

COLCHIS IN GLOBAL SETTINGS: VERSIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Baghaturia-Kner Eliso

Dr. Phil. in Cultural studies Visiting Professor at Shota Meskhia Zugdidi State University,
Member of Munich Universities Academic Society
ebagaturia1975@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: *This paper provides a new way of looking at historical perspectives, explores the meaning of interconnectedness with Europe and Asia, and re-examines continuity of similar challenges to understanding what matters. It provides a retrospective view of artifacts in cross-cultural perspective, cases of mental, spiritual and political behaviors, connections and exchange to make better sense of the way historical Colchis hung with ancient Civilizations. This also brings experiences of profound changes in boundaries, and economic and military histories to help us better understand how Colchian and Lazian predecessors responded to challenges. This leads to the question: what are the useful lessons of past that can help achieve future perspectives? Highlighted aspects also focus on scientific gaps to give reason for scholarly exchange and to increase the interpretative heritage. Most importantly, it seeks to show what we put our own lives into perspective and how to move research forward.*

Keywords: *Perspective, Colchis, Georgia, Military History, Boundaries, Cultural Heritage.*

As an archaeologist who assigns historical significance to archaeological landscapes, even in cases of insufficient artifacts, I asked myself a question:

- ✓ **What can I say about historical perspective as a process that brings warnings, benefits, and insights into the future, especially when I focus on historical Colchis?**

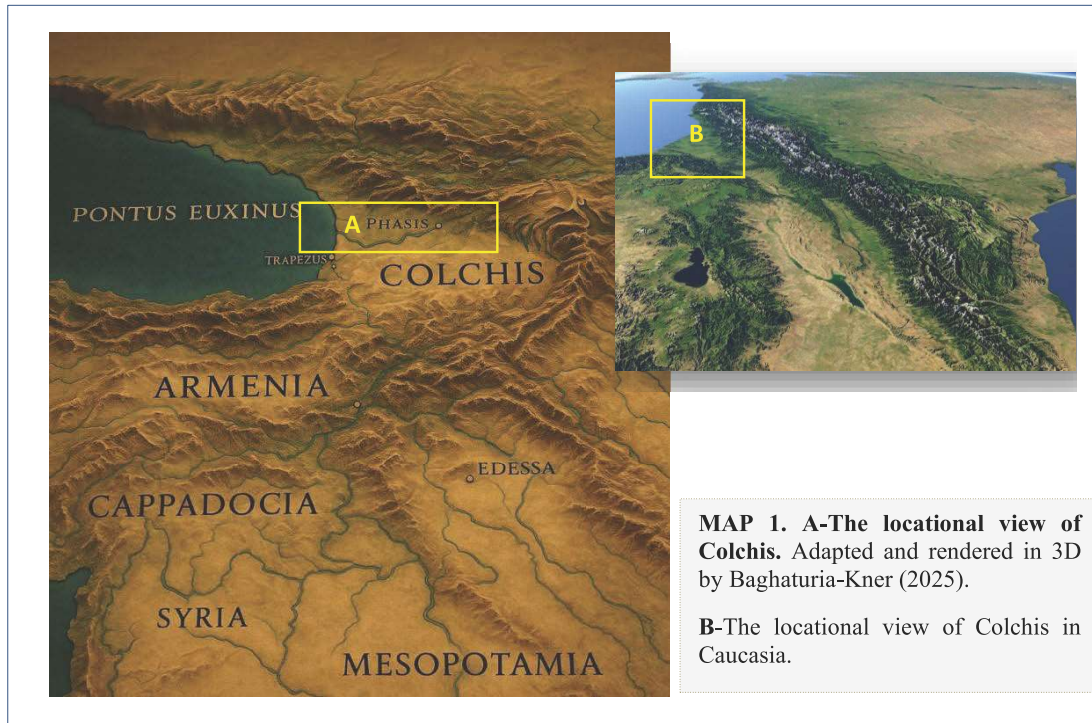
This means reframing the question as follows:

1. What roles did Colchis (**Map. 1**) play across its long historical trajectory in mediating between different regions, such as Europe and Asia? Moreover, what outcomes from those interactions can serve as inspiration or lessons for future generations?

Probable historical geography of historical Colchis well known: it stood at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, a shared space for pagans, Christians, Muslims, and various political powers. Thus, it is fitting to briefly highlight the emergence of intercultural interactions, preserved in prehistoric megalithic structures, such as the dolmens from the Middle Bronze Age (3rd–2nd millennium BCE) in the Azanta field of the Kodori Gorge (**Fig.1**).¹ These were outcomes of large-scale Eurasian migration. Diverse peoples brought with them vast collections of symbol-

1 Sagona 2017.

ic knowledge and practices, which Colchis hosted. This cosmic knowledge marks the beginning of global intellectual history, linking religion, culture, metaphysics, and life philosophy. Though the textual evidence is scarce, the influence is global.

