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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF KVEMO KARTLI REGION ROCK-CUT MONUMENTS IN GEORGIA

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### Abstract

The Georgian Republic is particularly rich in rock-cut complexes belonging to different historical periods – from prehistoric times to the late Middle Ages. However, until two decades ago, Georgian and foreign scientists considered a well-known rock-cut cave ensemble created in the second half of the 1st millennium B.C. - *Uplistsikhe* (*Gori district*) as the earliest cut in the rock monument in Georgia. Strongly different results were obtained by the laboratory of artificial cavities at Georgian S. Janashia National Museum that since the 1980s has been regularly carrying out architectural and archaeological research into the ancient rock-cut monuments situated in Georgia. The obtained data show that the tradition of cutting spaces of various purposes in rock was common in Georgia in much earlier epochs. In some regions of Georgia the traces of habitation of fairly numerous groups of humans in natural and slightly reconstructed cave-dwellings are attested at different stages of the Neolithic as well as the Palaeolithic periods. However, like in many neighbouring regions of the Eurasian continent, the foundation of the tradition for artificial cave-cutting must have been laid at the turn of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age.

**Keywords:** Georgia, cave-dwellings, Bronze Age, architecture, archaeology, ceramics.

### Riassunto

*La Repubblica Georgiana è particolarmente ricca di complessi rupestri appartenenti a diversi periodi storici che vanno dalla Preistoria al tardo Medioevo. Sino a due decenni or sono gli scienziati georgiani e stranieri consideravano il ben noto insediamento rupestre di Uplistsikhe (nel distretto di Gori), riconducibile alla seconda metà del primo millennio a.C., come il più antico monumento scavato in roccia della Georgia. I risultati ottenuti dal laboratorio di cavità artificiali presso il Museo Nazionale Georgiano S. Janashia hanno restituito risultati alquanto differenti: dal 1980 il laboratorio svolge regolarmente ricerche architettoniche ed archeologiche negli antichi monumenti rupestri situati in Georgia. I dati ottenuti mostrano che la tradizione di scavare la roccia per ricavarne ambienti destinati a scopi diversi, era comune in Georgia anche in epoche molto precedenti. In alcune regioni della Georgia tracce di insediamento da parte di gruppi antropici abbastanza numerosi nelle case-grotta (naturali o leggermente riadattate) sono attestate già nelle diverse fasi del Neolitico, nonché in alcuni periodi del Paleolitico. Tuttavia, come in molte regioni limitrofe del continente eurasiatico, le prime cavità rupestri scavate dall'uomo furono realizzate a partire dalla fine del Calcolitico e nell'età del bronzo.*

**Parole chiave:** Georgia, abitazioni rupestri, Età del Bronzo, architettura, archeologia, ceramica.

### Introduction, Materials and Methods

A particularly large number of ancient rock-cut monuments were discovered by the 1986-2002 expedition organized by the laboratory of artificial cavities at Georgian S. Janashia National Museum in the territory of *KvemoKartli* (Lower Kartli), in the province of Eastern Georgia (*Tetri Tskaro*, *Bolnisi*, *Dmanisi* and *Tsalka* districts; Fig. 1) (BAKHTADZE, 2002, 2007). Especially noteworthy among them are the multi-storey complexes of artificial caves (Fig. 2). Despite a certain interest of the scientific community towards them (BAGRATONI, 1959; JAVRISHVILI, 1963), until recently these monuments have not been studied from the viewpoint of architecture and archaeology and have not been even described thoroughly. Quite often of their artificial origin also was disputed. As to the period of rock cutting of these monuments, scholars' opinions differed. Taking into consideration the existing dubiousness concerning *Kvemo Kartli* cave complexes and the fact that the majority of the rock-cut monuments in the discussed region are not sufficiently known to specialists, in this paper I give an overview of them.

These monuments are located along river canyons. They comprise dozens of artificial caves distributed in several storeys within basalt and dolerite rocks. Certain regularity during rock cutting of the above caves was observed: the stratum of caves was mainly rock cut in the middle and lower sectors of the slope (Figs. 3, 4 and 5). The overwhelming majority of caves were made of rock without the use of metallic tools. This proves to be one of the most ancient rock processing techniques throughout the world: having been heated with fire, the rock was doused with cold water and water-impregnated wedges were driven into the resulting rifts. The remains of the wedges, stuck in the cracks of rocks, sooty as a result of powerful fire in some cave interiors, confirm such procedure (GOBEJISHVILI, 1952; GAGE & GAGE, 2005). As this technique of rock cutting makes practically impossible to maintain more or less regular forms, the shapes of the caves are only roughly and occasionally geometrical. Dwellings with uneven, oval and approximating to rectangular layout are found in the complexes. Their area ranges from 4-5 to 15-20m<sup>2</sup>. In most cases the height of the caves corresponds to the height of a standing man.





Fig. 1: Georgia, Kvemo Kartli region (drawing N. Bakhtadze).  
 Fig. 1: Georgia, regione di Kvemo Kartli (elaborazione N. Bakhtadze).

The caves are often isolated and cut at different distances from each other (Fig. 6). Irrespective of their forms, open into natural or man-made terraces through passageways (each approximately 50-100 cm in width) that represent the only source of lighting and ventilation. Apart from the dwellings linked with the outer space, groups of two or more caves, interconnected with passageways in the form of doors or tunnels, have been found (Fig. 7).

Crudely-cut household pits and hearths are still preserved in the caves. One cannot find more sophisticated devices in the complexes, a fact which was presumably conditioned by the hardness of the

rocks unfavourable for digging. Other materials, chiefly wood, must have been used for making household appliances as confirmed by the pits found in the walls of the dwellings. Nearly all the facades of the damaged caves were restored by dry masonry or slaked lime laying. The floors in most of the caves were covered with sterile or cultural layers of different thickness. From the very beginning, the caves were intended for repeated use, which was conditioned by their durability - a specific feature of the rock-cut monuments. It seemed extremely difficult to determine the original appearance, initial function and the time of origin of these multi-storey sites. To solve the problem, I have analysed and compared the layout, spatial planning and results of the archaeological excavations of the monuments.

### Preliminary Architectural Analysis of the Cave Complexes

Based on our studies, I have rejected the earlier supposition concerning the initial defensive function of the caves. Shelter-caves and the so-called fortress-caves of medieval Georgia are well known. The main features of such shelters include impregnability, spaciousness and availability of appliances good enough to ensure minimal living conditions for a refugee. As to fortress-caves, besides the above-mentioned conditions, they are characterized by a suitable strategic position and a number of elements needed for combat operations (LOMTATIDZE, 1977).

