INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

GEORGIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY:
RESULTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the distinguished Georgian scholar Otar Lordkipanidze, whose professional life was devoted to the archaeological investigation of ancient Georgia

SUMMARIES
ახალგაზრდობის გამჭვირვალების განვაცხადები

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აღსავლეთის პირველი გზებით ჩვენ გავითვლით ასახიერად საადრესო პერიოდში საქართველოს არქეოლოგიის სივრცეში სამთავრობო საპროექტო პროექტები გამოხატვით ხდება.
RESULTS OF THE JOINT SHIDA KARTLI GEORGIAN-ITALIAN PROJECT: PERSPECTIVES OF RESEARCH OF THE NATSARGORA SETTLEMENT AND CEMETERY

The Georgian-Italian Shida Kartli Archaeological project is a new activity of the Ca' Foscari University of Venice in collaboration with the Georgian National Museum, devoted to the investigation of the 4th and 3rd millennium B.C. cultures of Georgia and of their connections with the contemporary cultures of the Ancient Near East, in particular with those of Upper Mesopotamia and Eastern Anatolia.

This was a period of deep cultural transformations in the Transcaucasian regions, when the communities of these metal-rich areas were progressively involved into a complex network of relations with the regions of the Near East located to the South, where the first urban civilizations were developing since the first half of the 4th millennium B.C. The exact dynamics of the process of interrelation is still debated and required to be analysed on the basis of numerous sites of this period of South Caucasus and beyond.

The project's activity was accomplished under the leadership of Prof. Elena Rova (Ca' Foscari University), Prof. Marina Puturidze (Tbilisi State University) and Dr. Zurab Makharadze (Georgian National Museum). The first aim of two seasons was the special study of the material from the Early Bronze Age levels and cemetery of the site of Natsargora in the Khashuri district, field survey of some areas of the Shida Kartli region and excavations of two kurgans in Okherakhevi.

Natsargora settlement and cemetery, located near the modern village with the same name, has been excavated in 1984-1992 by the late Alexander Ramishvili, the head of the Khashuri Archaeological Expedition of the Centre for Archaeological Studies, but its Early Bronze Age levels and graves have been the subject only of preliminary reports. The importance of this material lies in the fact that Natsargora is one of the few sites in the Shida Kartli region (together with Tsikhiagora, published by Zurab Makharadze, and Berikdeebi, in course of publication by Mindia Jalabadze), where not only Bedeni ceramics have been discovered in a settlement context, but where a certain degree of continuity is also supposed between the Kura-Araxes and the Bedeni horizons. Therefore, it could shed new light on the poorly known transition between the Kura-Araxes and the Early Kurgan cultures.

The general aim of our project is to focus on the Shida (Inner) Kartli region of Georgia which for several reasons appears to be an especially promising area. First of all, its central position within Georgia makes it an area of contacts between Western and Eastern Georgia and between the Caucasus to the North and the regions located to the South of Georgia. Secondly, the presence of the plain of the Kura (Mtkvari) river allows the presence, in the region, of permanent settlements of relatively large size, which could play the role of "central places" in the settlement pattern. Thirdly, there are a number of already excavated archaeological sites of these periods in the region, which can provide important material for comparative study.
The Kura-Araxes culture shows a remarkable expansion in southern direction, both toward the East, in western Iran, and toward the West, in western Syria and Palestine, as shown by the distribution not only of the distinctive red-black burnished pottery but also of other equally distinctive categories of objects with clear Transcaucasian affinities (fixed and mobile hearths –andirons, metal pins, weapons, crucibles and moulds for casting metal objects, etc.).

From the chronological point of view, in the first stage of the project special attention will be paid to the transition between the Kura-Araxes and the Early Kurgan cultures, which is quite unclear in terms of both its chronology and its meaning in general historical terms. From the point of view of better understanding of this transitional phase the special study and publication of the Natsargora settlement and cemetery seems to be very important.

Translation and digitalization of the excavation documentation (plans, photos, drawings etc.) of campaigns in 1984-1988 has already been completed; the re-study of the artefacts (pottery and small finds) has been finished, and a monograph devoted to the cemetery is in course of preparing. As for the settlement of Natsargora, one can say, that, in spite of a rather poor preservation of the archaeological layers, we are dealing with a sequence of domestic occupation layers with remains of wattle- and daub-architecture, floors with fixed and mobile hearths and other installations, storage structures and pits.