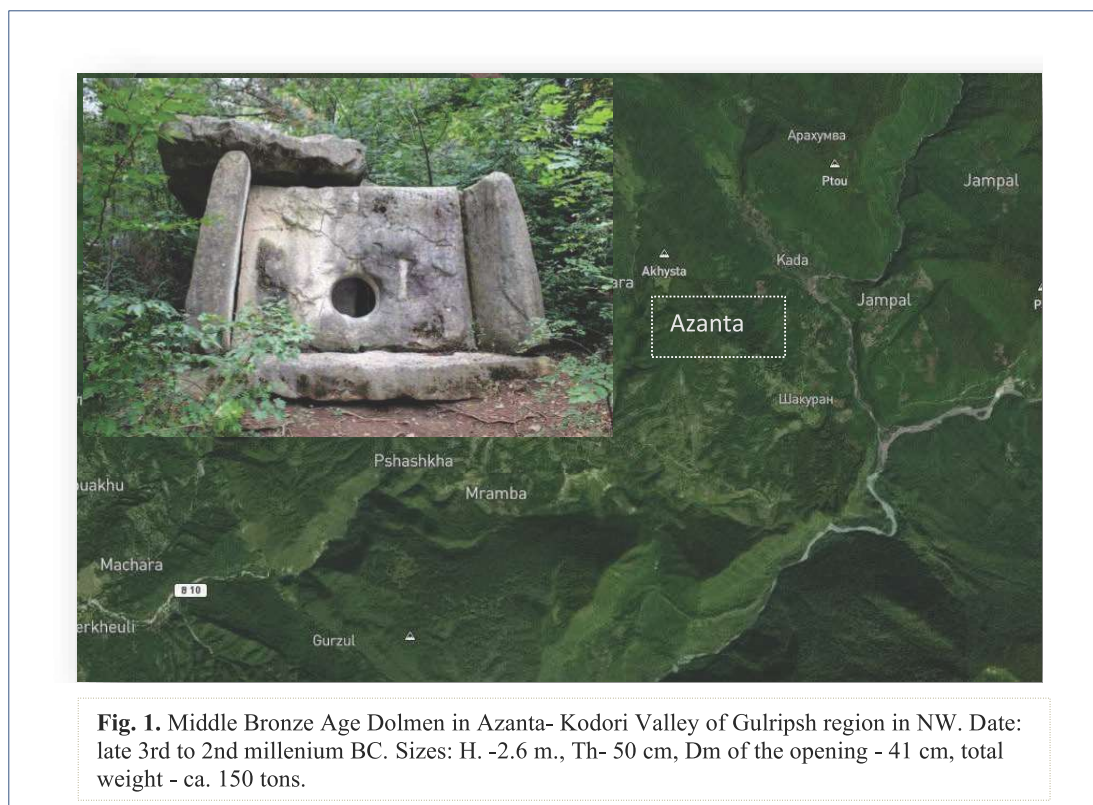


More structured intercultural relations¹ posed a new challenge to Classical-Hellenistic Colchis.² Topics such as social and trade relations³, colonization⁴, transportation of slaves⁵ and early globalization arose. The golden artifacts of elite culture reveal far more about fashion, scents, feasting, and burial customs than commonly understood (**Fig.2**). The visual history of Colchian identity and skills, expressed through techniques and behaviors, suggests a consistent level of quality and ambition on the material plane. This was the land of the *Golden Fleece*;⁶ let us recall the *Homeric effect* on global narrative, which continues to fascinate the Western world even today. The apologia of this „barbarian“ land gave rise to the rhetorical brilliance of Themistios and the famed teacher Eugenius of Constantinople.

It is clear that the Colchians constructed their identity with caution and ethnic consciousness, forming a heterogeneous entity (**Map.2**).⁷ Tribal diversity likely helped them manage challeng-

1 See: Apakidze A., Lordkipanidze O. 1965. Braund 1994. Lordkipanidze O. 1999.
 2 Central Colchis see in: Lomitashvili 2003. Mamuladze Sh. 2020.
 3 See: Gamkrelidze, G. 2001.
 4 See: Tsetskhladze, G 2022; Coskun, 2023.
 5 See: Braund D., Tsetskhladze G. 2009.
 6 See: Lordkipanidze, O. 2001.
 7 Baghaturia-Kner 2022:31-34.

es and harmonize conflict-prone groups. Here, families, communities, and newcomers coexisted peacefully. Even the presence of Greek burial practices reflects accepted migration.



