

Vani: An Ancient City of Colchis

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FOR SOME 140 YEARS¹ reports have appeared of ancient objects found at Vani, a small town in western Georgia on the left bank of the Sulori River at its confluence with the Rioni River, the ancient Phasis (Fig. 1).² Beginning in the 1870s

¹ The following abbreviations will be used: *KSIA*=*Kratkie Soobshcheniia Instituta Arkheologii SSSR* [Short Communications of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR] (Moscow); *Khoshtaria*, *Collected Papers*=N. V. Khoshtaria, *Kavkasiur-akbloaghmosavluri krebuli* [Caucasian-Near-Eastern Collected Papers] I-VI (Tbilisi 1962-80) (in Georgian and Russian); Lordkipanidze, *AG*=O. Lordkipanidze, *Archäologie in Georgien*, tr. D. Mcheidse (Weinheim 1991); Lordkipanidze, *DK*=*Drevnyaya Kolkhida* [Ancient Colchis] (Tbilisi 1979); Lordkipanidze, *GKK*=*Gorod-khram Kolkhidi* [The City-Temple of Colchis] (Moscow 1984); Lordkipanidze, *Iberia*=*Antikuri samqaro da qartlis samepo* [The Ancient World and Iberia] (Tbilisi 1968) (with Russian summary); Lordkipanidze/Lévêque= O. Lordkipanidze and P. Lévêque, ed., *Le Pont-Euxin vu par les Grecs. Sources écrites et archéologie. Symposium de Vani (Colchide), septembre-octobre 1987* (=Centre de Recherches d'Histoire Ancienne 100, *Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon* [Paris 1990]); *Matilss*=*Materiali i issledovaniya po arkheologii SSSR* [Materials and Investigations towards the Archaeology of the USSR]; *PAI*=*Polevie arkheologicheskie issledovaniya* [Archaeological Field Investigations] (Tbilisi); *Vani*=O. Lordkipanidze, ed., *Vani. Arqeologiuri gatkhrebi* [Vani. Archaeological Excavations] I- (Tbilisi 1972-) (in Georgian with Russian and English summaries). All dates unless otherwise noted are B.C.

² M. Brosset, *Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l'Arménie. Onzième rapport* (St Petersburg 1850) 4ff. "Vani," a relatively new name for the site, does not appear in ancient or medieval sources. In the geographical description of Georgia compiled by the eighteenth-century Georgian geographer and historian Batonishvili Vakhushti (Bagrationi), the name "Sachino" designates the entire region of which Vani formed part in the late Middle Ages: Batonishvili Vakhushti, *Aghtsera sameposa Sakartvelosa* [History of Georgia] (=Kartlis Tskhovreba IV [Tbilisi 1951]) 773. The name "Vani" is first attested in the 1770s for a village situated about 7-8 km from the ancient site. In the fifteenth century the village boasted a church of the "Vani Archangel" with frescoes: E. Taqaishvili, *Tserkov v Vane v Imerii i eya drevnosti* [The Church at Vani in Imereti and its Antiquities] (=Izvestiya Kavkazskogo istoriko-arkheologicheskogo instituta v Tiflise II [Tiflis 1917-25]). The word "Vani," however, occurs in Old Georgian sources as far back as the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., denoting "house" or "haven." In

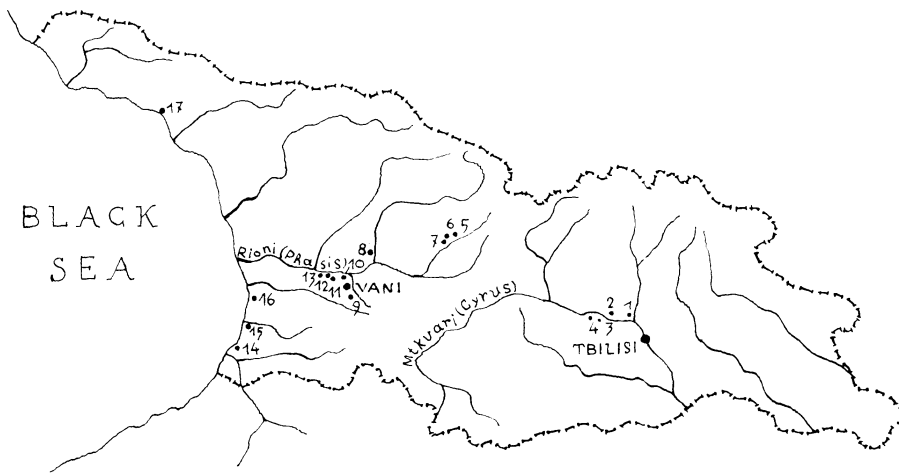


Figure 1. Ancient Georgia

- 1 Mtskheta, 2 Nastakisi, 3 Samadlo, 4 Tsikhiagora, 5 Sairkhe, 6 Itkhvisi, 7 Sachkhere, 8 Kutaisi, 9 Sulori, 10 Shumata, 11 Mtisdziri, 12 Dablagomi, 13 Dapnari, 14 Batumi, 15 Kobuleti-Pichvnari, 16 Poti (Phasis), 17 Sukhumi (Dioscurias)

Georgian newspapers frequently noted these discoveries, attracting the attention of native and visiting students of local lore (e.g. G. Tsereteli, A. Stoyanov, and others).³ At the request of the Moscow Archaeological Society, E. Taqaishvili began excavations in 1896 and produced the first scholarly publications on the antiquities of Vani and its environs, correctly dating the site to the Classical or “Graeco-Roman” period and collecting casual finds now preserved in the State Museum of Georgia (Tbilisi).⁴ Taqaishvili’s excavations were discontinued

southwestern and western Georgia several geographical points—mainly monastic sites—bear the name “Vani”: I. A. Javakhishvili, *Masalebi kartveli khalkhis materialuri kulturis istoriidan* [*Materials toward the History of the Material Culture of the Georgian People*] (Tbilisi 1946) 7ff; Vakhushti 665, 716, 719.

³ In general see Lordkipanidze, *GKK*.

⁴ E. Taqaishvili, *Arqeologiuri mogzaurobani da shenishvnani* [*Archaeological Journeys and Notes*] I (Tiflis 1907), and (*supra* n.2) III 86; see also *Otchoti Arkheologicheskoi Komissii za 1896 god* [*Reports of the Archaeological Commission for 1896*] 109f; P. S. Uvarova, *Kolleksii Kavkazskogo museya* [*Collections of the Caucasian Museum*] (= *Museum Caucasicum* 5 [Tiflis 1902]) 2500–13.

at the beginning of the present century; nevertheless, gold objects from Vani occasionally found their way into the State Museum of Georgia.⁵ In 1936 N. A. Berdzenishvili headed an expedition to Vani. His subsequent exploratory work, yielding fragments of tiles, amphorae, black- and red-glazed pottery, made obvious the need of large-scale excavations.⁶ But systematic work was not begun until 1947 by the Archaeological Expedition of the Institute of History of the Georgian Academy of Sciences under the late N. V. Khoshtaria. In 1947–1963, work was conducted (with some intervals) chiefly on the top of the hill (*Fig. 2.34–35*), with excavations on the lower terraces as well.⁷

Excavations, discontinued in 1963 and resumed in 1966, have continued to the present by the Archaeological Expedition of the Centre for Archaeological Studies of the Georgian Academy of Sciences under the direction of the author. During this period cultural layers, structures, and rich burials were unearthed on all three terraces (*Fig. 2.1–33, 36*). Simultaneously, systematic exploration of the territory surrounding the ancient city has been underway with the intent of (a) compiling an archaeological atlas of the historico-geographical region, (b) studying the main stages of its historico-cultural development, and (c) tracing the zone of influence of the ancient city (the so-called urbanized zone) in order to conceptualize it as a single structural whole.⁸

⁵ B. A. Kufin, *Materiali k arkheologii Kolkhidi* [*Materials toward the Archaeology of Colchis*] II (Tbilisi 1950) 7ff, pl. 1.

⁶ N. V. Khoshtaria, "Vanis arqeologiuri shestsavlis istoria [The History of the Archaeological Study of Vani]," in *Vani* I (1972) 87; on the history of the archaeological study of Vani see also Lordkipanidze, *GKK*.

⁷ See N. V. Khoshtaria, "Arqeologiuri gathkhrebi sopel Vanshi 1947 tsels [Archaeological Excavations in Vani in 1947]," in *Mimomkheilveli I* (*Publications of the Institute of History*, ANGSSR: Tbilisi 1947) 296–308, "Arkheologicheskie issledovaniya v Vani i Vanskom raione v 1952 g. [Archaeological Studies of Vani and Vani District in 1952]," in *Masalebi Sakartvelosaa Kavkasiis arqeologiisatvis* [*Materials toward the History of Georgia and Caucasus*] II (Tbilisi 1959) 149–62, "Arkheologicheskie raskopki v Vani [Archaeological Excavations in Vani]," in *Collected Papers* II 64–80.

⁸ The results of the excavations are regularly published in *Vani*, the collected papers of the Vani Archaeological Expedition; see also the annual *PAI*. Archaeological materials from the excavations are preserved at the State Museum of Georgia in Tbilisi and at the Vani State Archaeological Museum established in 1985.

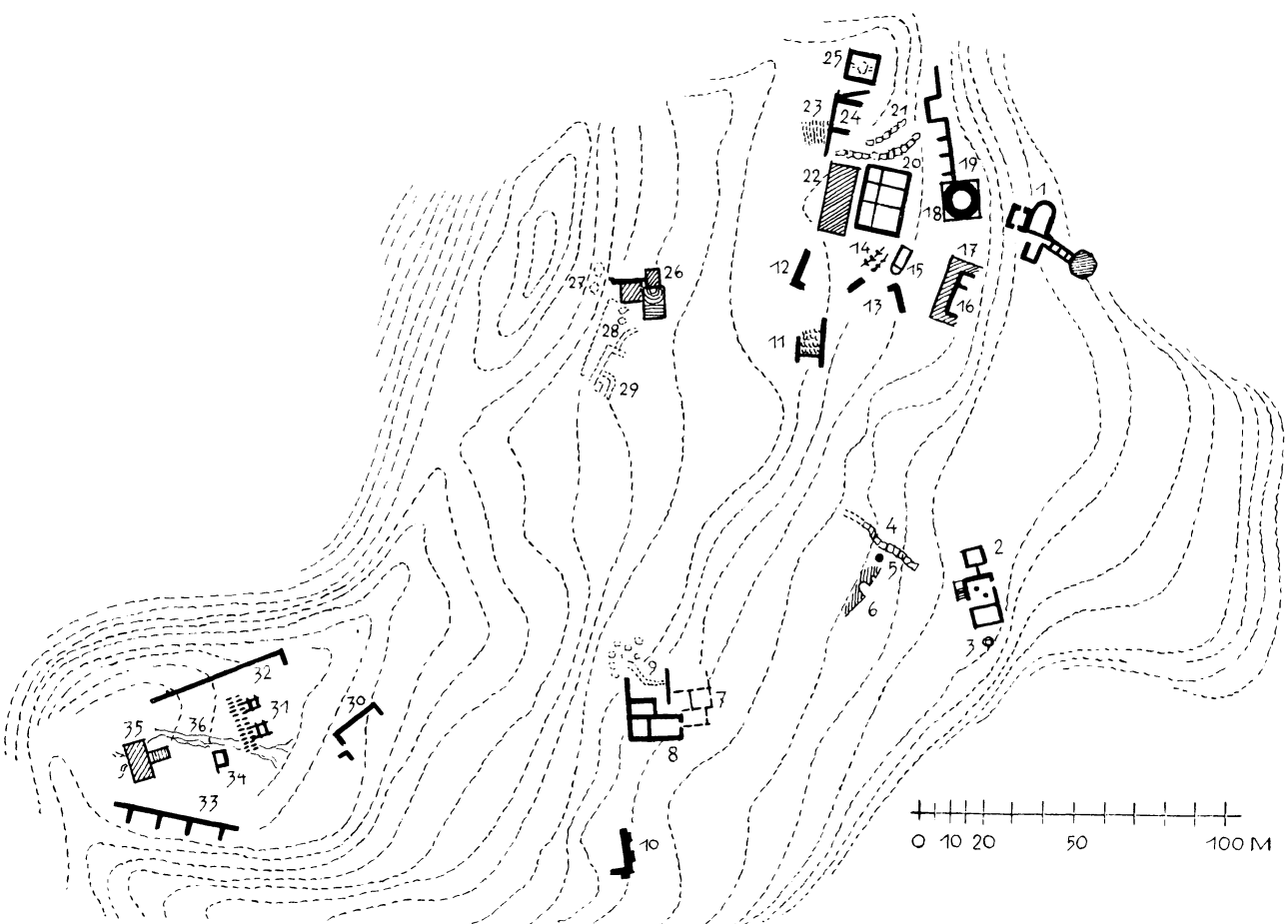


Figure 2. Plan of Vani

The site of Vani is situated in the western outskirts of the modern town, on a low triangular hill of approximately 8.5 ha., flanked on two sides with deep ravines that served as natural defenses in antiquity. The hill dominated the vast, fruitful valley. From here important ancient trade routes passing close to Vani could be controlled, including the route from India to the Caspian Sea and through Transcaucasia (on or along the Kura [the ancient Cyrus] River, then over the Surami Pass, and on to the Phasis River) to reach the Black Sea at the city of Phasis.⁹ Other significant routes, running from southern Georgia (Meskheta) through the passes of the Lesser Caucasus and from southwestern Georgia (modern Guria), also passed through Vani.¹⁰ The advantageous strategic situation of Vani, conveniently sheltered on the hill, doubtless contributed to its ascendancy over numerous other settlements of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages traceable in the environs of Vani.

Archaeological studies have revealed uninterrupted occupation at Vani during almost the entire first millennium. To date, four principal phases of development are identifiable: (1) ca 800–ca 600, (2) ca 600–ca 350, (3) ca 350–ca 250, and (4) ca 250–ca 47. Individual finds indicate continued but much less intense occupation of the hill in Roman and mediaeval times.