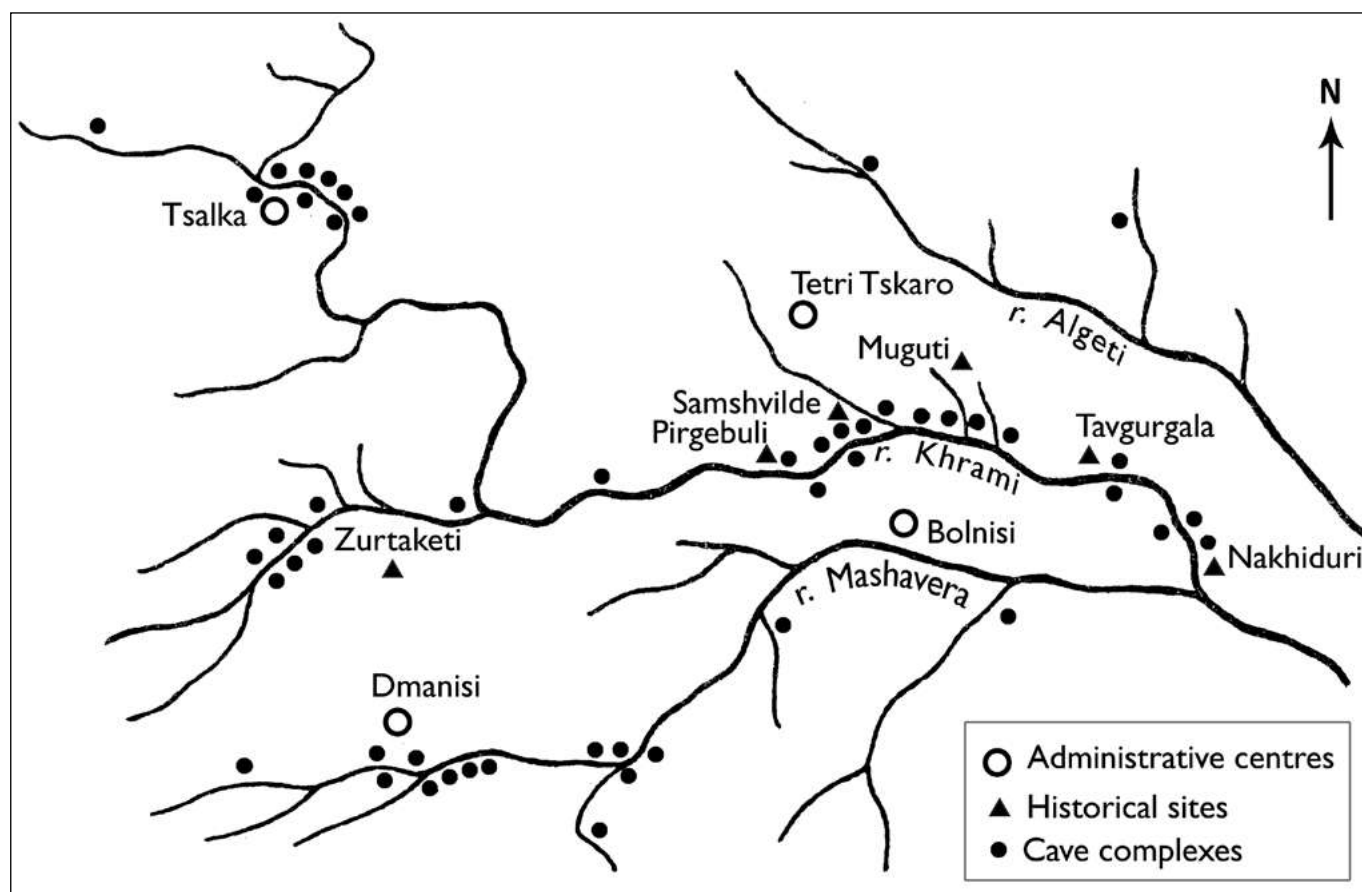


Fig. 2: schematic map. Most important cave complexes of Kvemo Kartli.  
 Fig. 2: mappa schematica. I più importanti complessi ipogei di Kvemo Kartli.



Fig. 3: cave complex of Dageti (photo N. Bakhtadze).  
Fig. 3: complesso ipogeo di Dageti (foto N. Bakhtadze).

The majority of the monuments we studied are characterized by contradictory features. At first sight, they resemble a unity of caves, shelters having a defensive function as some fortified walls and towers are attached to them. However, without these auxiliary fortifications the complexes would not have met the necessary demand of the defence structures –inaccessibility. Most of the caves are situated at the foot of the rocky massif and can be easily accessed. The caves located at the higher storeys can also be easily accessed by means of convenient paths. One of the characteristic features of these cave complexes is the availability of dwelling caves meant for prolonged inhabitancy, which is also incompatible with the defensive function (BAKHTADZE, 1988).

While discussing the function and foundation period of the cave complexes of Kvemo Kartli, I had to think over whether or not they were created in the Middle Ages to serve as monasteries. Rock-cut hermitages were widespread in Georgia, as in many other countries of Christendom in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Monuments of this category contain densely or sparsely cut multi-storey cave cells for monks; besides, churches, chapels and refectories are also included in such rock-cut complexes (e.g. Gareji cave hermitages, Sagarejo District) (CHUBINASHVILI, 1948; BULIA *et al.*, 2008; GAPRINDASHVILI, 1975). Unlike Gareji and other Georgian cave monasteries, none of the cave complexes of Kvemo Kartli proved to have Christian cult elements cut into a rock. Only in three of them (out of a dozen monuments studied b) I was able to find the built-in churches made of stone (Fig. 8). Therefore, Kvemo Kartli complexes were not rock cut as hermitages.

Well before the start of the archaeological works, in spite of the limited number of domestic appliances (e.g. stationary hearths cut out for lighting a fire and chimneys) and architectural details (e.g. quite wide doors, casements) I had presupposed that the main

1) The Georgian Christian Church is apostolic. According to reliable historical sources, a part of the population of Georgia adopted Christianity as a result of St. Andrew the First-called's sermons. In the Georgian kingdom Christianity was declared as the official state religion in 326 (MUSKHELISVILI, 2003). Based on the latest data, Christian monasticism in Georgia was practically established in parallel with the monastic movement of the early Byzantine world.