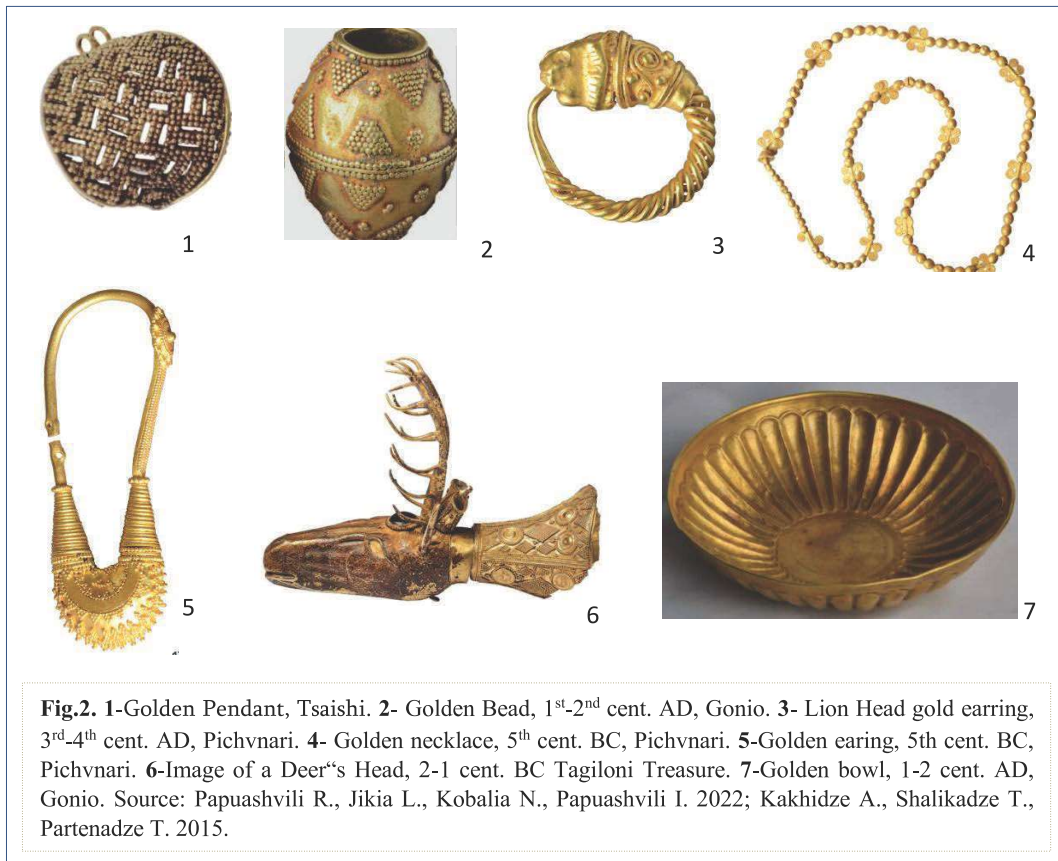
Gods of different faiths¹ shaped Colchian thought (**Fig.3**), behavior, norms, and values, not in peaceful harmony but through ongoing mental and emotional conflict. These require further exploration rather than quick conclusions.

Once Colchis shared its maritime and overland routes, trade and vision expanded in equal measure. Technologies, ideas, and knowledge, flowing for centuries between East and West, converged in Colchis.² These artifacts narrate diverse stories of long-term processes, European and Asian influences, interrupted transregional relations, and the capabilities and demands that such relations required. They guide us toward understanding Romanized socio-historical dynamics—covering trade routes, economic integration and exclusion, social taste, fashion, culinary habits, and emotions.

This led me to my discussion group, which examined several episodes from Colchis-Lazica's changing perspectives amid global tensions, not solely as reflections on the past.