Phase I (ca 800–ca 600)

Remains of this phase have so far appeared in relatively small quantity—in cultural layers badly damaged or partly destroyed by constructions of subsequent periods: fragments of baked daub with wicker imprints (*i.e.*, remains of plastered wooden

⁹ Strab. 2.1.15, 11.7.3; Plin. *HN* 6.52. Archaeological finds demonstrate that individual sections of this route, at first of local significance in the pre-Hellenistic period, served the spread of Greek imports from the coastal areas of western Georgia to the hinterland and eastern Georgia. In Hellenistic times, when trade attained 'world' scale, a single major trading route developed from Phasis to India: see O. Lordkipanidze, "Antikur khanashi indoetidani shavi zghvisaken mimavali satransito-savachro gzis shesakheb [On the Transit and Trading Route from India to the Black Sea]," *Sakartvelos metsniereba akademiis moambe* [Bulletin, Georgian Academy of Sciences] 19.3 (1957) 377–84, and *DK* 154ff, 191ff.

¹⁰ N. A. Berdzenishvili, *Sakartvelos istoriis sakitkhebi* [Problems of the History of Georgia] VIII (Tbilisi 1977) 472ff; T. N. Beradze, "Vanis raionis istoriuli geografiidan [From the Historical Geography of Vani District]," *Vani* III (1977) 37ff.

structures) and pottery. Hence the sacrificial ground in the northeastern part of the central terrace—an area of *ca* 90 m²—dating from the eighth to the seventh centuries, has great importance (*Fig. 2.23*). Unearthed here were several hundred broken clay vessels, fragments of miniature earthenware altars and figurines of various animals, strong traces of fire (ash), and large numbers of animal bones (cattle and pigs) attesting cultic rituals.

Almost all pottery from both the sacrificial ground and contemporary levels of the city indicate manufacture with a potter's wheel. Most characteristic are large and small channelled vessels (jugs, *etc.*), cups with a narrow conic bottom, basins and various pots, oil presses, *etc.* (PLATE 1a, b). The upper part of the handles usually have characteristic horn-like ("zoomorphic") projections, and the overwhelming majority of the vessels show a polished surface decorated with various geometric ornaments (concentric circles, relief or grooved spirals or wavy lines, conic knobs surrounded by radially arranged notches, hatched chevrons, engraved pine patterns, *etc.*).¹¹ Analogous pottery is typical of Colchian sites *ca* 800–*ca* 650.¹²

Although numerous terracotta figurines of various animals occur (*e.g.* deer, rams), particularly interesting are four-footed

¹¹ See V. A. Tolordava, "Un complexe cultuel des VIII^{ème}–VII^{ème} siècles à Vani," in Lordkipanidze/Lévêque 243–47.

¹² The introduction of the potter's wheel—generally considered the most vivid indication of the emergence of ceramic manufacture as a separate and independent handicraft—appeared in Colchis long before the commencement of the Early Iron Age in the eighth and seventh centuries: wheel-manufactured pottery occurs from the end of the second millennium, and is widely found in settlements and burials of the first half of the first millennium. See Kuftin (*supra* n.5) 121, 143, 256, 276; A. I. Kakhidze, *Saqartvelos zghvispiretis antikuri khanis qalaqebi* [*The Cities of the Black Sea Littoral of Georgia in Classical Times (Kobuleti-Pichvnari)*] (Tbilisi 1971) 24 (with Russian summary); M. M. Trapsh, *Trudi* [*Works*] II (Sukhumi 1969) 51ff; T. K. Mikeladze, *Arqeologiuri kvleva-dzieba rionis kvemo tselze* [*Archaeological Explorations in the Lower Reaches of the Rioni*] (Tbilisi 1978: hereafter 'Mikeladze, Rioni') 24ff (with Russian summary), and *Kolkhetis adrerkinis khanis samarovnebi* [*Colchian Burial Grounds of the Iron Age*] (Tbilisi 1985) 20ff (with Russian summary); T. K. Mikeladze and D. A. Khakhutaishvili, *Drevnekolkhidskoe poselenie Namcheduri* [*The Namcheduri Settlement*] (Tbilisi 1985) 13–20; E. M. Gogadze, *Kolkhetis brinjaosa da adreuli rkinis khanis namosakhlarta kultura* [*The Culture of the Settlements of Colchis of the Period of the Bronze and Iron Ages*] (Tbilisi 1982) 51ff (with Russian summary).

figures with multiple heads on opposite ends (PLATE 2a, b). The protomes of two- and three-headed fantastic creatures with characteristic post-like legs apparently belong to figures of this type—unusual among the numerous local zoomorphic representations¹³ but widespread as bronze pendants in so-called Luristan bronze.¹⁴ Yet their date and association with Luristan bronze is questionable, since most derive from private purchases on the market.¹⁵

Such figures, also common in the Greek world and generally assigned to the geometric period,¹⁶ have been found in eighth- and seventh-century contexts at Olympia, Delphi, Athens,

¹³ Hitherto only one bronze pendant with horse heads on a single four-footed body was known, found in one of the burials of Tli sepulchre and dated by the excavator to the tenth century: B. C. Tekhov, *Tliškii mogilnik* [*The Tli Sepulchre*] I (Tbilisi 1980) pl. 105.6; it is difficult, however, to concur with such an early date, as the presence of bronze situlae typical of the seventh and sixth centuries would point rather to a later period.

¹⁴ Cf. P. Calmeyer, *Altiranischen Bronzen der Sammlung Brockelschen* (Berlin 1969) 14 no. 19, 12 no. 102, and "Vor- und frühgeschichtliche Zeit," in *Das Tier in der Kunst Irans* (Ausstellung des Linden Museums: Stuttgart 1972) no. 24; P. R. S. Moorey, *Catalogue of Ancient Persian Bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford 1971) 233 no. 428; P. Amiet, *Les antiquités du Luristan* (Paris 1976) 67; O. W. Muscarella, *Bronze and Iron: Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1989) 270f.

¹⁵ Thus one documented discovery from a complex of the Hellenistic period may be a chance find: cf. R. Girschman, *Terrasses sacrées de Bard-e-Nechanden et Masjid Solaiman* (= *MémDélégArchIran* 45 [Paris 1976]) 47 pl. CI.8=pl. 27 G 1415.87; Muscarella (*supra* n.14) 270f.

¹⁶ A. Roes, *Greek Geometric Art: Its Symbolism and its Origin* (Oxford 1933) 107–27, and "Les ex-voto de bronze de l'époque géométrique," *RA* 52 (1970) 195–208; H. W. Hermann, "Frühgriechischer Pferdschmuck vom Luristantypus," *JdI* 83 (1968) 33–37, Abb. 24–31; cf. a Protoattic oinochoe from the Athenian Agora, generally dated to the first quarter of the seventh century: E. Brann, "Late Geometric and Protoattic Pottery," in *Agora VIII* (Princeton 1962) 79, no. 426, fig. 4, pl. 26.

Crete, Rhodes, Samos, and elsewhere.¹⁷ In Italy these figures frequently appear in seventh- and sixth-century contexts.¹⁸

Although at present a firm decision on which culture influenced the Vani figures (four-footed with two heads on opposite ends) is difficult,¹⁹ the earlier emergence and wide

¹⁷ Olympia: A. Furtwängler, "Die Bronzen und die übrigen kleineren Funde von Olympia," in *Olympia. Die Ergebnisse der von dem Deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabung* IV (Berlin 1890) 66 no. 477, Taf. xxv; Delphi: P. Perdrizet, "Monuments, figures, petits bronzes, terres-cuites, antiquités diverses," *FdD* V.1 (Paris 1908); Athens: F. Winter, *Die Typen der figurlichen Terrakotten* I (=R. Kekule von Stradonitz, *Die antike Terrakotten* III.1 [Berlin 1903]) 3 no. 7: a terracotta figure from Athens with protomes on both sides and human representations from Eleusis; Crete: I. K. Brock, *Fortetsa: Early Greek Tombs near Knossos* (Cambridge 1957) 133 no. 1556, pl. 111; Rhodes: H. W. Walters, *Catalogue of the Bronzes, Greek, Roman and Etruscan of the British Museum* (London 1899) nos. 132–75; C. Blinkenberger, *Lindos: Fouilles de l'Acropole* (Berlin 1902–14) I 345, no. 1571, pl. 63; Samos: U. L. Gehrig, *Die geometrischen Bronzen aus dem Heraion von Samos* (Hamburg 1964) 61 no. 10; elsewhere: C. Rolley, "Autres figurines de terre cuite," in *Collection Hélène Stathatos III: Objets antiques et byzantins* (Strasbourg 1963: hereafter 'Collection Stathatos') 115, no. 65, pl. xix.

¹⁸ Hermann (*supra* n.16) 129; C. Zervos, *La civilisation de la Sardaigne* (Paris 1954) 29–34; P. Orlandini, "Piccoli bronzi raffiguranti animali, rinvenuti a Gela e Butera," *ArchCl* 8 (1956) 1–10; G. Lloyd-Morgan, "Some Bronze Janiform Animal Figures," in *Italian Iron Age Artifacts in the British Museum* (London 1986) 47–50. Most noteworthy are coupled bull-protomes on opposite sides of a single four-footed body: cf. the figurines from Vani. For analogous figurines see A. de Ritter, *Les bronzes antiques du Louvre* I (Paris 1913) no. 204; Walters (*supra* n.17) 58 no. 396; cf. E. C. F. Babelon and J. A. Blanchet, *Catalogue des bronzes antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris 1895) 484 no. 1183.

¹⁹ M. Rostovtzeff, "A propos de quelques bronzes d'Anatolie, de Syrie et d'Arménie," *Syria* 12 (1931) 1–57, first supposed the eastern origin of such figurines, which M. Pallotino, "Gli scavi di Karmir-Blur in Armenia e il problema della connessione tra l'Urartu, la Grecia e l'Etruria," *ArchCl* 7 (1955) 120, takes for Urartian: "Si consideri ad esempio il motivo dell'animale (ariete, toro) con doppia protome estroversa, così frequente nella bronzistica etrusca, specie vetuloniese, del VII secolo e di origine sicuramente asiatica, probabilmente urartea." But the casual market purchase of this example renders the analogy unreliable. Cf. H. T. Bossert, *Altanatolien* (Berlin 1942) 96. H. Hermann developed the idea of the Luristan origin of the four-footed figures with protomas on opposite sides of a single body, as well as the supposition of their influence on the Greek representations (cf. Hermann [*supra* n.16] 33f). As already mentioned, the absence of these figures from excavated material casts doubt on their origin, although the pendants continued to be called "Luristan" without being included in lists of 'typical' Luristan artifacts: cf. e.g. L. Vanden Berghe, *Luristan* (Brussels 1983) 119 Abb. 63 (fourteen types of Luristan bronzes). Muscarella (*supra* n.14: 221ff) lists specimens of this type

distribution of such representations in the Greek world suggest a link with Hellenic culture.²⁰ Indeed the manufacture of one-piece, bow-shaped fibulae—a variety of the sub-Mycenaean fibulae and frequently found in eighth- and seventh-century Colchis—points to Greek influence.²¹ Hence interest arises in kantharos-like vessels with arched handles from the Vani sacrificial ground that are atypical of contemporary Colchian pottery.

Perhaps these new elements in Colchian culture *ca* 800–*ca* 650 resulted from Greek contacts (still intermittent) in the pre-colonial era, which were reflected in the great popularity of stories of the Argonauts in the eighth and seventh centuries and in the first geographical and ethno-political reports of Colchis (e.g. geographical references in the Homeric Catalogue of the Trojans, mention of Colchis in Eumelos and of the Phasis River in Hesiod).²² Regular Greek contacts began only *ca* 550 after the establishment of Greek settlements on the eastern shore of the Black Sea.

Furthermore, the sacrificial ground at Vani may have political implications, with the rise of a major cult center, at least in the eighth and seventh centuries, reflecting the dominant position of Vani over surrounding settlements. The spread of Colchian tribes over the Rioni (Phasis) lowland and the emergence of a strikingly original Late Bronze culture (“Colchian” in specialist literature) dates from at least the middle of the second millenium.²³ The entire Colchian lowland was economically

not under “Luristan bronzes” but in the chapter “Elamic, Iranian, Parthian and Sassanian Artifacts.”

²⁰ O. W. Muscarella, “The Archaeological Evidence for Relations between Greece and Iran in the First Millennium B.C.,” *JNESocColumbiaU* 9 (1977) 43f, and (*supra* n.14) 221ff.

²¹ Ju. N. Voronov, “Kavkazskie dugovidnie fibuli rannezheleznoi epokhi [Caucasian Arch-Shaped Fibulae of the Early Iron Age],” *KSIA* 176 (1983); T. K. Mikeladze, *Kolkhetis adrerkinis khanis samarovnebi* [Early Iron Age Necropoleis of Colchis] (Tbilisi 1985) 47ff (with Russian summary); cf. J. Bouzek, *The Aegean, Anatolia and Europa* (Prague 1985) 153 fig. 176.3.

²² For details see Lordkipanidze, *DK* 154, and *AG* 125ff.