Fig. 4: cave complex of Muguti-1 (photo N. Bakhtadze).  
Fig. 4: complesso ipogeo di Muguti-1 (foto N. Bakhtadze).

nuclei of the cave complexes could have been secular settlements, i.e. rock-cut villages. Naturally, in this case the presence of both dwelling and ancillary caves should be presupposed. Such differentiation is really observed in the complexes. Separate groups of caves include both - relatively comfortable, dry and well-lit caves of orderly layout, cut at a definite height (Fig. 7); as well as narrow and dark crudely cut caves at the foot of sheer slopes, which we classify as ancillary ones. Some of them could have been used for keeping cattle, or for other purposes.

At the same time, the integrity of dwelling and subsidiary caves belonging to certain families is not observed in the cave complexes: the structure of caves cut side by side is mainly identical and does not allow me to consider them as parts of dwellings (intended for separate families) used for different purposes. Therefore, the complexes under consideration differ considerably from the known rock-cut villages of medieval Georgia. For comparison I could use the planning of X-XIV centuries. rock-cut villages *Pia* and *Chachkari* situated in the *Aspindza* district of South Georgia, which have been well studied architecturally and archaeologically. There, in the houses intended for each family, dwelling spaces are very clearly separated by walls according to their functions: a common room to be used in the daytime, a bedroom, a kitchen and a toilet (GAPRINDASHVILI, 1959; BAKHTADZE, 2007).



Fig. 5: cave complex of Tavmrgvala (photo N. Bakhtadze).  
Fig. 5: complesso ipogeo di Tavmrgvala (foto N. Bakhtadze).



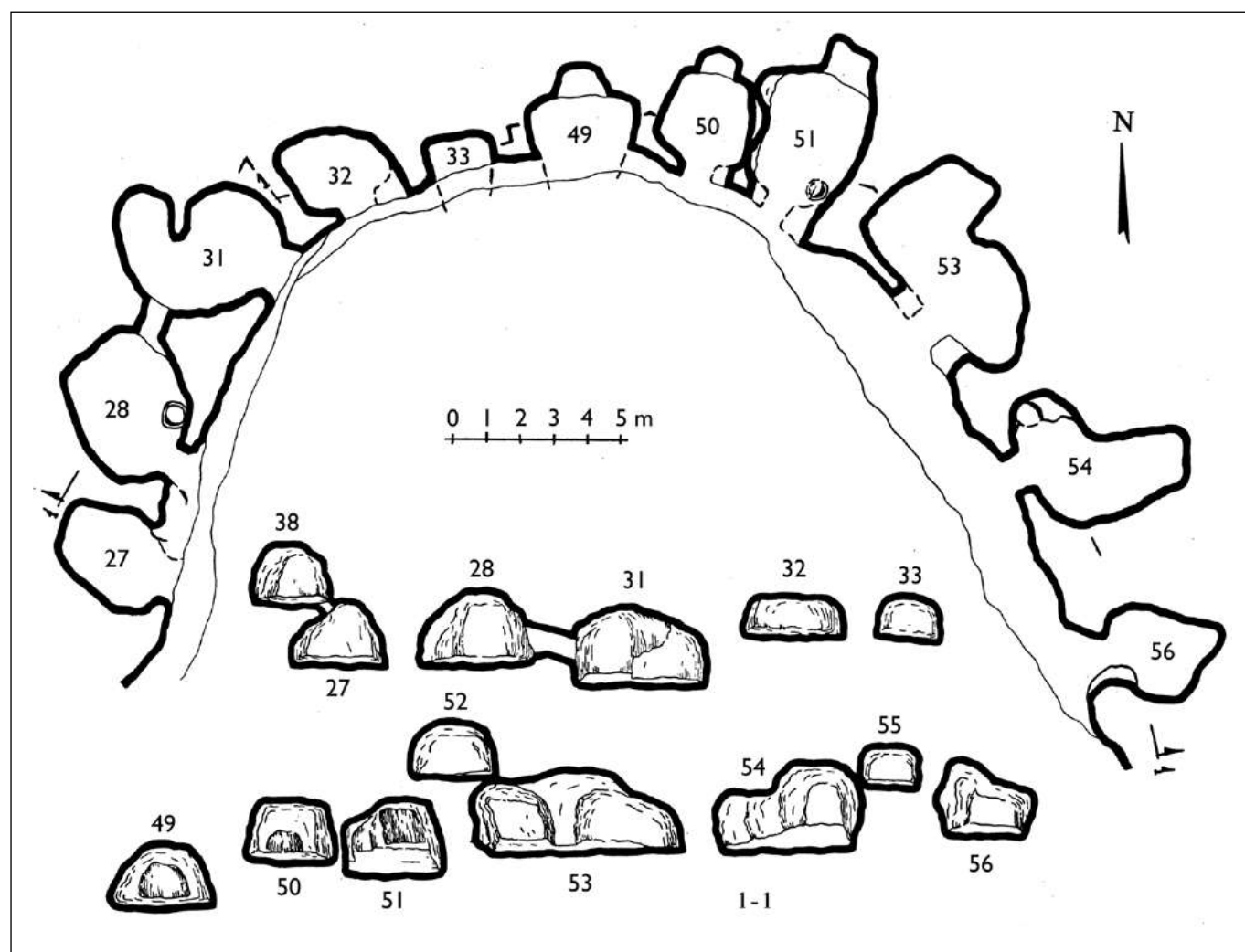


Fig. 6: cave complex of Nakhiduri-1. Central sector. Plan and sections of third tier's caves (drawing N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 6: complesso ipogeo di Nakhiduri-1. Settore centrale. Planimetria e sezioni delle grotte del terzo livello (elaborazione N. Bakhtadze).

The layout of these monuments differs markedly from the principles of rock-cut architecture both of the Antique period (e.g. a rock-cut city of *Uplistsikhe* in East Georgia; AMIRANASHVILI, 1963) and of the Middle Ages. As mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of these caves is quite primitive. The cited periods are not characterized by the rock cutting techniques applied in Kvemo Kartli, particularly shaping passageways in the form of a human silhouette.

A close neighbourhood of the studied cave complexes with archaic-megalithic settlements<sup>2</sup>, which is confirmed in many complexes (e.g. *Nakhiduri*, in the Tetri Tskaro district, *Avranlo* in the Tsalka district, *Zurtaketi* in the Dmanisi district), is also noteworthy. All the above-mentioned megalithic settlements are situated near the bordering rocky massifs full of archaically planned rock-cut complexes of large or

small sizes (MELIKSET-BEGI, 1938). As for some cave groups, they are cut along the terraces of the megalithic walls, i.e. in fact they are parts of those settlements (BAKHTADZE, 2001b).