1 Charkviani, Amirghanashvili 2011:172-186; Khrushkova 2002:293-294.

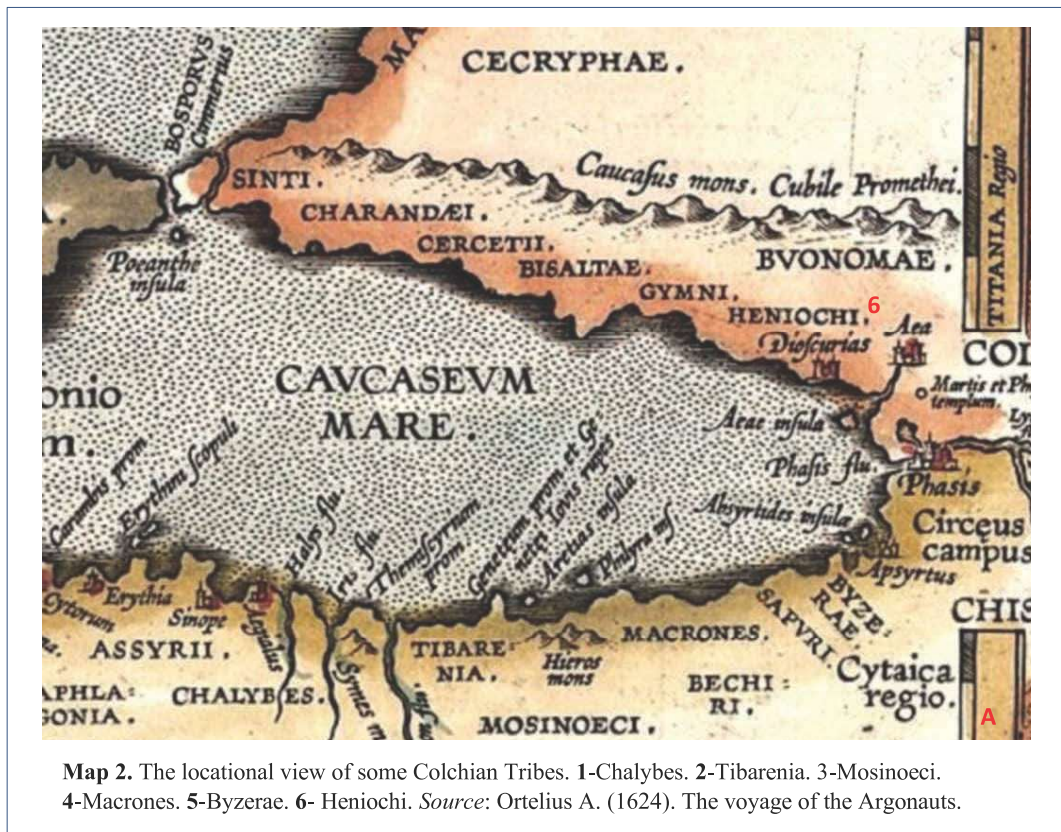
2 See: Gamkrelidze G. 2021.



If we highlight **Roman Colchis as a border culture**¹, we see Colchian families, companions, enemies, peace, conflict, and local constraints. The key theme is imperial security strategy, especially control of Black Sea trade routes and navigation. This led to the fortification of coastal Colchis in Apsaros, Phasis, Sebastopolis, and Pityus.² These became multi-ethnic institutions serving imperial interests and the military. Garrisoned soldiers and federated units were tasked not only with defense but also construction and production. Coins brought in through them circulated into the royal treasury. This is a story of **geostrategic positioning and communicational potential**. Lazica emerged as a **critical transit corridor** between Europe and Asia. Later, as Persia reclaimed parts of the Caucasus,³ Lazica became a **mediator** near long-range routes via Svaneti and Apsilia (**Map.3**). Historical sources describe how valuable goods⁴ and diplomatic cargo were transported, e.g., the silk brought by Zemarkhos and Maniakhs along the Darin route to the Black Sea.⁵ This Asian silk movement was archaeologically confirmed in the Kuban region (**Map.3**).

1 See: Lordkipanidze G., Braund D. 1991. Braund 1986; Lekvinadze 1969. Japaridze 2001. Voronov 2003. Baghaturia-Kner 2024.
 2 See: Speidel, 2021; Lordkipanidze G. 1991; Lordkipanidze G. 1995; Wheeler 1999; Zuckerman 1995. Speidel 1986. Zukermann 1991.
 3 Geoffrey G. and Lieu Samuel N.C. 2002.
 4 Baghaturia-Kner 2014.
 5 Baghaturia 2006.

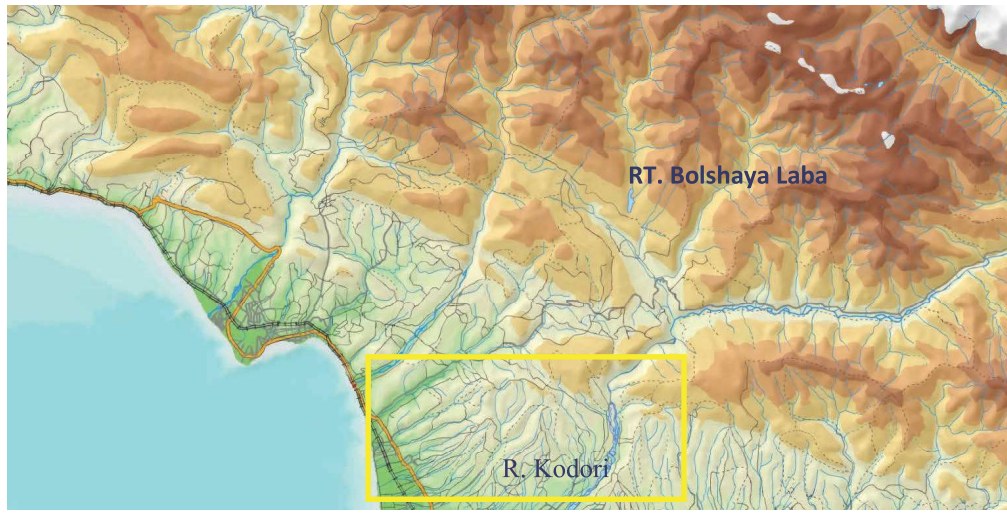
Such dynamics elevated the strategic value of locals, even in guarding passageways. Coastal and inland fortresses became targets for Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic forces. These encounters fostered both competition and cooperation between coastal and central Colchis, Byzantium, and Persia. A full exploration of themes like global trade, competition, integration, and rejection exceeds the scope of this presentation.