²³ The Colchians belonged to the west Georgian (west Kartvelian) tribes, whose descendants have lived to the present day in western Georgia (Megreles, Chans) and partially in Turkey (the Laz). The Colchian language, ordinarily called “Zan” by linguists, developed after the gradual disintegration of the proto-Kartvelian parent-language: Th. V. Gamkrelidze and V. V. Ivanov, *Indoeuropeiskii yazik i indoeuropeitsi* [The Indo-European Language and the Indo-Europeans] II (Tbilisi 1984) 880f; Lordkipanidze, *AG* 3–9. The isolation

developed and had a fairly dense population, but this complex, protracted process required large-scale labor-intensive work to reclaim marshy wetlands for cultivation, as seen in numerous and varied finds at settlements of this period (e.g. metal agricultural implements, querns, household utensils, botanical remains).²⁴

Colchian settlements, clearly a product of the socio-political structure that these processes engendered, were as a rule situated in clusters, with one or two moats surrounding the leading settlement.²⁵ Thus a firm foundation was gradually laid for political consolidation of the Colchian tribes. Moreover, mastery of iron in the seventh and sixth centuries played an enormous rôle in the further development of the socio-political and cultural structures of Colchis.²⁶

of the Colchian language and the inception of Colchian bronze culture are assumed from the second quarter of the second millennium: T. K. Mikeladze, *Dziebani kolkhetisa da samkhretaghmosavlet shavizgvispire-tis udzvelesi mosakhleobis istoriidan* [Studies in the History of the Ancient Population of Colchis and the Southeastern Black Sea Littoral] (Tbilisi 1974) 72, 184 (with Russian and English summaries); cf. Gamkrelidze and Ivanov 909 n.3. For a detailed discussion of the Colchian bronze culture see D. M. Koridze, *Kolkhuri kulturis istoriisatvis* [Toward the History of Colchian Culture] (Tbilisi 1965) (with Russian summary); A. T. Ramishvili, *Kolkhetis materialuri kulturis istoriidan* [From the History of the Material Culture of Colchis] (Batumi 1974); O. M. Japaridze, "Dasavlet saqartvelo gvian-brinjaos khanashi [Western Georgia in the Late Bronze Age]," *Matsne (Series of History, Archaeology, Ethnography and History of the Arts)* 1982.1, 61–88; 1982.2, 41–46; L. P. Pantskhava, *Kolkhuri kulturis mkhatvruli khelosnobis dzeglebi* [Relics of Artistic Craftsmanship in Colchian Culture] (Tbilisi 1988) (with Russian summary).

²⁴ See O. Lordkipanidze, *Argonavtika da dzveli Kolkheti* [The Argonautica and Ancient Colchis] (Tbilisi 1985) 62ff.

²⁵ G. Grigolia, "Dasavlet saqartvelos sadziebo-arqeologiuri eqspeditisiis 1969 tselis mushaobis shedegebi [Results of Exploratory Work in 1969 in Western Georgia]," in *Arqeologiuri kvleva-dzieba saqartveloshi 1969 tsels* [Archaeological Investigations in Georgia in 1969] (Tbilisi 1971) 19; Mikeladze and Khakhutaishvili (*supra* n.12) 9; M. V. Baramidze, "Pichorskoe poselenie [The Pichori Settlement]," in *Mestnie etno-politicheskie obiedinenia Prichernomorya v VII–IV vv. do n.e.* [Local Ethnopolitical Entities of the Black Sea Littoral in the 7th–4th Centuries B.C.] (= *Materiali IV Vsesojuznogo simpoziuma po drevnei istorii Prichernomorya. Tskaltubo-Vani, 1985* [Materials of the Fourth Symposium on the Ancient History of the Black Sea Littoral. Tskaltubo-Vani, 1985] [Tbilisi 1988: hereafter 'Symposium IV']) 224–29.

²⁶ The latest evidence shows that the widespread adoption of iron in western Georgia began already in the seventh century, although some would date it earlier: cf. D. Khakhutaishvili, *Proizvodstvo zheleza v drevnei Kolkhide* [The Iron Manufacture in Ancient Colchis] (Tbilisi 1987). From then on pro-

Phase II (ca 600–ca 350)

At the end of the seventh or the beginning of the sixth century, a new phase of development began at Vani—and indeed Colchis as a whole—marked by changes in material culture, especially pottery, jewelry, and the spread of imported Greek wares. At Vani one of the earliest Greek imports is a fragment of a Chiot chalice from the first half of the sixth century (*Vani* VII [1983] 26). Numerous and quite diverse finds—remains of wooden structures and an altar hewn in the rocky ground, thick cultural layers, and rich burials with multiple gold, silver, bronze, and earthenware objects—give a fairly vivid illustration of the new, higher level of development in this settlement, which had already become a political and economic center for its region.

Many different and highly varied series of pottery appear in cultural layers and in contexts other than cult structures, altars, and burials. Although the pottery, on the whole, continues the tradition of Phase I, new forms emerge: e.g. pithoi and jars, jugs with biconic body and vertical tubular handle, cylindrical or high-stemmed goblets, and basins with flat bottoms and slanting walls (*Fig. 3*).²⁷ The abundance of pithoi (generally absent in

duction of iron acquires mass character, attested by numerous remains of manufacture (e.g. smelting furnaces, slags, clay nozzles, clay plaster for furnaces: details in Khakhutaishvili). In settlements and especially burials abundant finds of diverse objects of household economy and battle (e.g. ploughshares, hoes, knives, sickles, so-called segment-shaped multifunctional tools, swords, daggers and blades, spear- and arrowheads) demonstrate the exceptionally wide scale of iron manufacturing. Most iron wares from the seventh to the fourth century typologically reproduce Colchian Bronze Age forms. Such wide-scale mining of metal and manufacture of iron implements required regular barter between the iron-working and farming populations of mountainous and lowland areas, which was intensely carried on as far back as the Late Bronze Age. The economic interdependence of separate regions of Colchis formed one of the solid foundations uniting the population of the whole country into a single economic—and gradually a single political—system. Details in O. Lordkipanidze and T. K. Mikeladze, “Kolkhida v VII–IV vv. do n.e. [Colchis in the 7th–4th Centuries B.C.],” in *Symposium* IV 124f.

²⁷ Such pottery at Colchian settlements appears as early as the seventh century: see A. T. Ramishvili, “Raskopki prichernomorskikh stoyanok v Pichvnari (Kobuleti) v 1960–1964 i 1967 gg. [Excavations of Seaside Stations at Pichvnari],” *SovArch* 1975.1, 136–53. The presence of fully formed types already in the sixth century is reliably attested by their joint discovery with eastern Greek pottery (e.g. lamps, rosette bowls) of the mid-sixth century at the Colchian settlement of Simagre (20 km east of Poti): see Mikeladze, *Rioni* 54–68.

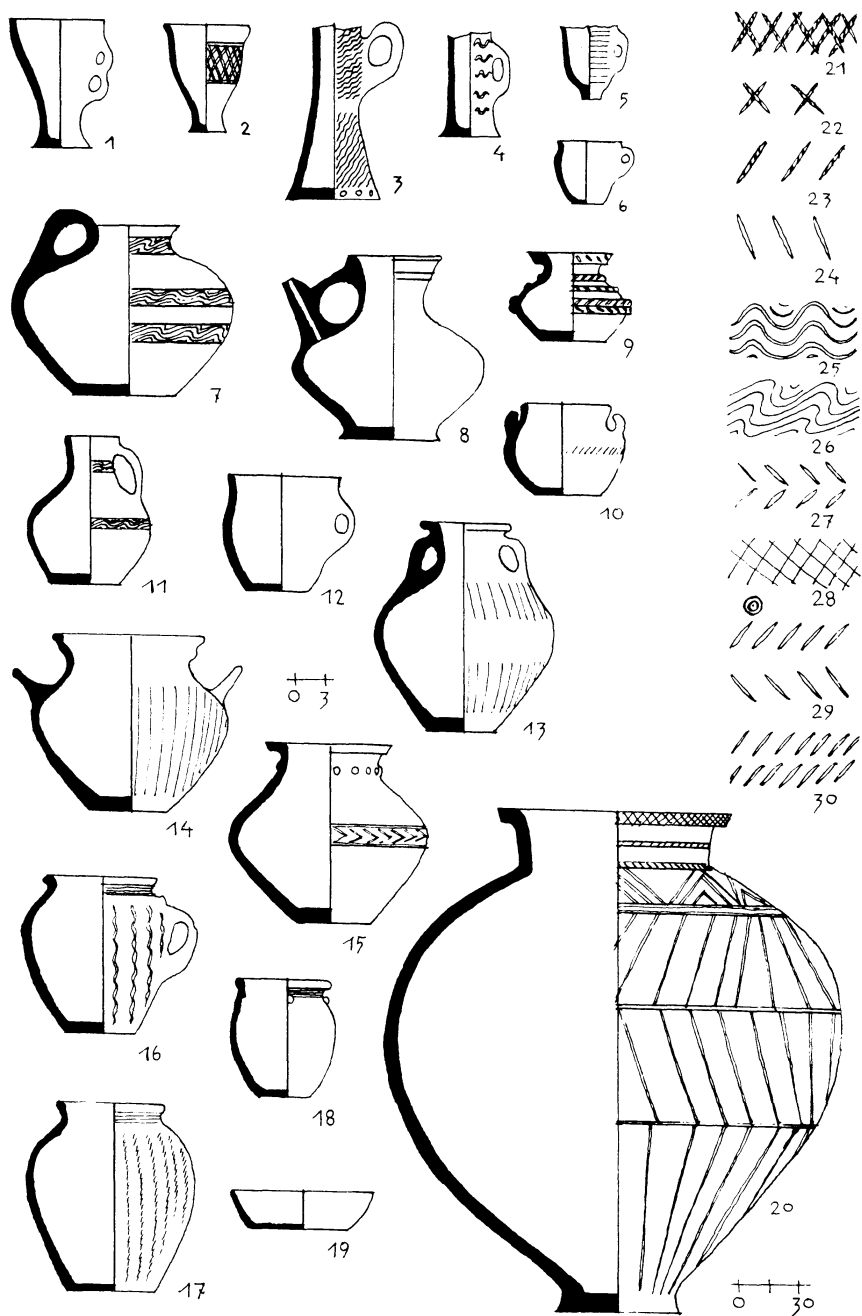


Figure 3. Pottery (Phase II)

1-6, goblets; 7-8, 11, jugs; 9, 15, decorative vases; 10, 12, 16-18, pots;
13-14, jars; 19, bowl; 20, pithos; 21-30, patterns of ornamentation

Phase I), used for the storage or transportation of cereals, oil, and honey but mostly for the fermentation and storage of wine, points to the extensive development of viticulture and wine making.²⁸ Other, typologically diverse vessels (jugs, bowls, phiales) seem to corroborate this point.

The local pottery of Phase II, of fairly high quality and uniformly fired, usually with black (occasionally polished) or gray surface, displays not only common technological features but similar ornamental decor: polished vertical lines and rhomboid patterns, wavy lines applied with a comb-like tool, spirals, incised concentric circles, and slanting 'pine' notches.²⁹ Refined forms and decoration carefully related to contour attest the high professional standard of local potters.

Colchian pottery, to which that of Vani corresponds in typology and ornamentation, constitutes one of the most organic and original components of Colchian culture from the end of the seventh to the first half of the fourth century. This period indubitably witnessed a definite standardization of forms and a wide diffusion of monotypic vessels throughout Colchis. All the principal components of Colchian pottery found at Vani occur at every coastal settlement from Batumi to the vicinity of Sukhumi (ancient Dioscurias) and at villages of the Colchian lowland. This pottery also spread to the mountainous regions (Racha, Svaneti, and Racha-Lechkhumi), probably from the ceramic manufacturing centers along the middle course of the Rioni (Phasis).³⁰ The large scale of Colchian ceramic manufacture for mass use graphically illustrates its status as a commodity in this period and its significance for the development of intra-Colchian economic relations.³¹ Thus the discovery at Vani of

²⁸ See e.g. *Vani* IV (1979) 41 (nos. 1-9), 80ff (nos. 515-36, 587-612, 675, 680f, 685-90, 709-12, 714-19, 726ff, 741-59, 798f, 827-37, 868-71, 876-83, 907f); V (1980) 60-69 (nos. 1-79); Lordkipanidze, *DK* 72.

²⁹ For details see O. Lordkipanidze, E. G. Gigolashvili *et al.*, "Dzv. ts. VI-IV saukuneebis kolkhuri keramika vanidan [Colchian Pottery of the 6th-4th Centuries B.C. from the Vani City Site]," *Vani* V (1980).

³⁰ Lordkipanidze, *DK* 77ff with references.

³¹ On the diffusion at this time of Colchian pottery in the northern Black Sea littoral see V. M. Skudnova, "Nakhodki kolkhidskikh monet i pifosov v Nimfee [The Finds of Colchian Coins and Pithoi at Nymphaeum]," *VDI* 1952.2, 238-42; I. B. Zest and I. D. Marchenko, "Nekotorie tipi tolstostennoi keramiki iz Pantikapeya [Some Types of Thick-walled Pottery from Panticapaeum]," *Matiss* 103 (1962) 154f, figs. 6, 8; O. Lordkipanidze, "K voprosu o svyazyakh Kolkhidi s severnim Prichernomorjem v VI-IV vv. do

two large bronze situlae with two handles (*Fig. 4*), manufactured in the mountainous areas (probably in Racha-Lechkhumi), and analogous bronze cauldrons found at lowland settlements (Kobuleti-Pichvnari, Sairkhe) demonstrate further the active intra-Colchian economic links that reflect some degree of political consolidation.³²

Large quantities of bronze and silver adornments (*e.g.* diadems, earrings, bracelets, pendants, plaques, beads) appear in rich burials. Indeed Colchian culture is most vividly characterized by the abundance and astonishing variety of its jewelry. Gold diadems, with torques ending with rhomboid plates decorated with chased representations of fighting animals, constitute outstanding examples of Colchian goldsmithery. A fifth-century diadem, for example, features lions attacking bulls, a common motif in Near Eastern and Classical art (PLATE 3a, b). In this piece the skilful construction of a three-figure composition, filling the triangular space with clear and realistic figures of similar size (characteristic of pedimental composition), reveals an original master trained in Near Eastern artistic traditions and likewise acquainted with the techniques of Greek late archaic and Achaemenid art. Hence the Vani gold diadem, in my view, belongs to a specific branch of so-called Greco-Persian art.³³

Gold temporal hoops and earrings, in general typologically characteristic of Colchis and unknown beyond the Georgian borders, form a fairly large, peculiar group, including fine earrings with a large hoop decorated with a rosette and its radial shafts terminating in small pyramids or triangles of refined granulation (PLATE 4a), or earrings with a circular hoop decorated with hollow spherical or dipyramidal pendants having lavishly granulated open-work (PLATE 4b). A female burial of the first half of the fourth century has yielded gold earrings with

n.e. [Concerning the Relations of Colchis with the Northern Black Sea Littoral],” in *Istoriya i kultura antichnogo mira [History and Culture of the Classical World]* (Moscow 1977) 112–15.