These circumstances became the basis for our supposition regarding the origin of this type of monuments in Kvemo Kartli. I seek to prove that they were rock cut long before the Middle Ages, more precisely in the Bronze Age (BAKHTADZE, 2005).

### Results of Archeological Research Concerning Cultural Layers of Cave-creation Period

The above presented opinion was confirmed by the data obtained during the explorations carried out between 1986 and 2002 by the Georgian S. Janashia National Museum expedition (responsible: N. Bakhtadze). Archaeological digging was accomplished at the cave complexes of *Muguti*, *Samshvilde*, *Nakhiduri* and *Pirghebuli* in the Tetrtskaro District and of *Zurtaketi* in the Dmanisi District (BAKHTADZE, 2007). Other sites were only surveyed. As expected, the caves revealed mainly cultural layers of different thickness dating back to the Middle Ages, i.e. to the last stage of functioning of the monuments. It became obvious that the traces of the previous periods had been brought down to a minimum due to numerous alterations, and

2) A province of Georgia *Kvemo Kartli* is particularly distinguished by plentiful megalithic ("Cyclopean") settlements and citadels. The walls and dwellings of this monuments are built of large unhewn basalt stones (about 1-3 m in length and width) and are made of dry masonry. Some Georgian scholars date them to XIV-XIII centuries B.C., but lower cultural layers of the same monuments with the material evidence of early Middle Bronze Age (approximately XX-XV centuries) cast doubt on this date.

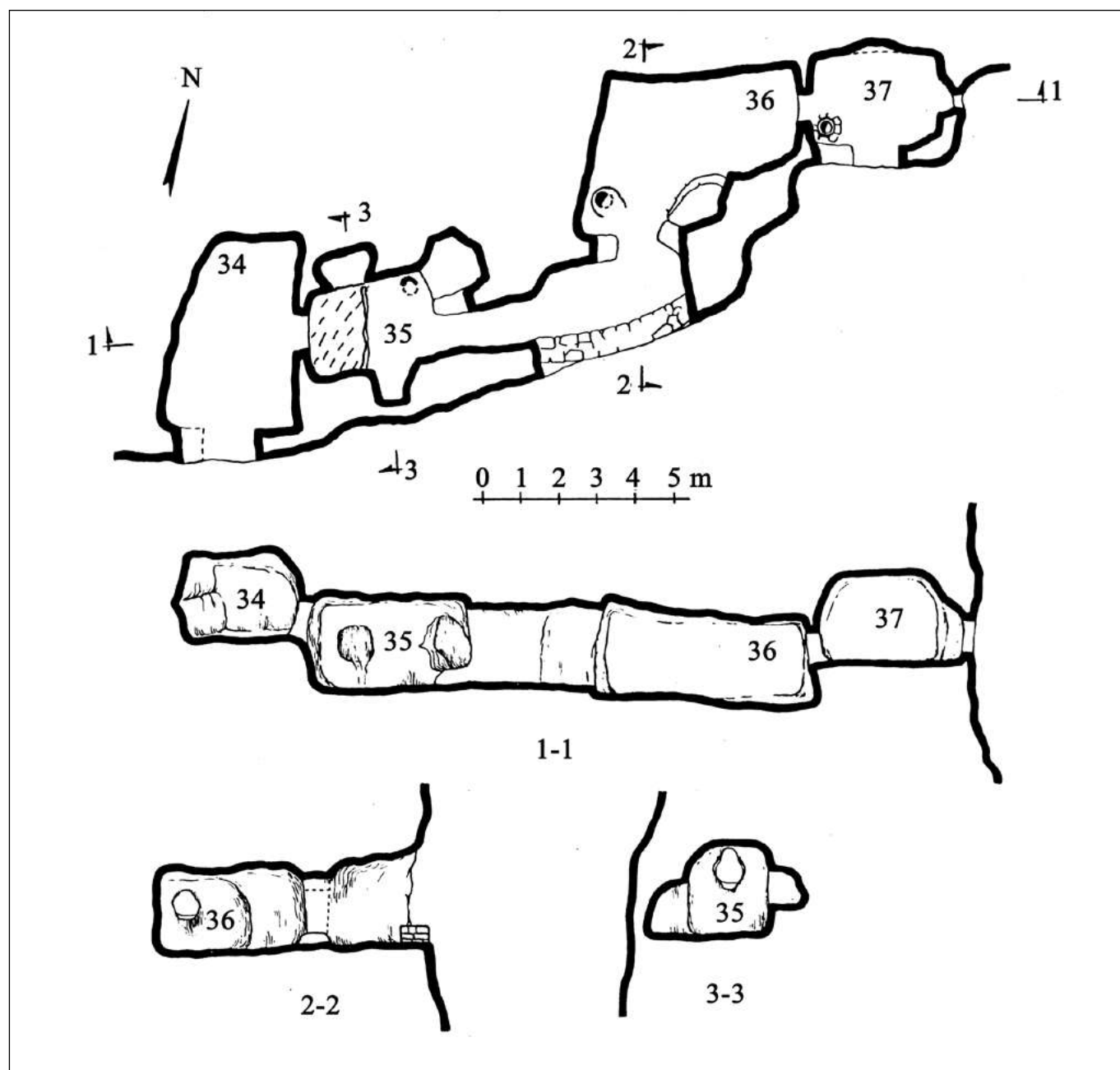


Fig. 7: cave complex of Nakhiduri-2. Central sector. Plan and sections of third tier's caves (drawing N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 7: complesso ipogeo di Nakhiduri-2. Settore centrale. Planimetria e sezioni delle grotte del terzo livello (elaborazione N. Bakhtadze).

multiple reoccupations of the sites. However, remnants of the cultural layers of different periods of the Bronze Age could be found in the recesses of the cave floors and in the abandoned household pits that were laid with adobe, as well as in the cobbled areas. Ancient materials are represented mainly by fragments of black and brown burnished pottery of the Late Bronze Age, including some fragments of pottery characteristic of the Middle and Early Bronze Ages<sup>3</sup>. Evidently, different layers of the Bronze Age had been mixed with

3) On the basis of chronological classification accepted by the majority of Georgian scientists, the differentiation of various chronological stages of the Bronze Age in Georgia is as follows: Early Bronze Age – second half of IV millennium BC – first half of III millennium BC; Middle Bronze Age – second half of III millennium BC – first half of II millennium BC; Late Bronze Age – second half of II millennium BC – first half of I millennium BC (LORDKIPANIDZE, 1989).

later reconstructions due to which it is very difficult to determine their original stratigraphy.