A brief look at Byzantine influence reveals cultural-political mismatches with Lazic expectations. Disputes over provincial customs policy, budget distribution, and social resistance exposed sharp differences between imperial and local principles.

From a conflict archaeology perspective, we gain insights beyond written records, massive investments in weapons, armor, horse gear, and logistics (Fig.4.1-11).¹ Warrior types and provisioning systems appear, resembling Chernyakhov culture armaments from Ukraine (Fig.4), suggesting federated units and organized commando groups (quaestor exercitus). These reflect the complex military adventures of various ethnic groups.²

1 Baghaturia-Kner 2022; Kazansky M., Mastykova A. 2007.
 2 Bierbrauer 2008



Map 3. View of the Gulripshi region in northwestern Georgia. The area marked in yellow represents the historically known as Apsilia.

We also see evidence of local military contracts,¹ possibly involving patrol responsibilities, including the Kodori Gorge (**Fig.4. A**). A notable artifact, a stone fragment from Arabia inscribed *Ala Abazgorum*, likely indicates Abasgi military support on the Eastern frontier. This fragment captures both the tragedy of local warriors and the emotional toll of imperial campaigns, hinting at new global diplomatic dynamics.

Meanwhile, the Lazic society faced ethical trauma. The topic of eunuch-making (castration), a morally unbearable practice, was harrowing:

„Their kings used to raise boys of beautiful appearance and traits, forcibly taking them from their parents, castrating them, and selling them at high prices to buyers across the Roman territories. Fathers were killed to prevent revenge. Hence, many imperial eunuchs were Abasgi by origin. However, under Emperor Justinian, this changed. Influenced by Christianity, he sent a eunuch born Abasg Euphratas, to command Lazic kings never to mutilate boys again. The Abasgi accepted the command with joy and courageously sought to end the practice.“ (**Procopius**. History of Wars, Book 8, chapter 3, part 15-20).

This theme is global.² Byzantium, as a hub of Eurasian behavior, pulled partners into profit-driven imperial systems. Paradoxically, Abasgia, part of a bishopric, was legally codified into this practice. This illustrates the complex interplay of religion and politics, not only in Abasgia but throughout the Christian world (where eunuchs were accepted as patriarchs, bishops, monks). Imperial religious landscapes with architectural innovations, often linked to military structures, became zones of Byzantine jurisdiction.

¹ Warriors from Olginskoe cemetery. Baghaturia-Kner 2023:155.

² Shaun Tougher, 2009.