³² Vani I (1972) 60, 238, figs. 223f; L. S. Sakharova, *Brinijaos gandzebi lechkhumidan [Bronze Hoards from Lechkhumi]* (Tbilisi 1976) 32ff (in Georgian with Russian summary); Lordkipanidze, *DK* 82ff.

³³ Lordkipanidze, *DK* 86–89, and “La civilisation de l’ancienne Colchide aux V^{eme}–IV^{eme} siècles,” *RA* 2 (1971) 262–68.

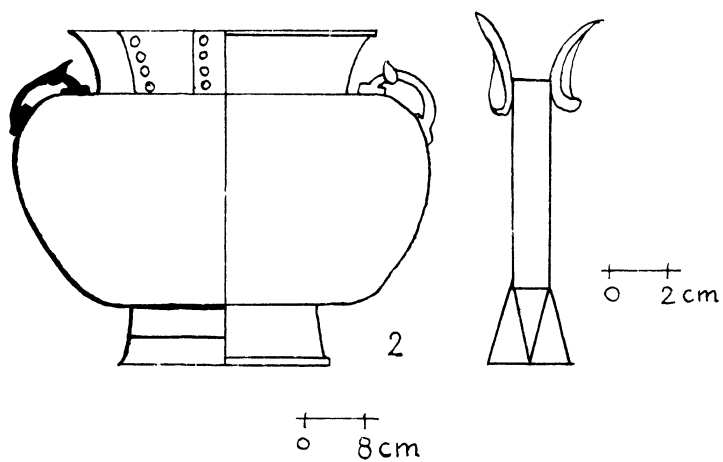
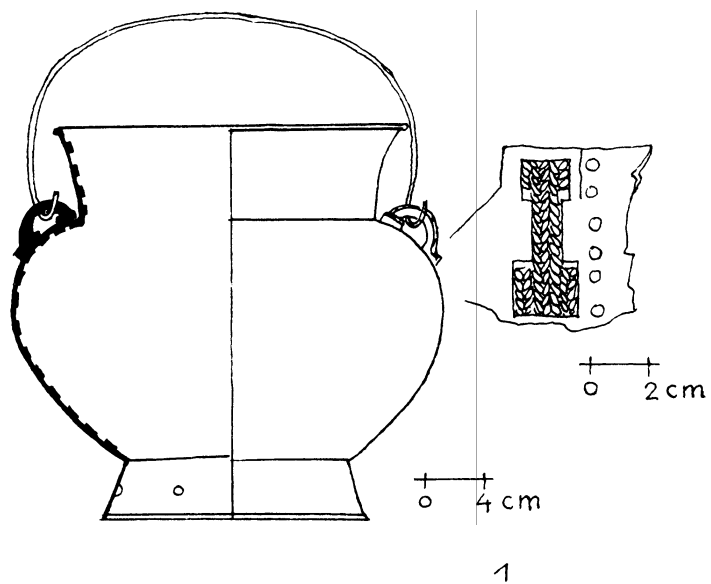


Figure 4. Bronze Situlae, fifth century B.C. (Phase II)

a representation of two riders in a chariot (PLATE 5a). In addition, so-called boat-shaped earrings, common in the Near East and throughout the Mediterranean, also occur at Vani.³⁴

All varieties of earrings from the rich burials at Vani (or elsewhere in Colchis) have a common stylistic detail: the front part of a large hoop features a rosette, always decorated with granulation and filigree. This trait occurs regardless of whether the earrings have an original, purely local form ('radial', with spherical, dipyramidal open-work pendants or figures of riders) or reproduce foreign forms (e.g. boat-shaped earrings). Indeed this motif is unknown on earrings beyond the limits of the diffusion of Colchian culture.

Gold necklaces, as a rule, feature the alternation of beads and pendants in the form of miniature birds, rams' heads, calves, and ibexes. A necklace from a mid-fifth-century burial consists of ribbed beads and two types of pendants: first, drum-shaped with geometric patterns (meander, swastika), executed in the granulation technique; and second, hollow gold turtles having shells decorated with refined grain triangles and their eyes inlaid with vitreous mass (PLATE 5b).

Gold bracelets with oval or concave sections, ending in sculptural representations of animals or their heads facing each other, form a separate group.³⁵ Oval bracelets, like those from the burial of a noble Colchian woman of the mid-fifth century, antedate the concave form. One pair from this burial is adorned with rams' heads, and the other, more massive (cast), has sculptural representations of a wild boar, its body entirely covered with fine slanting notches (PLATE 6a). Stylistically, the boars on the Vani bracelets recall the miniature bronze figures of boars from Iran (Amlash) and Asia Minor,³⁶ but differ in

³⁴ G. Azarpay, *Urartian Art and Artifacts: A Chronological Study* (Berkeley 1968) 58 fig. 17, 59; A. Pierides, *Jewellery in the Cyprus Museum* (Nicosia 1971) 10, pl. V.7; M. Ghirshman, *Tomb princière de Ziwye et le debut de l'art animalier scythe* (Paris 1989) 27f.

³⁵ Such bracelets, widespread in the Achaemenid period, appear in Asia Minor from at least the beginning of the first millennium: see K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop, *Western Asiatic Jewellery (c.3000–612 B.C.)* (London 1971) 196, 203, 209; B. Hrouda, *Die Kulturgeschichte des assirischen Flachbildes* (Bonn 1966) 52, Taf. 9.9–12; cf. A. P. Kuzloff, in *id.*, ed., *Animals in Ancient Art from the Leo Milderberry Collection* (Mainz 1981) 40f.

³⁶ P. Amandry, "Un motif 'scythe' en Iran et en Grèce," *JNES* 29 (1965) 153ff, pl. xxix.3f; cf. J. C. Waldbaum, *Metalwork from Sardis* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1983) 41f no. 88, pl. 7.

certain details (a large, bulging eye, vertically pointed ears, bristly cover from head to tail) and, above all, in the graphically decorative style and distinct sculptural feeling (perhaps indicative of Ionian influence). The same burial also yielded several silver pendants in the shape of a boar, perfectly analogous to those of the bracelets (*Vani* I [1972] 229 no. 32).

Later gold and silver bracelets (*ca* 400–*ca* 350) generally imitate in shape (largely with concave back) and in the style of sculptural representations bracelets common throughout the Achaemenid world and adjacent lands. Gold bracelets from a female burial of the first half of the fourth century are most characteristic, ending in sculptural heads of lions, ibexes, and calves (PLATE 6b), and are stylistically almost indistinguishable from gold and silver bracelets of the Achaemenid cultural orbit,³⁷ particularly Cyprus (Vuni), Syria (Ras-Shamra), and Egypt, which Amandry dates *ca* 400–*ca* 350, assuming their manufacture at various Achaemenid centers or in adjacent areas.³⁸ Hence, although it is very difficult to determine the provenience of the Vani gold bracelets, their local production according to widespread Achaemenid patterns cannot be ruled out.

Similarly, a gold phiale with omphalos (PLATE 7a), adorned with stylized representations of lotuses (from a burial of the first half of the fourth century), shows Achaemenid patterns. Analogous silver-plated phiales with omphalos occur elsewhere in Colchis (*e.g.* Dablagomi, Itkhvisi),³⁹ and belong, like the Vani gold phiale, to the type of Achaemenid bowls widespread throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East. The peculiarity and frequency of metal phiales of the fifth and fourth centuries throughout Georgia permit the assumption of a local

³⁷ See *e.g.* D. Stronach, *Pasargadae* (Oxford 1978) 173ff with references. Analogous bracelets appear on the famous reliefs from Persepolis; very close to the Vani bracelets are those worn by a delegation that some (*cf.* G. Walser, *Die Volkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis* [Berlin 1966] 84, Taf. 18.x) identify as Scythians. Exactly the same head crowns the gold scabbard from the Chertomlik barrow: M. Artamonov, *Goldschatz der Skythen* (Prague 1970) 55, pl. 184.

³⁸ P. Amandry, "Orfèverie achéménide," *AntK* 1 (1958) 14f, 20, pls. 1–12; *cf.* B. Deppert-Lippitz, *Griechischer Goldschmuck* (Mainz 1984) 156–59.

³⁹ Kuftin (*supra* n.5) 151, pl. A; Ju. Gagoshidze, "Itkhvisis samarkhi [A Burial from Itkhvisi]," *Saqartvelos skhelmtsipo museumis moambe* [*Bulletin, State Museum of Georgia*] 25-B (Tbilisi 1968) 36f, pl. I.7.

center manufacturing metal wares after Achaemenid patterns, corroborated by the recent discovery in Sairkhe of a whole series of silver phiales.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, almost all the numerous and varied gold ornaments of the fifth and fourth centuries found at Vani and other Colchian sites display a strict stylistic and technological unity, thereby attesting manufacture at a single workshop: for example, gold and silver diadems, earrings and temple adornments ('radial', with open-work pendants, boat-shaped), and necklaces, analogous to those at Vani and lately found at Sairkhe. The originality of artistic forms largely characteristic of Colchis alone further indicates local provenance. Diadems with lozenge-shaped bezels, earrings and temple-rings with radials or spherical pendants—forms reproduced in silver and bronze—relate genetically to pre-Classical culture and do not occur outside Georgia.

The continuity of typological and stylistic features from the early sixth to the first half of the third century should also be noted. Gold earrings found recently at Vani in a burial of the second half of the fourth century (PLATE 7b) provide a vivid example: they terminate in a richly granulated dipyramidal pendant and miniature sculptural representations of birds. These earrings—a profoundly important discovery in my view—embody all the basic typological and stylistic characteristics that local Colchian goldsmiths evolved over the fifth and fourth centuries. Earrings with a dipyramidal pendant also occur in rich burials of the fifth century, but other varieties of earrings with pendants appear throughout Colchis in the fifth and fourth centuries.

Colchian gold ornaments for the head likewise feature individual artistic details, especially a rosette on the front of the earring hoop, typical (as we have noted) of Colchian earrings and various temple adornments. Miniature sculptural birds have a different arrangement but the same functional purpose on typical fifth-century Colchian earrings (*cf.* PLATE 4a), and pyramids of finest granulation are also typical.

Abundant use of granulation, characteristic of Colchian gold items of the fifth and fourth centuries and invariably in the finest grain, occurs in adornments of quite different form and

⁴⁰ H. L. Lushey, *Die Phiale* (Bleicherode am Harz 1939) esp. 51, 56; J. Sh. Nadiradze, *Sairkhe—Saqartvelos udzvelesi qalaqi* [*Sairkhe—An Ancient City of Georgia*] I (Tbilisi 1990).

purpose (e.g. temporal rings and earrings, pendants and beads of various kinds, plaques). Small pyramids, triangles, rhomboid and other geometric patterns (e.g. meander, swastika) are created by tiny droplets of gold. Further testimony to the pervasive use of granulation is found in the appearance of the rare technique of silver granulation.⁴¹

But how did these techniques reach Colchis? Granulation, in widespread use for pyramids and rhomboid, triangular, and geometric patterns in the East and the Mediterranean ca 600–ca 300, arose in Sumerian art of the Early Dynastic period and flourished in the second millennium.⁴² Gold earrings with miniature pyramids in grain and gold plaques finished with granulated triangles occur in the Marlik burials (Gilam province, Iran) of the thirteenth century and later.⁴³ The Marlik burials probably belonged to tribes forming the nucleus of the Manaeen kingdom, of which later (eighth and seventh centuries) cultural traces appear at Zivye (near modern Sakkyz, northwestern Iran).⁴⁴ Thus in the territory of the later Manaeen kingdom southeast of lake Urmia, the style of decorating articles with granulated pyramids, triangles, and other geometric patterns probably flourished ca 1000. From the eighth and especially the seventh century it spread to Urartu and Iran,⁴⁵

⁴¹ P. Amandry, "Objects d'or et d'argent," in *Collection Stathatos* 118ff, nos. 113f, pl. xxx.

⁴² Maxwell-Hyslop (*supra* n.35) 7, 19, 36f, 102, 117; cf. 103.

⁴³ E. O. Negahban, "Notes on Some Objects from Marlik," *JNES* 29 (1965: hereafter 'Negahban') 326f, pl. LIX, *A Preliminary Report on the Marlik Excavations* (Teheran 1964) 21f, figs. 66ff; 24ff, figs. 79, 82, pl. IV.A; and "Pendants from Marlik," in *IrAnt* 24 (= *Mélanges P. Amiet* II: 1989) 178ff; Maxwell-Hyslop (*supra* n.35) 190, pl. 137; cf. 195, pls. 147f.

⁴⁴ This refers to remains of local Manaeen provenience in contrast to Assyrian and so-called Scythian: see A. Godard, *La trésor de Ziwiye (Kurdistan)* (Haarlem 1950), and "À propos du Trésor de Ziwiye," *ArtAsiae* 14 (1951) 240–45; R. Ghirshman, "Notes Iraniennes IV. Le Trésor de Sakkez, les origines de l'Art Mède et les bronzes du Luristan," *ArtAsiae* 13 (1950) 181–206; R. D. Barnett, "The Treasure of Ziwiye," *Iraq* 18 (1956) 111–16; H. A. Potraz, "Die Skythen und Vorderasien," *Orientalia* 28 (1959) 57–73; P. Amandry, "À propos du trésor de Ziwiye," *IrAnt* 6 (1966) 109–29; Maxwell-Hyslop (*supra* n.35) 206ff.

⁴⁵ B. B. Piotrovski, *Iskustvo Urartu [The Art of Urartu]* (Leningrad 1962) 86ff.

while it also became fashionable in western areas *ca* 700–*ca* 500, occurring in the most diverse combinations of finishing gold ornaments in Cyprus, Samos, mainland Greece, Macedonia, Etruria, and the Black Sea littoral.⁴⁶

The technique also reached Colchis, most probably from the Manaeans, as the Colchians (according to Herodotus in particular) maintained cultural contacts in the middle of the first millenium with the Hurrian-Urartian population of Mana and Media.⁴⁷ In Colchis these artistic skills underwent a peculiar modification, becoming organically blended with the centuries-old local traditions of the remarkable Colchian bronze culture, and resulting⁴⁸ in the creation of the strikingly original style of Colchian goldsmiths abundantly attested at Vani.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ R. Hadazeck, *Der Ohrschmuck der Griechen und Etrusker* (Vienna 1903) 16ff; B. Segall, *Katalog der Goldschmiede Arbeiten* (Benaki Museum: Athens 1938) 15, 21; Amandry (*supra* n.41) 198f, and "L'art scythe archaïque," *AA* 4 (1965) 891ff, fig. 4; A. Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery* (London 1962) 112, fig. 20; 122f, fig. 24.