Under these circumstances, of great importance was the fact of finding an undisturbed Bronze Age layer on the floor of one of the cave complexes located in close vicinity of the ruins of the powerful city of Samshvilde (Tetri Tskaro district), belonging to antique and early medieval periods. In the cave, which had fortunately escaped later reoccupations, habitation traces of different periods of the Bronze Age were found, fairly well preserved. Under a sterile 50-70 cm thick ground layer, a flattened clay stratum was revealed entirely covered with differently preserved numerous pottery fragments (up to 200 pieces) of the Late Bronze Age (Fig. 9), as well as with obsidian chips. Many fragments of black and brown pots, bowls and plates of different forms were found at the site. Some of the samples

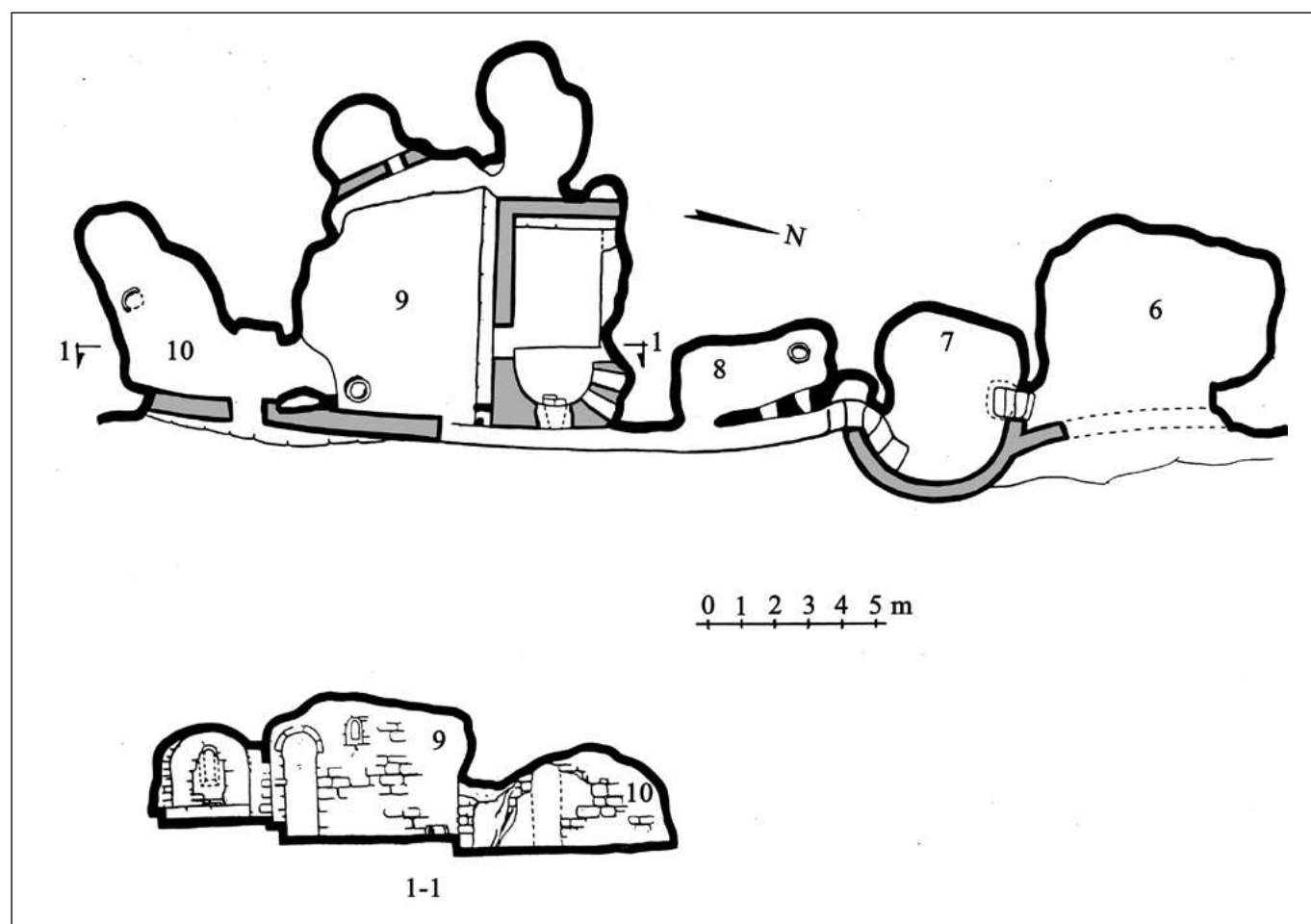


Fig. 8: cave complex of Muguti-1. Northern sector. Plan and section of second tier's caves (drawing N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 8: complesso ipogeo di Muguti-1. Settore Nord. Planimetria e sezioni delle grotte del terzo livello (elaborazione N. Bakhtadze).

have reticulated, wavy and wedge-shaped decorative patterns typical of the given period. There can also be observed pot handles decorated with zoomorphic images, bent corrugated whorls and wave-profiled vessel walls, together with other details reliably dating the material (LORDKIPANIDZE, 1989; MIRON & ORTHMANN, 1995).

More ancient pottery fragments were found in the cavity under the adobe floor of the Late Bronze Age. They include glitter-burnished black clay pottery fragments, some of which bear stamped and wavy decorative patterns (Fig. 10). They date back to the Middle Bronze Age (LORDKIPANIDZE, 1989; GOGADZE, 1972). This period can be considered as the lower chronological margin of the cave. Fragments of a greyish-brown pot with a pair of protuberances like female breasts on the walls were found approximately in the same stratigraphic position. This motif has been known from the Late Chalcolithic (second half of V millennium BC) and Early Bronze Kura-Araxes (second half of IV millennium BC) sites in Georgia and evidently remained applicable within the limits of the Middle Bronze Age (LORDKIPANIDZE, 1989; JAPARIDZE, 1969). It is noteworthy that some of the fragments of the earliest black and greyish-brown pottery of the Early Bronze age have been found in the layers, which was formed in the process of rock cutting the cave. This is indicative of the fact that the age of the pottery and time of rock cutting of the cave is the

same (CHUBINASHVILI, 1965; MIRON & ORTHMANN, 1995). It is noteworthy that in these cave complexes the Chalcolithic, Early and Middle Bronze Age layers were destroyed and mixed in the Late Bronze Age in the same manner, just as the artefacts of the Late Bronze Age were reduced to minimum in medieval times.