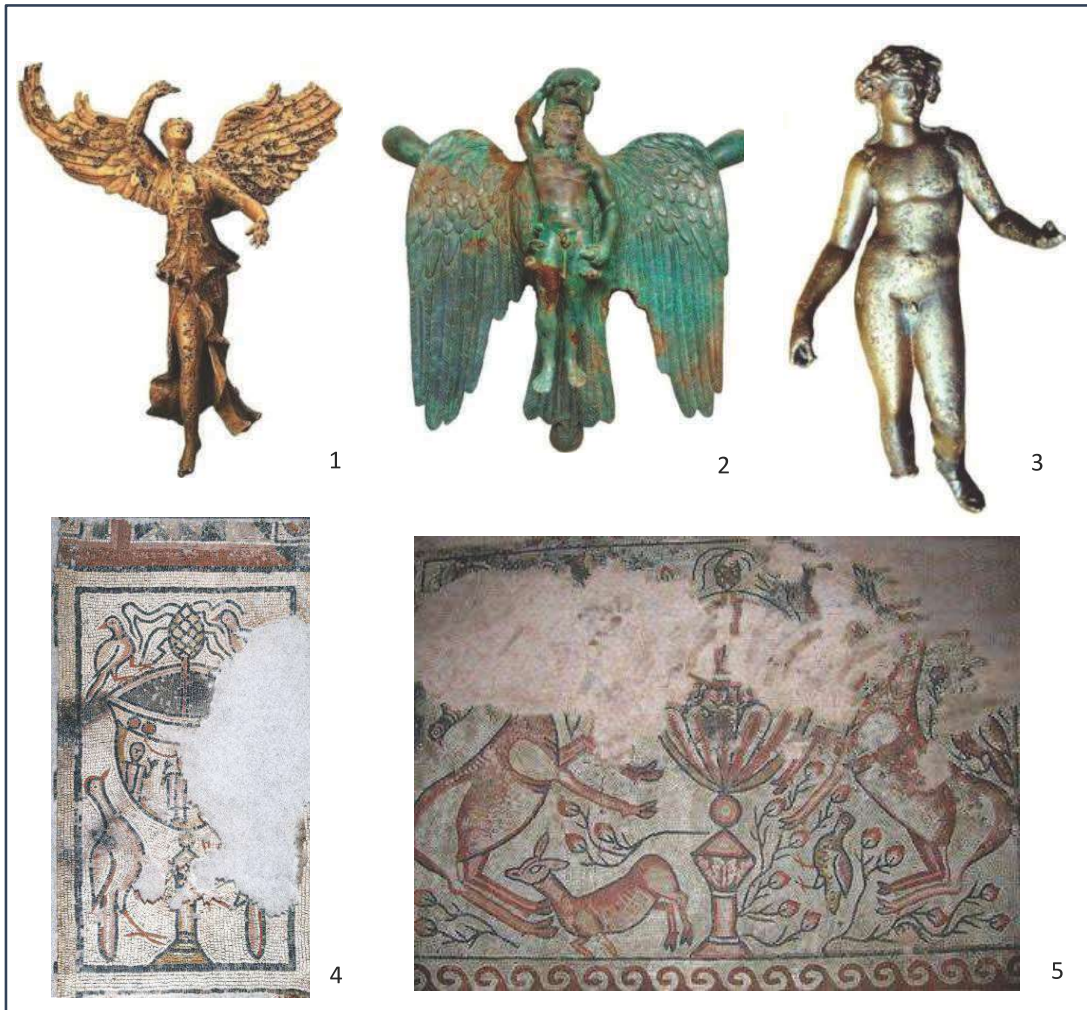
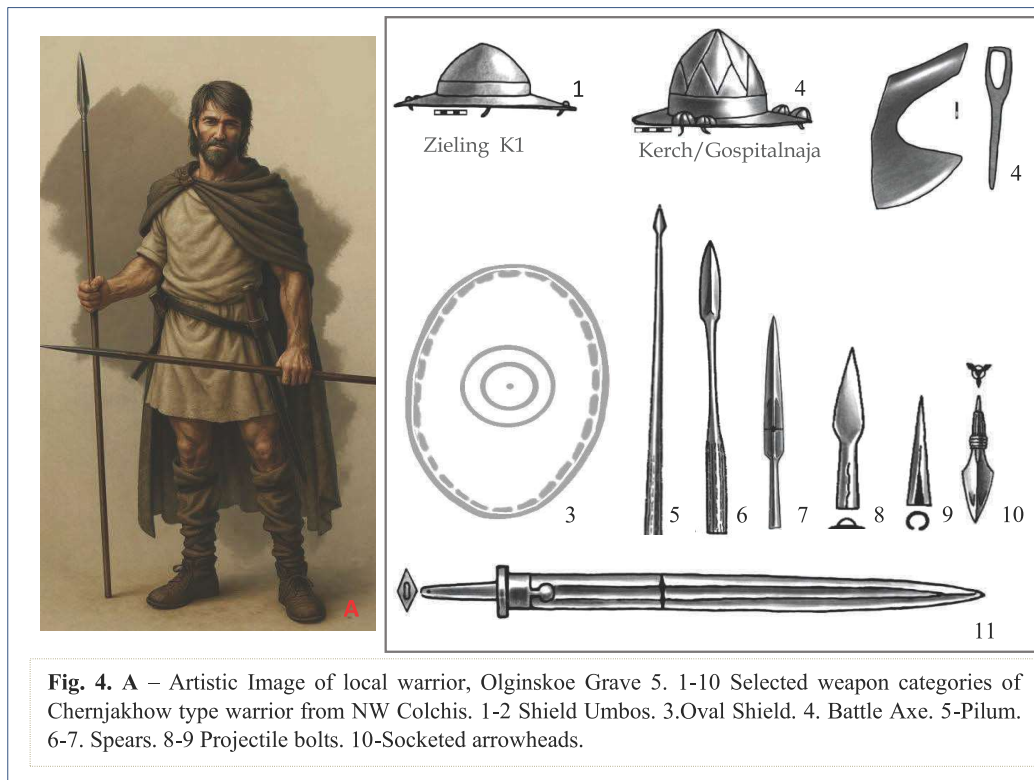


Fig. 3. The ways of thinking in Colchis. 1- The statue of Victory Goddess Nike, from Vani. 2- Lamp featuring an eagle and Ganymedes, from Vani. 3- Bronze torso of youth, from Vani. 4- The 5th century mosaic of Pythius Basilica. 5- The floor mosaic of Pythius three nave Basilica.