⁴⁷ According to Herodotus the Colchians and Saspies (east Georgian tribes) immediately bordered on Media: *cf.* 1.104: "from the Colchi it is an easy matter to cross into Media: there is but one nation between, the Saspies"; 6.84: "the Scythians themselves should essay to invade Media by way of the river Phasis." Herodotus (*cf.* also 4.77) appears to reflect the period of the heyday of the Median state, at any rate until the 520s when Media became an Achaemenid satrapy after the defeat of Fravartish's rebellion (521). Under the Achaemenids the Saspies with the Hurrian-Urartian populations of Mana and Media—namely, the Matieni (Hurrians) and Allarodians (Urartians)—formed the eighteenth satrapy, directly bordering on Colchis (Hdt. 3.94).

⁴⁸ Some stylistic elements linked to Manaeon-Median culture have already been noted in our discussion of the chased representations of the Vani gold diadem. The decoration of gold signet rings with four spiral-shaped volutes (*Vani* I [1972] 225, pl. 201) may also have stemmed from this culture, as analogous decorations of beads appear at Marlik (Negahban 319, pl. LX, fig. 16) and at Hasanlu, an area within the diffusion of Manaeon culture at the beginning of the first millennium (*cf.* R. Ghirshman, *Iran, Protoiraner, Meder, Achämeniden* [Munich 1964] 26, fig. 27). Jugs with the so-called tubular handle (fig. 8.8), so characteristic of Colchian pottery of the sixth and fifth centuries, probably came from the same cultural world: *cf.* Ghirshman 128, fig. 70; R. N. Dyson, "Problems of Prehistoric Iran," *JNES* 24 (1965) 200, fig. 7.

⁴⁹ A small but very important group of gold items—probably remains of the manufacturing process—stands out among the casual finds from Vani: blanks in the form of wire rods with notches, droplets of gold, an ingot, and fragments of unused stamped plaques; for details see *Vani* VI (1981) 29–94, 148, 154, figs. 73f.

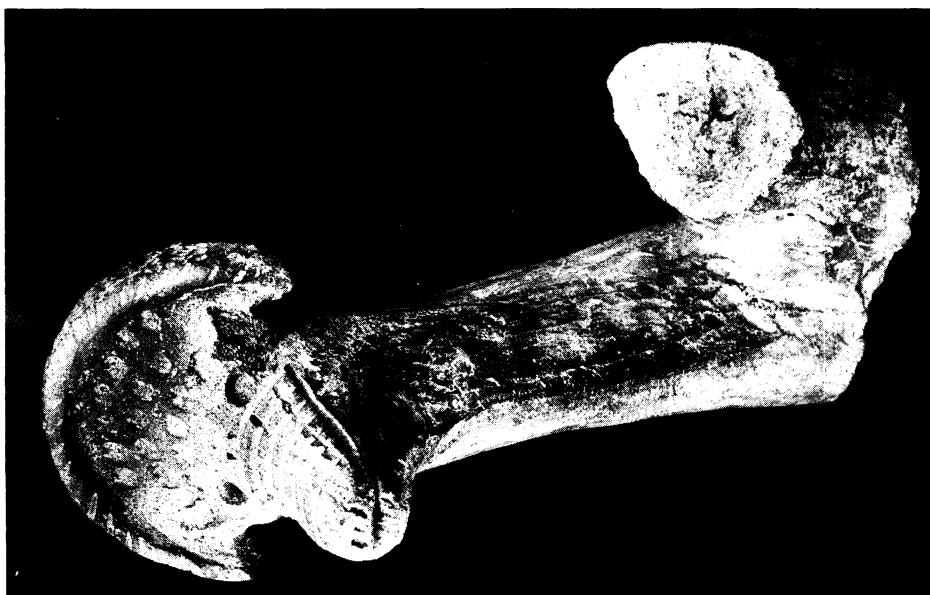


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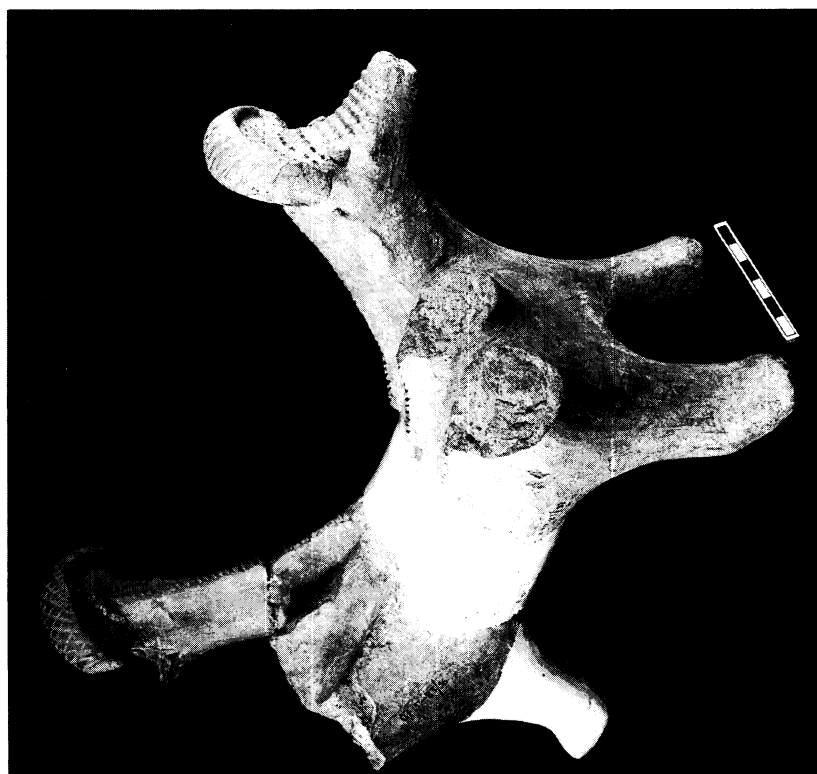


(a)

(a) Clay jug with 'zoomorphic' handle from the sacrificial ground
(h. 14.5 cm.), 8th-7th century B.C.
(b) Clay goblet (h. 11 cm.), 8th-7th century B.C.

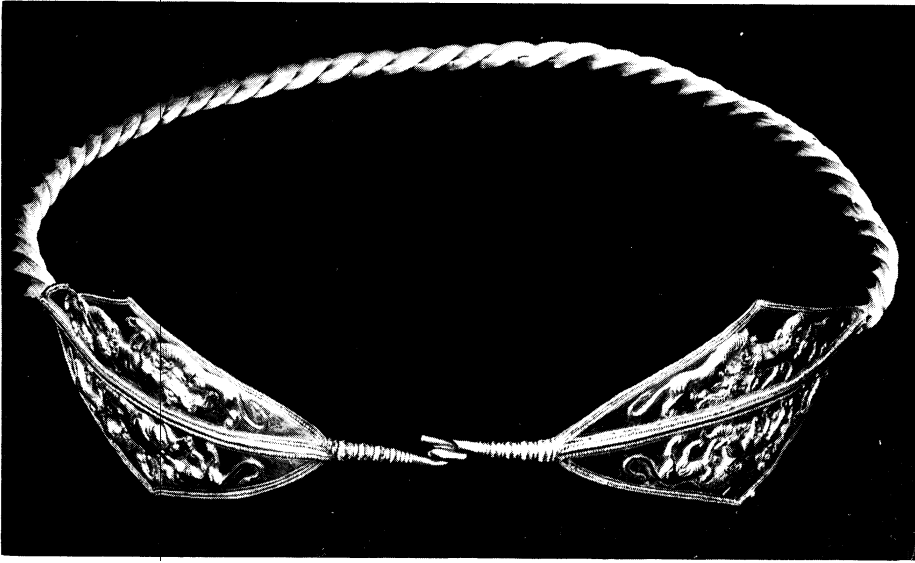


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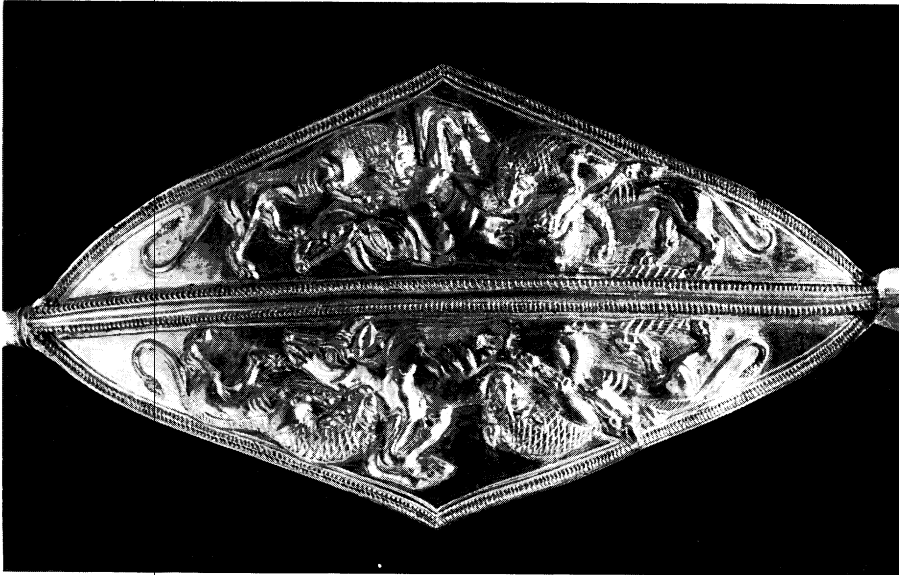


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(a) Clay figurine with three heads on each side
(b) Two-headed protome



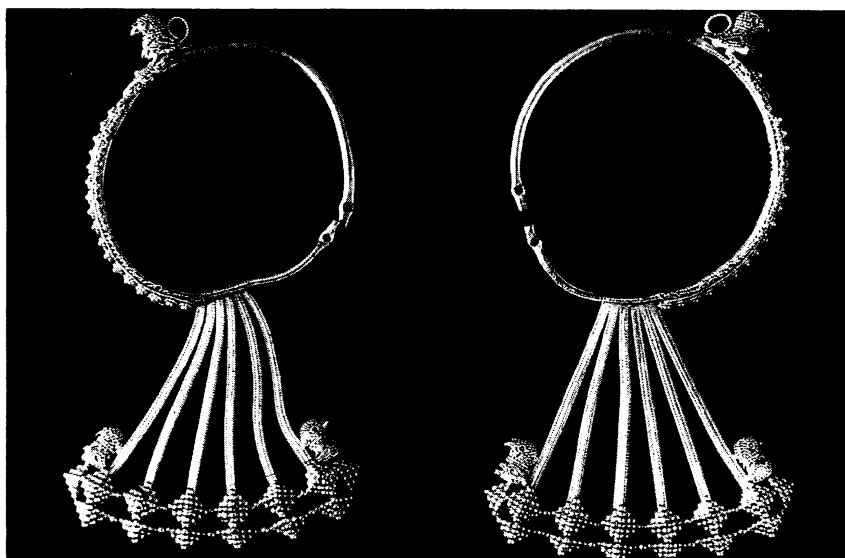
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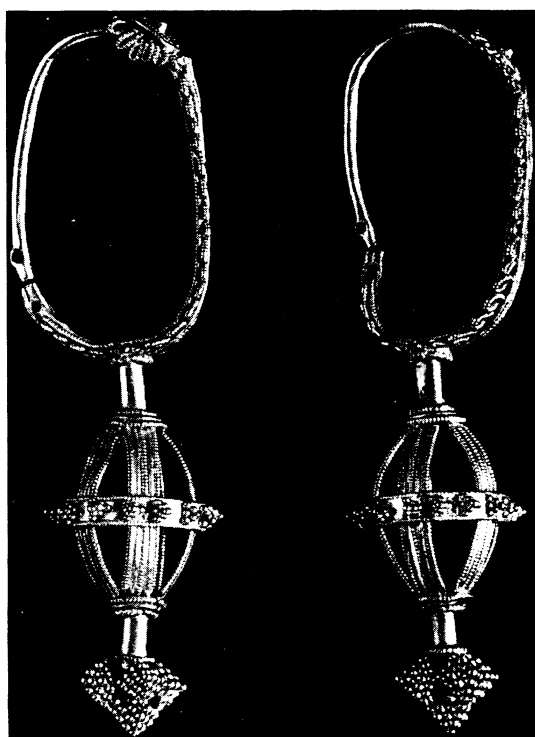
(b)

- (a) Gold diadem (dm. 24.5 cm.), 5th century B.C.
(b) Detail: repoussé representation of fighting animals—lions preying on a bull (l. 11.7 cm.)