The component facilities of other cave complexes in Kvemo Kartli are similar to the mentioned above cave in Samshvilde in terms of rock-cutting technology and architectural peculiarities; in addition, certain amount of the Bronze Age pottery fragments of almost all periods are found in the floor cracks of the caves. Therefore, a well-preserved archaeological and stratigraphic picture revealed in the Samshvilde cave before total reoccupation of the Middle Ages, could have been typical for the other cave complexes of Kvemo Kartli. At the given stage of our research, we consider this as a working hypothesis.

#### Discussion – Comparing ancient cave settlements in Kemo Kartli with similar monuments abroad

It should be noted that according to a great number of scholars, in III-II millennia BC rock-cut settlements and necropolises of approximately the same planning appear to have been intensively used in many regions of South Europe and Asia Minor (MELLAART, 1966; PERROT, 1967; LEIGHTON, 1999). Nowadays, sufficiently investigated from architectural and archaeological

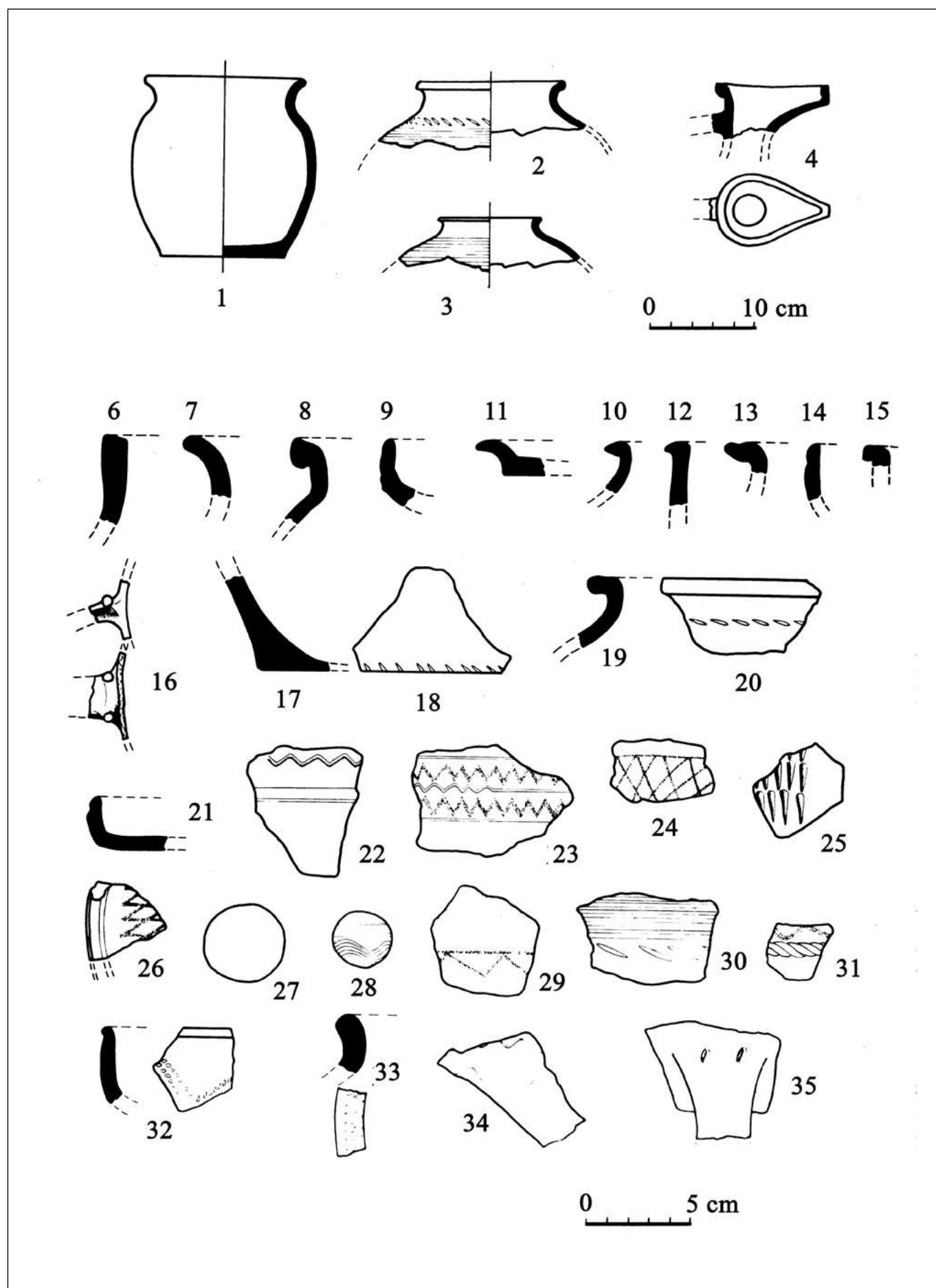


Fig. 9: pottery of Late Bronze Ages from cave complexes of Kvemo Kartli (drawing N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 9: ceramica della tarda Età del Bronzo dal complesso ipogeo di Kvemo Kartli (elaborazione N. Bakhtadze).