Christianity introduced a different spiritual baseline, struggling against external influences. Vestments, objects, rituals, scents, and foods marked sacred space, distinguishing spiritual life from daily social spheres. Nevertheless, the lack of philosophical and social critique of these artifacts is evident.

The lessons and practices of the past show us the importance of learning history well. Do we respond adequately when confronted with similar global dynamics, borders, gender politics, transgender rights, and antisocial behavior?



Are we aware of the consequences of Georgia’s renewed transregional connections and the paradoxes of Western vs. Eastern economic influences? Did we reflect when troops were sent to foreign frontlines, or when occupied Georgian coasts came under international peacekeeping control? All of this echoes past experiences of federated institutions and well-paid foreign careers in Georgia.

We also have a displaced society, suffering, yet hopeful. Their hope is linked to Euro-integration, seen as a guarantee for peace and the right to return home. A brief bridge built by the Germans in 1948 connects this. In the space between international recognition and lived experience, there is only one absolute path: **knowledge and vision**. I found a small hint: „*The front line, a book with no ending.*“

Thus, Georgia’s communicational potential is not merely geographic; it is a lived reality, a set of paths, directions, and meanings. Not an accessory to commerce, but a foundational force between peace and challenge. It defines the future, offers tangible realities, and sometimes even limits perspectives. Every misstep stems from a lack of knowledge and reflection.

My main message is this: **We must better learn from the past.**

We possess scientific strength, but lack answers and solutions. The title of this conference underscores the need to **activate perspectives**. The messages presented aim to **bridge interdisciplinary gaps**. We need **new experiences in science, new thematic spaces, new methodologies, and deeper collaboration** for a promising future.

REFERENCES

- Apakidze, A., Lordkipanidze, O. 1965.** Materials for the archaeology of Dioskuria-Sebastopolis. MSKA, N3.
- Baghaturia-Kner, E. 2024:**11-17. Gastronomy in archaeological context: adventurous 'Ripenschale' Glass bowl from NW Lazica (Georgia). Zugdidi, Gastronomy Edition 2.
- Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022.** Machara and Kodori Valleys (historical Apsilia) of NW Georgia in Caucasia in the 1st to 7th Centuries AD: Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München, 2022. See Online: [Machara and Kodori Valleys \(historical Apsilia\) of NW Georgia in Caucasia in the 1st to 7th centuries AD](#)
- Baghaturia-Kner, E. 2014.** Late Antique/Early Byzantine Glass vessels from the cemeteries of Kodori and Machara valleys (Georgia). Izmir, Turkey. ISBN 978-605-61525-0.
- Baghaturia, E. 2006.** 'On the importance of 'Missimian's'-Kodori Route in the 1st-6th centuries. *Eran ud Aneran. Cafoscarina*. ISBN 88-7543-105-1. Venezia, Italia.
- Bierbrauer, V. 2008.** Ethnos und Mobilität im 5. Jahrhundert aus archäologischer Sicht: Vom Kaukasus nach Niederösterreich. Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse Abhandlungen. Neue Folge, Heft 131. München.
- Braund, D., Tsetskhladze G. 2009.** The Export of Slaves from Colchis. Cambridge University Press.
- Braund, D. 1994.** Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC-AD 562, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Braund, D. 1986.** The Caucasian frontier: myth, exploration and the dynamics of Imperialism. In: P. Freedman and D. Kennedy (eds) the defence of the Roman and Byzantine East. Oxford (BAR International Series 297).
- Coskun, A. 2023.** From Dioskurias/Aia (Ochamchire) over Sebastopolis/Dioskurias (Skurcha) to Sukhumi/Sebastopolis; The letter of the Episcopus Sanastupolitanus Inferioris Georgiae reconsidered. University of Waterloo, ON, Canada.
- Gamkrelidze, G. 2001.** On the Transportation of Oil to Phasis-Poti (According to Archaeological materials. Essayes on the archaeology of Colchis in Classical Period)
- Gamkrelidze, G. 2021.** Archaeology of Georgia (5th century BC-5th century AD). Tbilisi. ISSN 1512-4207.
- Kakhidze A., Shalikadze T., Partenadze T. 2015.** Batumi Archaeological Museum Treasure. Catalogue.
- Kazanski, M. and Mastikova, A. 2007.** A TSIBILIUM II, Cette publication paraît dans le cadre des travaux du Groupement de Recherche Européen (GDRE) « L'Est européen dans le haut Moyen Age: des tribus à l'état », BAR International Series 0000 2007.
- Khrushkova, L. 2002:**293-294. Rannekhristianskie pajatniki vostochnovo prichernomorija (IV-VII vv). Moskva. (In Russian)
- Lekvinadze, V. A. 1969.** The pontic limes. VDI 2 (In Russian)
- Lomitashvili, D. 2003.** Central Colcha in the 8th BC-6th AD (Tsikhegoji-Archeopolis-Nokalakevi). Doctoral thesis, Tbilisi. (In Georgian)
- Lordkipanidze, G., Braund D. 1991.** Recent Work at Pityus (Pitsunda/Bichvinta, USSR), in: Maxfield V.A / Dobson MJ. (eds.), Roman frontier Studies.