PLATE 4 LORDKIPANIDZE

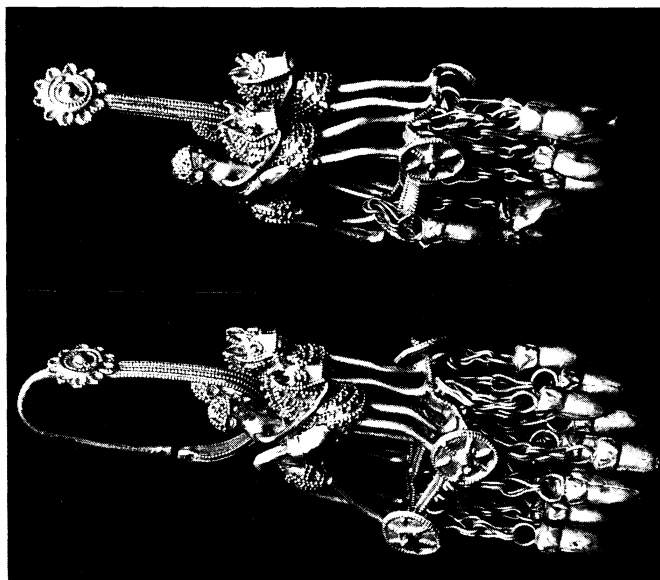


(a)

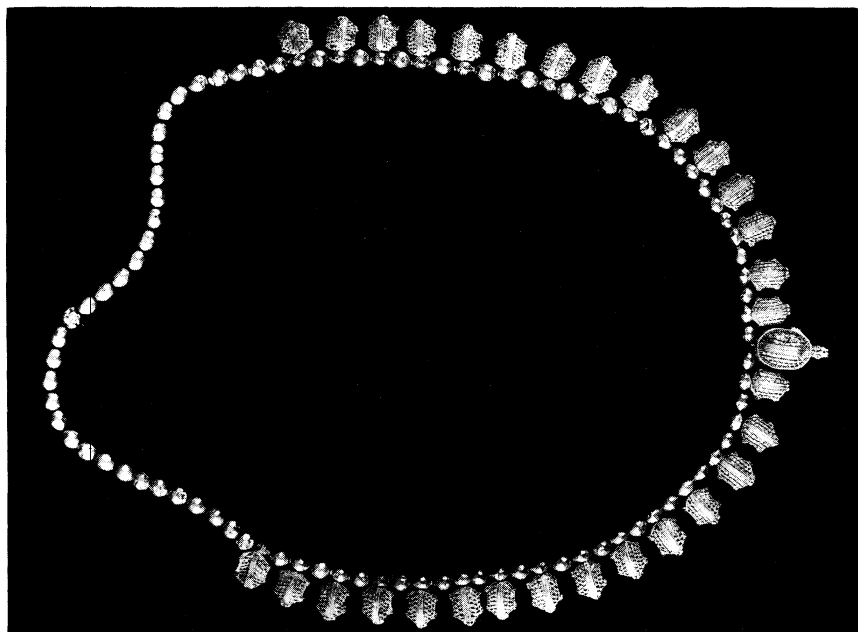


(b)

- (a) Gold earrings with radials (h. 7.7 and 8.5 cm.), 5th century B.C.
(b) Gold earrings with open-work pendants (h. 6.5), 5th century B.C.



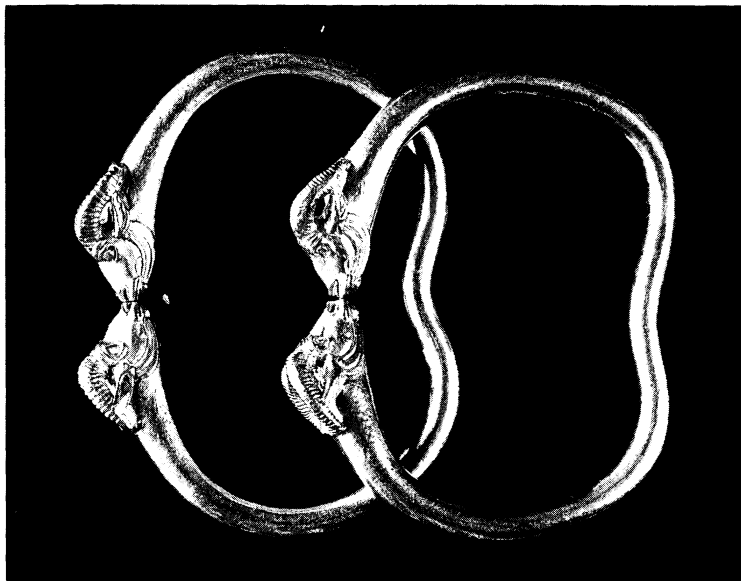
(a)



(b)

- (a) Gold earrings with pendants in the shape of riders on a chariot (h. 8 cm.), 4th century B.C.
(b) Gold necklace formed of pendants in the shape of turtles (h. 2.5 cm.), 5th century B.C.

PLATE 6 LORDKIPANIDZE

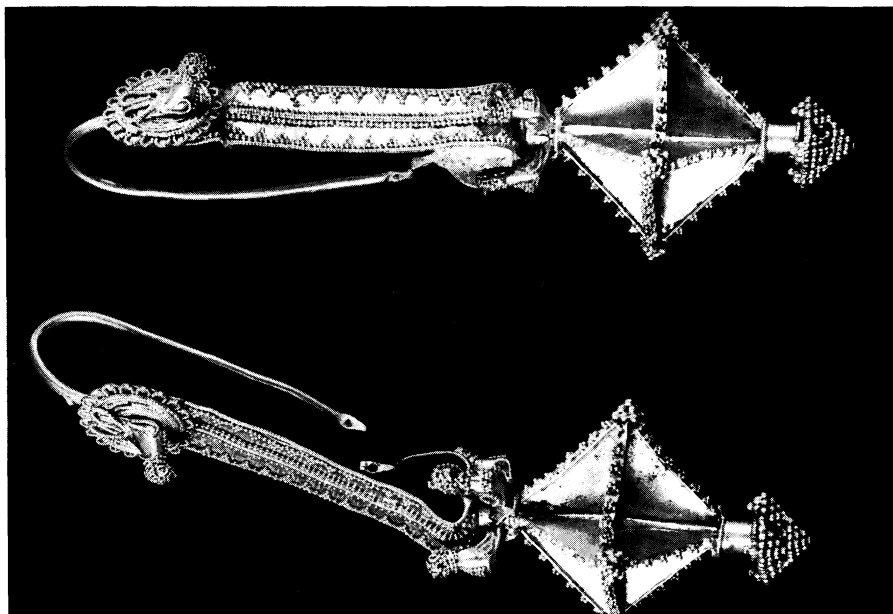


(b)



(a)

- (a) Gold bracelets decorated with wild boar figures (dm. 7.7 cm.),
5th century B.C.
(b) Gold bracelets decorated with ibex heads (dm. 10 cm.),
5th century B.C.



(b)



(a)

(a) Gold phiale (dm. 1 cm.), 4th century B.C.
(b) Gold earrings with bipyramidal pendants (h. 9 cm.),
4th century B.C.

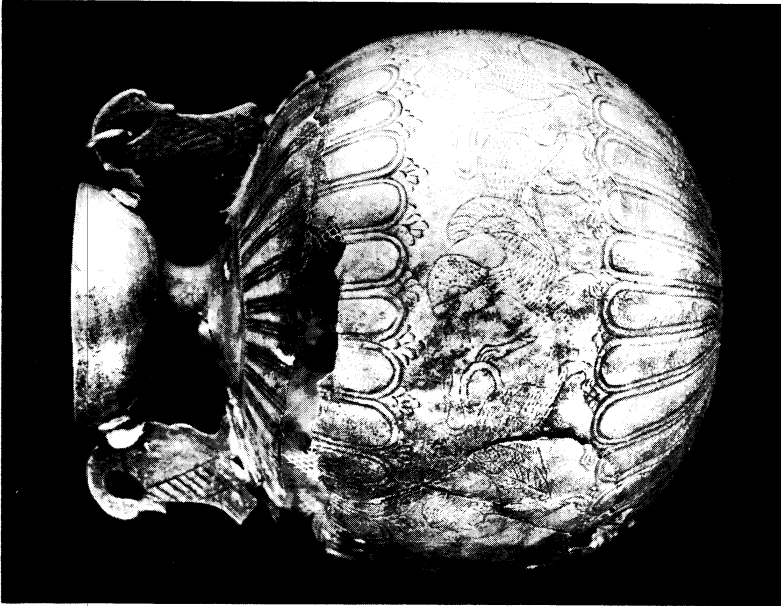


(b)



(a)

(a) Rich burial (of a 'noble woman'), 5th century B.C.
(b) Detail: gold and silver ornaments



(b)



(a)

- (a) Bronze patera with anthropomorphic handle of the so-called Acropolis group (h. 46 cm.), 489–470 B.C.
(b) Silver aryballos of Attic type decorated with an engraved frieze (a procession of sphinxes), early 5th century B.C.

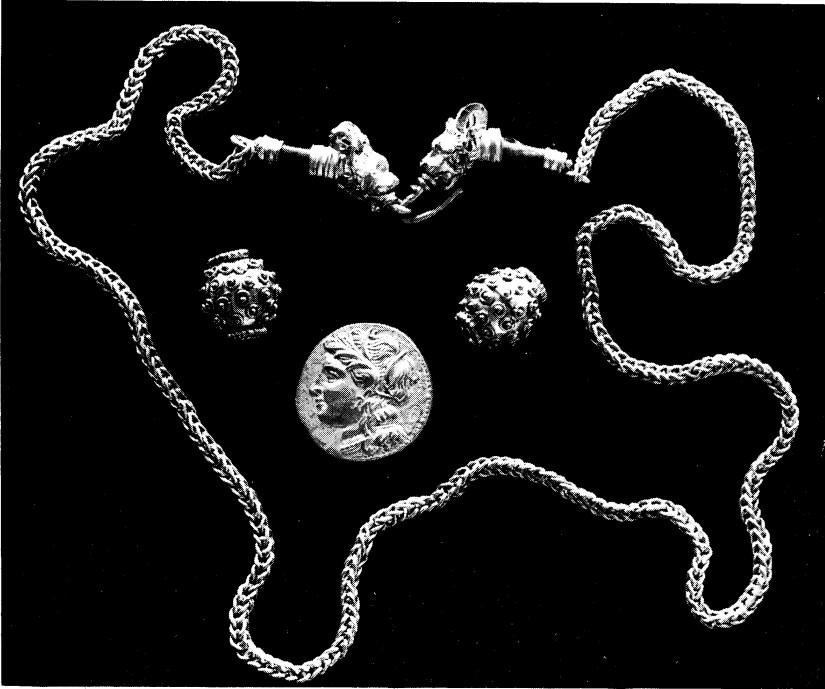


(a)

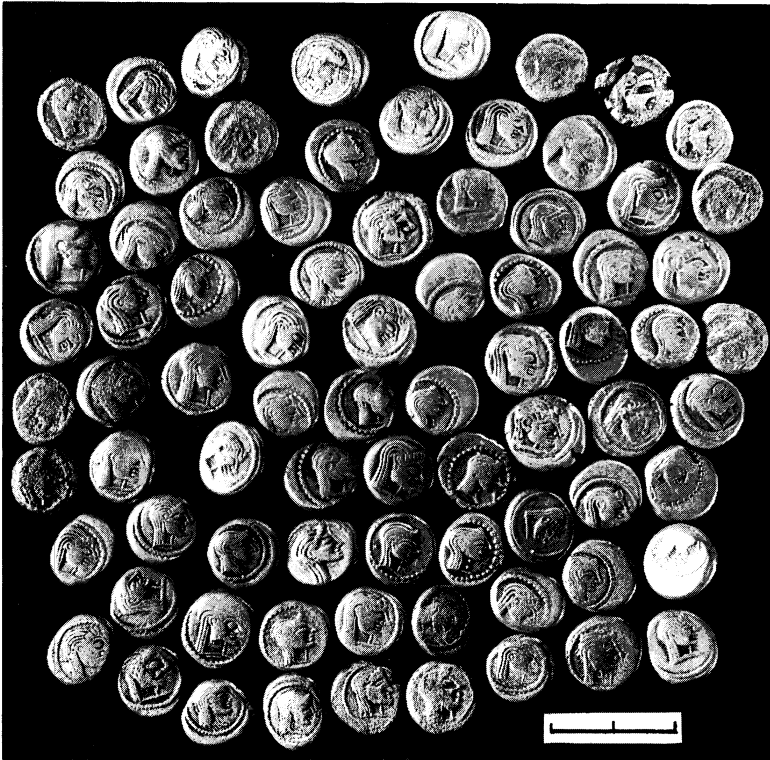


(b)

(a) Stone wall (so-called vitrified fort), 4th-3rd century B.C.
(b) Sacrificial ground laid with cobbles, 4th-3rd century B.C.

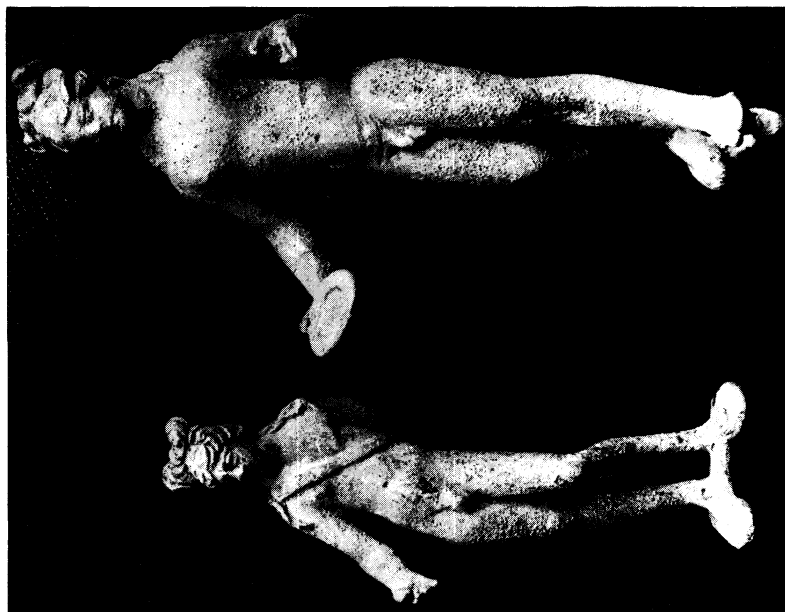


(a)

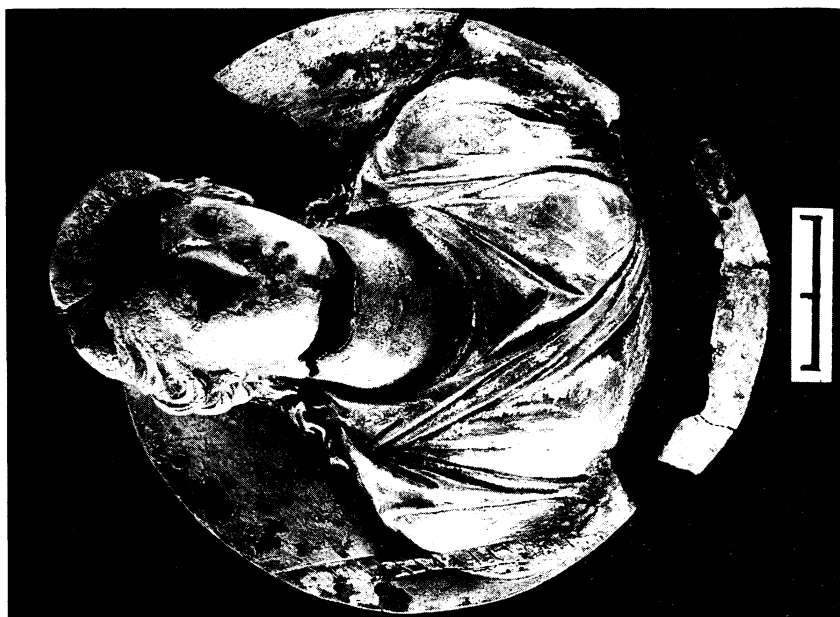


(b)

(a) Gold necklace, beads, stater of Hieron II
(b) Colchian silver coins from a late 4th-early 3rd century burial



(b)



(a)

(a) Silver medallion (dm. 8 cm.), 2nd-1st century B.C.
(b) Silver figurines (h. 7.0 and 8.5 cm.), 2nd-1st century B.C.



