, with a specific focus on the work carried out by the Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi (AGEN) since 2001. Over the past 20 years, AGEN has pioneered a multidisciplinary approach to the archaeology of Nokalakevi, allowing a greater understanding of the long history of occupation of this site, and the lives of its inhabitants.

The chapter by M. Jaworska (Chapter 6) presents preliminary remarks on the results of a study of selected lamp finds discovered during excavation at the Roman fort of Gonio-Apsaros. After contextualising the material, the contribution discusses the problem of the low representativeness of clay lamps in the archaeological record and puts forward an explanation for this. It also explores the trade link evidenced by studying lamps and the role of the army in importing goods from the west to the South Caucasus.

Chapter 7 by N. Murgulia, B. Lortkipanidze, and D. Lomitashvili, discusses the evidence for the Christianisation of modern-day western Georgia, focusing in particular on the remains from sites in the surroundings of the Laz capital, Nokalakevi-Archaeopolis. In so doing, the contribution also presents the results of the excavations conducted by the authors in what has been identified as the ancient Onoguris mentioned by Agathias. To date, the excavations have revealed portions of a substantial fortification wall and a church, the latter believed to have been constructed on top of an earlier place of religious convergence.

The chapter by R. Papuashvili, E.E. Intagliata, A. Vinogradov, D. Naskidashvili, and G. Chitaia (Chapter 8), presents the results of a research project conducted at Machkhomeri hill – Khobi Municipality. The excavations have revealed the existence of a late antique church most likely dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. The church appears to have been an important religious centre in Lazika, attracting funding from religious associations and prominent figures such as the bishop of Satala. The apparent absence of strong defensive facilities so far excludes the hypothesis that the site was part of the frontier defensive system of Lazika in Late Antiquity.

Finally, Chapter 9 (D. Berikashvili) provides insights into the results of a landscape survey conducted in the hinterland of Samshvilde (Kvemo Kartli). Most of the material and sites discovered during this fieldwork, which was conducted over the course of three years, are dated to the Middle Ages, although earlier and later archaeological evidence are also attested. The contribution provides a much-needed contextualisation of the settlement pattern surrounding the complex site of Samshvilde and demonstrates the potential of landscape archaeology to shed light on the history of large nucleated settlements.

The chapters collected in this volume represent the diversity and vibrancy of international research collaboration in the archaeology of Georgia, while all underline the enormous potential of the country's archaeological resource. The importance of seeing the South Caucasus in its unique context, rather than as peripheral to Europe or Asia, is evident throughout. The increasing application of scientific techniques to archaeological research and landscape archaeology, features prominently in many of these chapters. However, the key element is the multidisciplinary nature of much of the work, which allows specialists drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and scholarly traditions to contribute to the better understanding and appreciation of the Georgian historic environment.

In various versions of the story of Prometheus, the Greek Titan gave fire and civilisation, and the arts and sciences, to mortal humans. As punishment, Zeus had him bound to the Caucasus Mountains where he was tortured for his defiance. Archaeology itself – the application of science and scholarly endeavour to the understanding of our own early societies – might, therefore, be directly connected to Prometheus and his gifts, but the proximity of the Caucasus Mountains means that there is perhaps nowhere in the world where this is more true.