Lordkipanidze, G. 1995. Forschungen in Pityus (Pitsunda/Bichvinta), in Kühnert B. / Riedel V./ Gordesiani R. (eds.), Prinzipat und Kultur im 1 Jahrhundert.

Lordkipanidze, O. 2001. „The Golden Fleece: myth, euhemeristic explanation, and archaeology“. Oxford Journal of Archaeology, 20:1-38.

Lordkipanidze, O. 1999. Trade on the Black Sea: the historic premise of the Great Silk Road. 9th International Symposium on the Ancient History and Archaeology of the Black Sea Area. Dzeban (JCSAG).

Japaridze, V. 2001. ‘To the Genesis of the Colchian Cities of the Roaman-Byzantine Period’. Second International Congress on the Black Sea Antiquity. Ankara, Turkey.

Sagona, A. 2017. The Archaeology of the Caucasus from Earliest Settlement to the Aron Age. Cambridge University Press.

Shaun Tougher. 2009. The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society. London.

Speidel, M. 2021:269-280. New and Revised Tile Stamps From The Roman Fort of Apsaros (Gonio, Georgia) aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphic 219.

Speidel, M.P. 1986. The Caucasus frontier. Second century garrisons at Apsarus, Petra and Phasis. In: Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms. vol.3. 13 Internationaler Limes-kongress, Aelen. Stuttgart.

Tsetskhladze, G. R. 2022:522-564. Classical Archaeology of the Pontus in the Archaic Period. Some Current Problems and Prospective Solutions, in: Colombi, C., Parisi, V., Dally, O., Guggisberg, M. A. (eds.). Comparing Greek Colonies. Mobility and Settlement Consolidation from Southern Italy to the Black Sea (8th-6th Century BC). Proceedings of the International Conference (Rome, 7-9.11.2018). Berlin, Boston.

Voronov, I. 2003. Mogili Apsilov. Itogi issledovaniya nekropolja Tsibiluma v 1977-1986 godax. (In Russian).

Wheeler, E. 1999. From Pithyus to Zeugma: The Northern sector of the eastern frontier 1983-1996. Roman Frontier Studies. Proceeding of the XVIIth international Congress of Roman Frontier Studies.Zalau.

Zukermann, C. 1991. The early Byzantine Strongholds in Eastern Pontus. Travaux et Mémoires 11.

Zuckerman, C. 1995. Ceux centurions commandants d’ailes en Egypte, in Y.Le Bohec (ed), La hierarchie (Rangordnung) de l’armee romaine.

Geoffrey, G. and Lieu Samuel, N.C. 2002. The roman eastern Frontier and The Persian Wars. Part II, AD 363-630. A narrative sourcebook. London and New York.

Baghaturia-Kner, E. 2023

ბალათურია-კნერი, ე. 2023:155. ოლგინსკოეს სამაროვნის საზოგადოება ისტორიული აფშილეთიდან. ქართული მხარეთმცოდნეების სათავეებთან, სამეცნიერო კრებული, ეძღვნება სერგი მაკალათიას დაბადების 130 წლისთავს, ქუთაისი 2023.

Charkviani, M., Amirkhanashvili, Q. 2009

ჩარკვიანი, მ., ამირხანაშვილი, ჟ. 2009. საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე გამოვლენილი ბერძნულ-რომაულ ღვთაებათა და მითოლოგიურ პერსონაჟთა გამოსახულებების ნუსხა. ძიებანი 9. მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის არქეოლოგიური ჟურნალი. თბილისი.