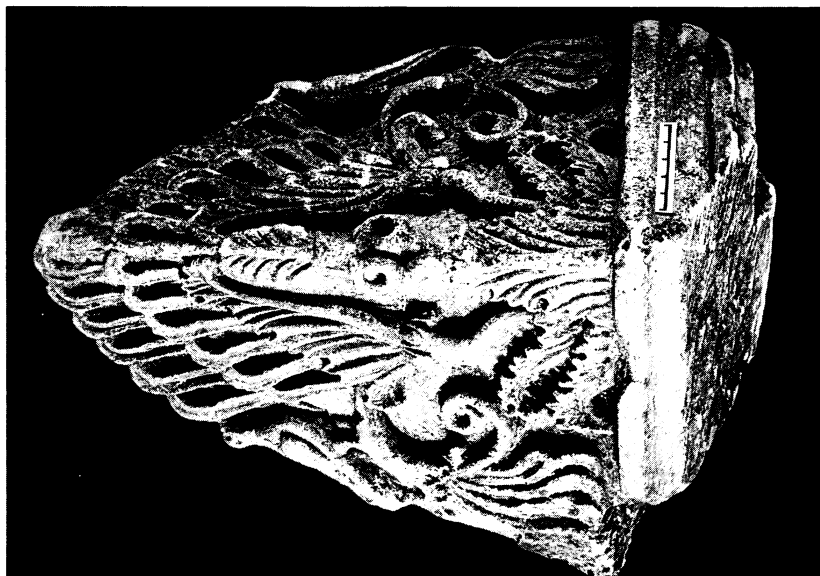
(a)



(b)

(a) Lion head, part of a sima (h. 52 cm.), limestone,
2nd-1st century B.C.

(b) Figured capital (h. 45 cm.), limestone, 2nd-1st century B.C.

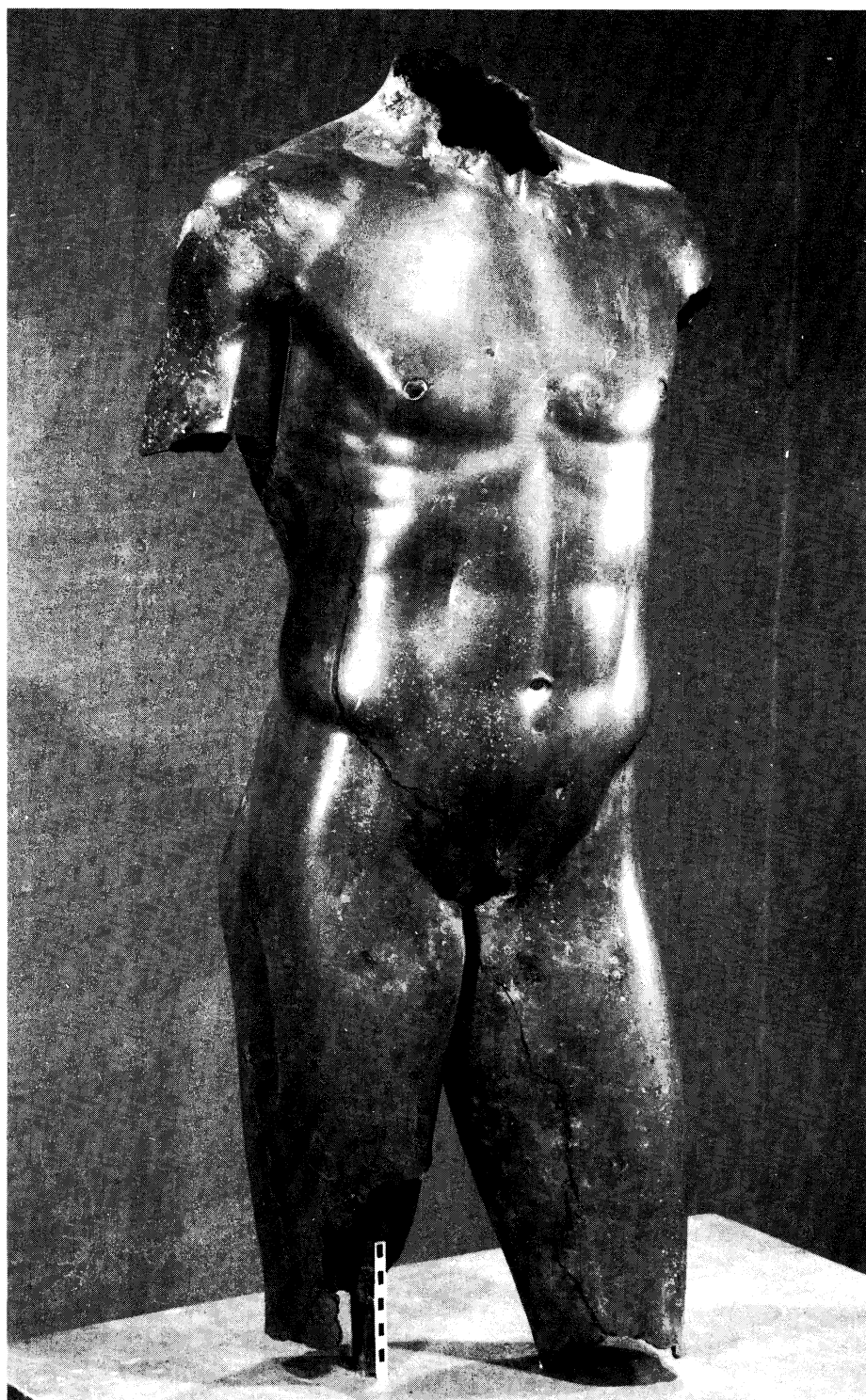


(b)

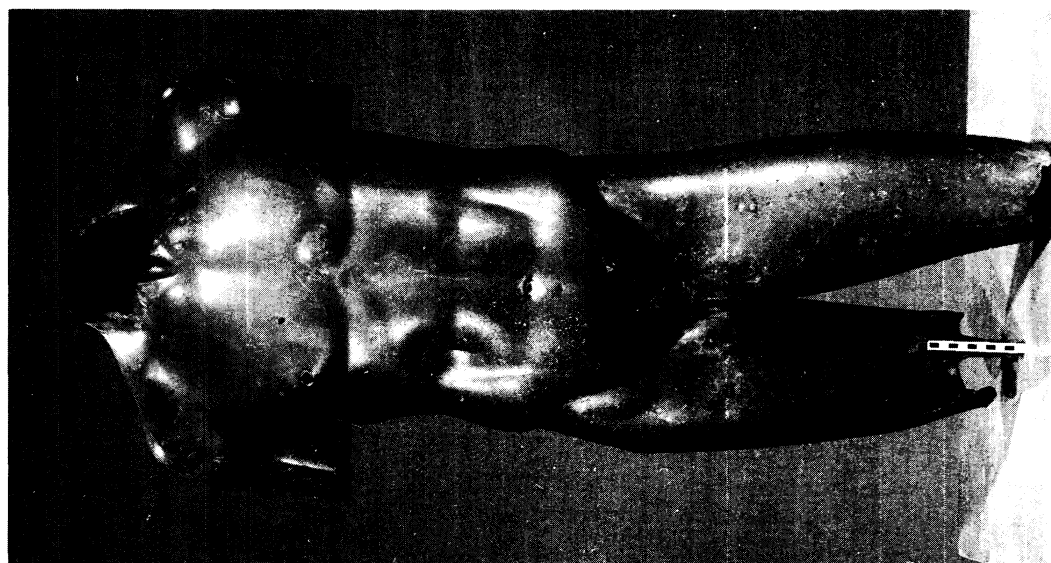


(a)

- (a) Fragment of a limestone frieze with a figure of a charioteer,
2nd century B.C.
(b) Acroterion, limestone, 2nd-1st century B.C.



Bronze torso: the Vani Youth



Bronze torso

Other gold objects from the rich burials at Vani should be briefly noted: e.g. one-piece, arch-shaped, and two-piece fibulae, buttons, and stamped plaques for decorating shrouds; and plaque images of eagles for heraldic purposes.⁵⁰

It can now be confidently asserted that in fifth- and fourth-century Colchis—in all likelihood primarily at Vani—a highly artistic and original school of goldsmiths skilfully employed the most intricate techniques of smithing, chasing and stamping, casting, applying grain and filigree.⁵¹ Indeed, Greco-Roman authors knew about gold mining in Colchis. As Strabo (11.2.19; tr. Jones [Loeb]) describes mountainous Colchis, “It is said that in their country gold is carried down by the mountain torrents, and that the barbarians obtain it by means of perforated troughs and fleecy skins, and that this is the origin of the myth of the golden fleece.” According to Appian (*Mith.* 103; tr. White [Loeb]), “Many streams issue from Caucasus bearing gold-dust so fine as to be invisible. The inhabitants put sheepskins with shaggy fleece into the stream and thus collect the floating particles; and perhaps the golden fleece of Aectes was of this kind.”

The validity of these accounts need not be doubted, for until recently the ancient technique of mining gold was practiced in modern Svaneti (the mountain regions of historical Colchis). According to the ethnographer L. Bochorishvili,⁵²

The Svans obtain gold with the help of sheepskins. A sheepskin, stretched over a board or flattened by some other means, was placed in the river and made fast so as not to be swept away by the stream, the fleece being turned upwards. The soaked fleece trapped gold particles. After some time the skin was removed and spread on the ground for drying; the dried skin was beaten to shake out the gold grains.

⁵⁰ A. M. Chqonia, “Okros samkaulebi vanis naqalaqaridan [The Gold Ornaments of the Ancient City Site of Vani],” *Vani* VI (1981) 46f.

⁵¹ Details in Lordkipanidze, *DK* 86f, and (*supra* n.33) 261ff; Chqonia (*supra* n.50).

⁵² L. Bochorishvili, “Oqromchedloba svanetshi [Goldsmithery in Svaneti],” in *Saqartvelos metsnierebata akademiis moambe* [*Bulletin, Georgian Academy of Sciences*] 7.5 (1946) 285. This technique of mining gold was demonstrated to the British traveler in Svaneti, Tim Severin, who in 1984 repeated the expedition of the Argonauts in a twenty-oar galley: see T. Severin, *The Jason Voyage* (London 1985) 220–23.

In light of this discussion of archaeological material, we now face the complex task of defining the rôle of Vani in the general political, socio-economic, and cultural milieu of Colchis *ca* 600–*ca* 350. Despite the well-known difficulty of sociological interpretation of archaeological remains, some conclusions about the development of this highly unique site can be drawn.

The evidence gives a fairly clear picture of the developing differentiation of wealth within Vani society, graphically demonstrated by the rich burials with numerous gold, silver, bronze, and clay wares of high artistic value (PLATE 8a, b).⁵³ These burials, undoubtedly of the higher (and perhaps richest) stratum of the Colchian ruling elite, presumably contrast in wealth with those of the general population. Although no graves of these lower classes have been found at Vani and its environs, burial inventories from other regions of Colchis give at least an approximate picture of general tendencies in the drastic differentiation of wealth and hence social class of Colchian society in the sixth and especially the fifth and fourth centuries.

At the village of Sairkhe, located in the Qvirila River valley of northeastern Colchis, the recently discovered site of a multi-layered ancient city offers an analogy to Vani:⁵⁴ detached living quarters with rich burials containing numerous gold, silver, bronze, and earthenware articles; a similar burial inventory (*e.g.* diadems, earrings, temple adornments, necklaces, bracelets, phiales, imported Greek vessels); the same method of interment (burial in holes cut in the rocky ground, wooden sarcophagi with stone embankment); and burial of horses with the household. No doubt, as at Vani, these burials belong to the local elite. Other burials, however, with analogous interment in sarcophagi and a comparatively smaller number of gold and silver adornments, have been unearthed within 5 km of Sairkhe at the village of Itkhvisi,⁵⁵ where there are also burials in ordinary ground pits and different grave inventories that only occa-

⁵³ *Vani* I (1972) 113–17, 213–39.

⁵⁴ J. Sh. Nadiradze, *Sairkhe: dzveli qalaqi* [*Sairkhe: An Ancient City*] (Drosha 1988) 20f (in Georgian), (*supra* n.40), and “Le site archéologique de Sairkhe,” in Lordkipanidze/Lévêque 213–17.

⁵⁵ Gagoshidze (*supra* n.39) 31–46.

sionally include arms and an isolated gold object. Some burials contain only one or two clay vessels and iron ware.⁵⁶ The situation at neighboring Sachkhere is analogous.⁵⁷

Thus we can infer a developing differentiation of wealth within Colchian society from the sixth to the fourth century. The rich burials of Vani and Sairkhe, distinguished by the exceptional splendor of the numerous gold and silver articles and imported metal and earthenware vessels, differ sharply from the burials of the poor and middle strata of society and even from some rich burials at Mtzisdziri near Vani.⁵⁸ Since wealth, as a rule, derives from nobility and privileged position rather than the converse, differences in methods of interment and the quality of grave goods support the existence of socially distinct groups in Colchian society *ca* 600–*ca* 300.