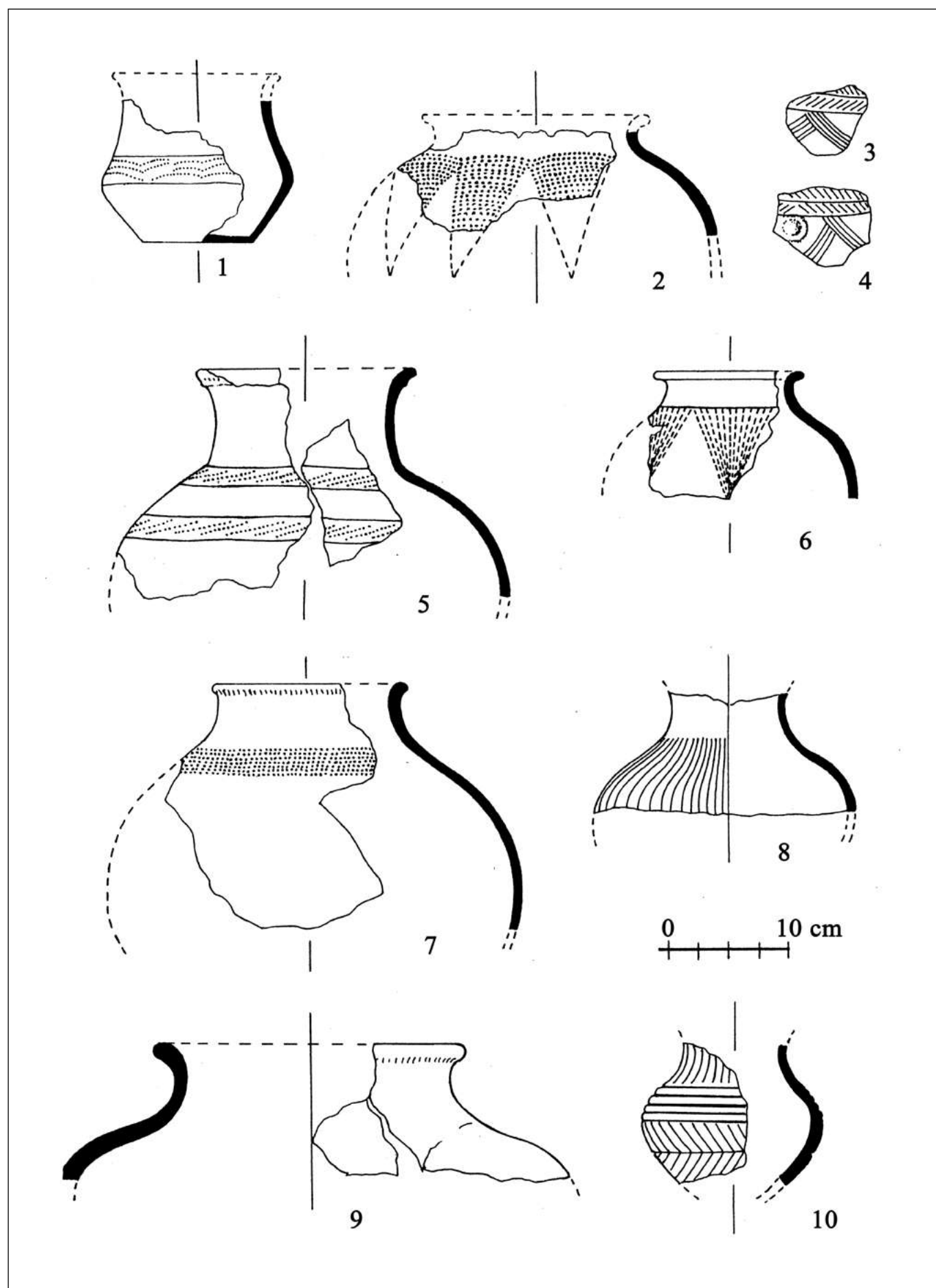


Fig. 10: pottery of Middle Bronze Ages from cave complexes of Kvemo Kartli (drawing N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 10: ceramica della Media Età del Bronzo dal complesso ipogeo di Kvemo Kartli (elaborazione N. Bakhtadze).



Fig. 11: cave complex of Nakhiduri-2. Medieval furnace (photo N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 11: complesso ipogeo di Nakhiduri-2. Fornace medievale (foto N. Bakhtadze).

viewpoint are such outstanding cave monuments as, for instance, grandiose Bronze Age tombs and dwelling complexes located on the Anatolian Peninsula and Mediterranean Sea islands. Moreover, during one or two millennia some of these complexes were almost continuously used for slightly different purposes (GARRARD, 1996; GOPHER & TSUK, 1996). For example, in Sicily during the excavations of some gigantic cave complexes ("Grotta de la Ciuraza", "Grotta Majore", "Grotta Caruggi" and others), the following chronological stratigraphy was observed: 1. Chalcolithic Age; 2. Early Bronze Age; 3. Middle Bronze Age; 4. Antique Age. Besides, in the Middle Ages these complexes were periodically used by desert monks as well (BREA, 1966).

Like in many neighbouring regions of the Eurasian Continent, the foundation of the tradition of artificial cutting of caves in Kvemo Kartli must have been laid at the turn of the Chalcolithic Age and Early Bronze Age (BAKHTADZE, 2001a). Like the cave complexes of the Near East and the Mediterranean basin of the same periods, the mentioned rock-cut sites of Kvemo Kartli could have been only clusters of cave habitations or tombs (ILEN, 1997). Differentiation of the ancient complexes of Kvemo Kartli by these two functional features is also very difficult: in the period under discussion, in Georgia, as well as in practically all regions where Near Eastern and the Mediterranean Sea Basin civilizations were spread, tombs often resembled dwellings. Moreover, sometimes dwelling-like tombs were even included in the structure of settlements. Hence, although we have not yet identified direct facts pointing to the burial of the dead in the cave facilities of the period we have studied, we believe it conceivable that some of the indicated cave complexes were, entirely or partly, arranged for this purpose.

### Medieval archaeological layers in ancient rock-cut settlements of Kvemo Kartli

The archaeological evidence of using the same Kvemo Kartli rock-cut monuments in the Middle Ages is of interest as well. Despite reconstruction,



Fig. 12: glazed jag from cave complex of Nakhiduri-3. XIII-XIV cc. a.D. (photo N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 12: Frammento smaltato dal complesso ipogeo di Nakhiduri-3. XIII-XIV secolo d.C. (foto N. Bakhtadze).

the mentioned rock-cut villages, created on the basis of the Bronze Age cave complexes, have partly preserved the planning features characteristic of the group, tribal lifestyle. That is why they somehow remind us the compact terraced settlements, which still exist in the mountainous regions of Georgia (e.g. *Khevsureti*. *Dusheti* district). Such resemblance is not unexpected as even in XVIII-XIX centuries the tribal order was still present in the mountainous regions of Georgia (CHIKOVANI, 1967).

The characteristic features of rock-cut villages established in the High Middle Ages (X-XIV centuries) were best revealed during the archaeological excavations we carried out in the Zurtaketi and Nakhiduri complexes. There we observed extra stone constructions of the medieval period set up for the purpose of restoring the facades, household appliance traces of the same period like a clay facility for baking bread (Fig.11), hearths, various pottery, metallic, glass and wooden wares, fabric, carpet and rug fragments.

The glazed pottery includes: bowls with loop-like decorative patterns on the white *engobe* (white paint





Fig. 13: fragments of household utensils made of organic materials. Cave complexes of Nakhiduri. XIII-XIV cc. a.D. (photo N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 13: frammenti di utensili domestici in materiale organico. Complesso ipogeo di Nakhiduri. XIII-XIV secolo d.C. (foto N. Bakhtadze).

made of clay), and covered with green or brownish glaze; various bowls with geometrical and floral decorative patterns under a translucent glaze layer; mono-colour jugs chiefly with green and pale blue glaze (Fig. 12); oil lamps and salt cellars. Unglazed ceramics is represented by red washed jugs with a herring-bone decorative pattern; red and brown burnished, flat-bottomed and saucer type bowls of different sizes; jugs with a broad neck and flat handle; low-mouthed round pots; crude kitchen ceramics – “*kveuri*” (large pottery vessel placed in earth), basins, etc. Previous excavations in other regions of Georgia have reliably dated the above pottery back to the XII-XIV centuries (JAPARIDZE, 1956; MITSISHVILI, 1969; CHILASHVILI, 1991; BAKHTADZE, 2013).

Twenty-eight Georgian copper and silver coins have also been found during the excavations of these rock-cut villages. The most ancient among them is King Giorgi III's (1156-1184) coin, followed by those dating back to the period of the rule of Queen Tamar (1184-1213), King Lasha-Giorgi (1213-1222) and Queen Rusudan (1222-1245). The most recent one was a coin minted in Tbilisi in the XIV century (the so-called “*kanuri*”; KAPANADZE, 1969). The revealed material evidence, along with the coins, allowed us to determine the preliminary dates of the revival and termination of life in the discussed complexes.

It turned out that in these complexes life renewed around the XI-XIII centuries, which, in our opinion, must have been connected with the demographic explosion that stimulated the rise of the national economy<sup>4</sup>. These monuments stopped functioning at the end of the XIV century and the beginning of the XV century. Life in the complexes seems to have terminated due to the devastating Mongol invasions, most likely that of Tamerlane. According to the preliminary data, the similar chronological cycle is typical of all the before mentioned rock-cut villages in Kvemo Kartli.

Apart from the material evidence, archaeological excavations allowed us to reconsider some facts, namely, chronology of producing and utilization of the Georgian medieval artefacts, inadequately studied earlier. Of special interest in this respect is a group of artefacts (e.g. farming and household utensils, chiefly fragments of organic materials, fabrics, fragments of

4) In general, it is considered that XI-XIII centuries is the period of unification as well as political and economic development of the Georgian kingdom. In this epoch Georgia got rid of the influence of the neighboring, powerful Muslim states (Persia, Seljuk states) and even returned the territories conquered by them. The process of economic and cultural prosperity reached its culmination in the second half of the XII and the first quarter of the XIV century.





Fig. 14: fragment of rug from cave complex of Nakhiduri-3. XIII-XIV cc. a.D. (photo N. Bakhtadze).

Fig. 14: frammento di tappeto dal complesso ipogeo di Nakhiduri-3. XIII-XIV secolo d.C. (foto N. Bakhtadze).

clothes, carpets, rugs, etc.; EILAND, 1998), which do not have analogies in Georgian archaeology (Figs. 13, 14). The fact that the artefacts made of organic material also belong to XII-XIV centuries is confirmed by the circumstance that they were discovered in the same layer as the well-studied type of ceramics mentioned above.<sup>5</sup>

Archaeological studies have thrown light on some aspects of the economic and social everyday life and technological processes taking place in these villages in the Middle Ages. Rock-cut dwellings, often arranged vertically, represent an imitation of two-storey houses. Differentiation into household economy facilities and living quarters is noticeable in these houses - the lower, dark and comparatively damp caves were often used as cowsheds, while the upper, light facilities, equipped with elements of fortification, were living quarters.

The analysis of the material shows that the residents (mainly peasants) of rock-cut villages were involved in both agriculture (farming, vine-growing) and life

stock farming. During the excavations pruning knives, hoes, tools for reaping grain (e.g. fragments of a sickle, special thimbles), a large number of cow and sheep bones, etc. were discovered. Signs for various fields of domestic crafts, such as manufacturing pottery, carving wooden household objects, weaving various fabrics are evident (semi-manufactured ceramics, clay and wooden objects, spindles, primitive weaving loom parts, etc.). The definite share of agricultural and domestic craft production was manufactured for the purpose of commodity production and trade, as indicated by the considerable quantity of coins found in the dwellings. Only the following can be said about the sociological structure of the families: as a hearth or oven-hearth is attested in practically every modest-sized dwelling-cave, life of small-sized families in them should be assumed.

According to the material in evidence, proprietary differentiation among the residents of rock-cut villages was weak: manufactures of almost the same style and quality were found in nearly all rock-cut houses. Nevertheless, a privileged stratum could still be identified in the village - presumably petty *aznauris* (*gentry*), who lived in cave habitations specially restored and broadened with stone structures. For example, in the villages of Nakhiduri and Zurtaketi cave complexes, among other structures one can easily

5) Material evidence of this kind is extremely seldom in open archaeological sites, while here it has survived abundantly in the caves protected from rainfall. Besides, the archaeological evidence (ceramic material well known to scientists) found in the highest layers confirms that life in most of the rock-cut villages came to an end suddenly and finally in circa at the turn of the XIV-XV centuries.

differentiate fortified towers.

In the medieval period some of the ancient cave complexes in Kvemo Kartli were reused as hermitages EILAND & BAKHTADZE, 2000; BAKHTADZE, 2007). For these purposes heavily damaged caves were restored, inside which churches, cells and fortification constructions were built or attached to (Fig. 8). Monasteries of that type have been found in the Muguti (TetriTskaro district) cave complex and in the environs of the site of ancient Dmanisi, as well as in *Tezis Khrami* gorge (Tsalka District). The Muguti caves were studied archaeologically. Apart from numerous household appliances of the above-described type and various articles of domestic utility, excavations at the Muguti monastery have revealed manuscript fragments of secular and ecclesiastical character – e. g. fragments of the XII Gospel written on parchment with the old Georgian alphabet *Nuskhuri*.

On the basis of the revealed materials, the period of intensive functioning of the monastery has been dated to the XI-XIV centuries. Judging from the evidence of the excavated material, the functioning of other hermitages of this type lies within the same chronological limits.

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