But what was the political status of Colchians entitled to such rich burials at Vani and Sairkhe? In my view, they were the rulers of the administrative areas that Strabo (11.2.18) calls “sceptuchies”:

The great fame this country had in early times is disclosed by the myths, which refer in an obscure way to the expedition of Jason as having proceeded as far even as Media, and also, before that time, to that of Phrixus. After that, when kings succeeded to power, the country being divided into ‘sceptuchies’, they were only moderately prosperous (tr. Jones [Loeb]).

These *sceptuchiae*, I believe, were administrative units formed on the territorial principle and based (as in eastern Georgia) on

⁵⁶ R. M. Abramishvili, “Itkhvisis arqeologiuri eqspeditsiis 1963 tslis mushaobis shedegebi [The Results of the Work of the Itkhvisi Archaeological Expedition in 1963],” in *XII sametsniro sesia midzhgvnili 1963 tslis arqeologiuri kvleva-dziebis shedegebisadmi (peodaluri da antikuri khanis dzeglebi)* [Twelfth Scientific Session Devoted to the Results of Field Archaeological Studies (Relics of the Medieval and Classical Periods)] (Tbilisi 1964) 33f.

⁵⁷ J. Sh. Nadiradze, *Qvirilas kheobis arqeologiuri dzeglebi* [Archaeological Relics of the Qvirila Valley] (Tbilisi 1975) 26ff.

⁵⁸ O. Lordkipanidze, “Novie materialy k istorii svyazei Afin s Kolkhidoi [New Materials toward the History of Athenian Contacts with Colchis],” in *Khudozhestvennaya kultura i arkheologiya antichnogo mira* [Culture and Archaeology of the Classical World] (Moscow 1975) 143–50; G. Gamkrelidze, *Tsentraluri kolkhetis dzveli nasakhlarebi* [The Ancient Settlements of Central Colchis] (Tbilisi 1982) 69–81 (with Russian and English summaries).

historically-developed territorial administrative entities, which the royal power charged members of the local ancestral aristocracy to govern.⁵⁹ Thus the sceptuchies must have formed one stage in the hierarchical ladder of administration headed by the king of the Colchians.⁶⁰ Granting administrative functions to the tribal elite transformed it into a ruling class and accelerated the separation of the nobility from the people, thereby contributing to the social isolation and enrichment of the Colchian aristocracy. The new functions conferred by royal authority also brought income—tribute not only in agricultural produce but also in the gold, silver, and valuable articles so abundant in the rich burials at Vani.

The Vani nobility resided on a triangular hill with deep ravines on two sides, which served as natural defenses and were perhaps linked by a moat. Rich burials of *ca* 600–*ca* 350 found in various parts of the lower and central terraces do not constitute a single cemetery. As most of these graves occur close to residential layers, they may be considered to be household burials. The upper terrace featured a wooden sanctuary and ritual ditches cut

⁵⁹ See Lordkipanidze, *DK* 56–59, *Iberia* 15, 22, and *AG* 109ff; cf. N. A. Berdzenishvili, in *Saqartvelos istoriis sakitkhebi* [*Questions of Georgian History*] 8 (1975) 140f, 150, 151ff.

⁶⁰ A. J. Graham's review (*CR* N.S. 37 [1987] 312f) of my monograph, *Das alte Kolkhis und seine Beziehung zur griechischen Welt vom 6. bis 4. Jh. v. Chr.* (= *Xenia* 14 [Constance 1985]), once again highlights the controversy over the existence of a Colchian state from the sixth to the fourth century in view of Herodotus' characterization of the political situation in the Near East (cf. Lordkipanidze 13ff), but unfortunately fails to consider the whole of my argument. Direct evidence of royal power in Colchis appears in literary sources: Xenophon, recounting events of 401, says that in Colchis (on the Phasis) "reigned a descendant of Aetes" (Αἰήτου δὲ υἱοῦς ἐτύγγανε βασιλεύων αὐτῶν : *An.* 5.6.37)—thus attestation of both a king in fifth-century Colchis and a royal line claiming descent from the legendary king Aetes. Similarly, Pliny reports that "Saulaces the descendant of Aetes had already reigned in Colchis" (*iam regnaverat in Colchis Saulaces Aetae suboles*: *HN* 33.15), and Strabo emphasizes the hereditary character of royal power in his report on the sceptuchies (11.2.18): διαδεξάμενοι βασιλεῖς εἰς σκηπτουχίας διηρημένην ἔχοντες τὴν χώραν μέσως ἑπραττον. Thus Graeco-Roman authors attest a royal authority in Colchis and even a royal dynasty. Perhaps these accounts reflect attempts of the Colchian royal house to strengthen their right to the throne and supreme authority by tracing their genealogy to the mighty king Aetes. According to Strabo (1.2.39) "Aetes is believed to have ruled over Colchis, and the name Aetes is still locally current among the people of that region." Indeed a sixth-century A.D. Colchian aristocrat bears the name Aetes in Agathias (*Hist.* 3.8–11).

in the rocky ground (Fig. 2.31, 36).⁶¹ Thus the hilltop became a peculiar functional center, pointing to the concentration of secular and spiritual life in the hands of the ruling nobility.

Clearly the formation of a ruling class and its social isolation led to the detachment of its residence in an administrative center, as the dwellings of the commoners are in areas adjoining the hill. This distinction of living quarters vividly reflects the hierarchical system within populated sites and the dominant position of their hegemony. The defenses of Vani further illustrate the site's administrative function. On a high hill at Mtisdziri, 10 km north of Vani, a detached tower of the fifth and fourth centuries, erected on a stone socle and with wooden, rubble-filled walls three meters thick, controlled the surrounding territory and defended the approaches to Vani.⁶² Thus from the sixth to the fourth century Vani, the residence of the ruling elite, emerges primarily as a political and administrative center aimed at exploiting local agriculture and holding political, ideological, and economic sway.

Indeed the principal handicraft industries were concentrated at such administrative centers and served exclusively the Colchian ruling elite. As I have tried to demonstrate through analysis of style and manufacturing sites, local artisans produced the vast number of luxury articles, precious ornaments, and insignia of authority found in the rich Vani burials. These are of great significance for the sociological attribution of the handicraft articles: the high development of the jeweler's craft reflects the complex class structure of Colchian society.

Nor is this all. The center of the local elite must have also contained other types of manufacture, such as metalworking (primarily weapons production), construction, costly metal and earthenware vessels (usually present only in rich burials), valuable grades of cloth (a Colchian export according to

⁶¹ Details in *Vani IV* (1979) 150–54; M. I. Jandieri, "Derevyannoe zdanie V v. do n.e. na Vanskom gorodische [A Wooden Building of the 5th Century B.C. at the Vani City Site]," in *Symposium IV* 234–45.

⁶² G. A. Gamkrelidze, "K izucheniyu drevnekolkhidskikh sooruzhenii [Toward the Study of Ancient Colchian Defensive Works]," *Saqartvelos SSR metsnierebata akademiis moambe [Bulletin, Georgian Academy of Sciences]* 88.2 (1977) 501ff (in Georgian and Russian). An analogous situation is attested in the Near East: cf. S. Kashkai, "O gorodakh-krepostyakh na territorii Manni [On the City-Fortresses on the Territory of Manna]," in *Drevnii Vostok [The Ancient East]* (Yerevan 1976) 39ff.

Herodotus),⁶³ and other luxury goods. Concentration of handicrafts at a single center stimulated urbanization—a powerful impetus to the emergence of crafts as a major social factor.

These processes, fully represented in the archaeological remains of the sixth through the fourth century, offer proof, albeit indirect, of the urbanization of Colchian society in this period, with (a) highly developed handicrafts (metalworking, pottery, jewelry) based on a local, fairly rich source of raw materials and centuries-old traditions of perfected technological skills, (b) standardization of the main forms of articles of mass production (generally having their own Colchian typological pattern), and (c) the spread of handicraft wares beyond the seat of manufacture, attesting Colchian manufacture in commodities, *i.e.*, developed trade in handicraft wares. The economic contacts of Colchis with the external world, *i.e.*, its involvement in the orbit of Greek trade, undoubtedly played a significant rôle in this process.

The varied Greek imports discovered at Vani and its environs supply interesting material for the history of Greek trade with Colchis. Greek imports, for this early period not yet considerable at Vani and inner Colchis, include fragments of a Chiot chalice-style cup and Attic Little-Master cups, Lesbian and Chiot amphorae, and Ionian gold signet rings.⁶⁴ Despite their small numbers these Greek wares of the second half of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth century are important in attesting the involvement of Vani in the complex process of Greek trade with Colchis. Greek imports at Vani become even more varied and numerous *ca* 450–*ca* 350, when Athens dominated commercial relations with Colchis and the entire Black Sea littoral. Besides Attic wares, material appears from centers closely connected with Athens and not infrequently exporting their manufactures through Athens and her allies, including some highly artistic specimens: ceramic containers, painted and black-glaze pottery, polychrome glass vessels, metalware, and gold signet rings. Athenian trade with Colchis intensified immediately after the Persian Wars, as the number of Attic wares securely dated to the second quarter of the fifth century shows (PLATE 9a, b).

Greek imports likewise spread throughout the territory of Vani in the sixth and fifth centuries, as seen in finds of Chian and

⁶³ See Lordkipanidze, *DK* 152f for references.

⁶⁴ For details see Lordkipanidze, *DK* 154ff, and *Vani* VII (1983) for Greek imports.

Lesbian gray clay amphorae, Attic painted and black-glaze pottery at Shumata, Mtsdziri, Dablagomi, Dapnari, Sulori, and elsewhere.⁶⁵ Therefore, as an administrative center of the Colchian kingdom in the sixth through the fourth centuries, Vani became a major trading and economic site, probably indicating the emergence of a permanent market.

The archaeological material of Phase II at Vani permits the conclusion that early Colchian cities were political, religious, and economic centers for their respective administrative areas, but it is too early to say whether this was the only type of Colchian city. At any rate, the course of development (sketched here) for Colchian cities must have significantly affected the location of urbanization, in contrast to the Greek trading cities on the Colchian coast in the great period of Greek colonization.⁶⁶

Phase III (ca 350–ca 250)

A new phase began at Vani ca 350, coinciding with the decline of the Colchian kingdom. By this time the principal sanctuary on the hilltop had been destroyed and burnt, the ritual ditches had ceased to function, and there are traces of conflagrations at many other sites. At the same time, however, new stone structures as well as new cemeteries (including the hilltop) appear, and the material culture generally acquires new features.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Vani VII* (1983) 154f nos. 531ff, 540f, 569.

⁶⁶ For detailed discussions of Greek colonization in Colchis see O. Lordkipanidze, ed., *Problemi grecheskoi kolonizatsii Severnogo i Vostochnogo Prichernomor'ya* [*Problems of Greek Colonization of the Northern and Eastern Black Sea Littoral*] (=Materiali I Vsesojuznogo simpoziuma po drevnei istorii Prichernomor'ya. Tskaltubo, 1977 [*Materials of the First Symposium on the Ancient History of the Black Sea Littoral. Tskaltubo, 1977*] [Tbilisi 1979]) 345, 369–406; O. Lordkipanidze and T. K. Mikeladze, ed., *Demograficheskaya situatsiya v Prichernomorje v period velikoi grecheskoi kolonizatsii* [*The Demographic Situation in the Black Sea Littoral in the Period of Great Greek Colonization*] (=Materiali II Vsesojuznogo simpoziuma po drevnei istorii Prichernomor'ya. Tskaltubo, 1979 [*Materials of the Second Symposium on the Ancient History of the Black Sea Littoral. Tskaltubo, 1977*] [Tbilisi 1981]) 242–394.

⁶⁷ *Vani IV* (1979) 25–37. In this period a drastic change in the development of material culture is observable throughout Colchis. The homogenous Colchian culture of Phase II gradually disintegrated from the mid-fourth century with the weakening of the formerly powerful Colchian kingdom, and the latest archaeological studies reveal emerging cultural differences in the populations of the littoral and the eastern areas.

Stone architecture at Vani, first attested in this period, is seen in a rectangular structure—probably for civic purposes—built of limestone slabs on a high foundation of large cobblestones (see *Vani* II [1975] 27ff, figs. 39–44). Presently under excavation are thick-walled structures resting on a rocky foundation, rising to a height of 6 m. and built of irregular rectangular stone blocks made fast with clay. In all probability a wooden structure stood on the stone socle; the structure was filled with cobblestones, partially turned into a slagged amorphous mass (*i.e.*, vitrified) by fire (PLATE 10a). A sacrificial platform, of which the study is still incomplete at this writing, was also found, paved with cobblestones and with four round, shallow holes for libations (PLATE 10b; *Vani* VII [1983] 93–115, figs. 79ff).

With the emergence of stone architecture came drastic changes in several types of material culture. Although there is a continuation in the third quarter of the fourth century of some forms of Colchian pottery characteristic of the sixth and fifth centuries (*e.g.* pithoi, jugs with tubular handles, basins with slanting walls), new forms gradually appeared (*Fig. 5*), as well as painted pottery with various motifs (chevrons, geometric pattern) done in red on light engobe.⁶⁸ Such pottery, well-known in neighboring Iberia and Armenia⁶⁹ and so far attested only in eastern Colchis, undoubtedly penetrated from eastern Georgia.

Innovations in goldsmithery also occurred. In the fourth and third centuries we find a continued production of the earrings characteristic of Phase II (with openwork or hollow spherical and dipyramidal pendants), but new kinds of jewelry showing Greek influence superseded the diadems with rhomboid bezels, earrings with radials, and other types common in the earlier period. One example of the new types is the headdress of the 'noble warrior', formed of hollow gold figurines of a rider and birds adorned with granulation (*Vani* I [1972] 203ff, fig. 106). Al-

⁶⁸ *Vani* I (1972) 208 no. 16, 212 no. 13, fig. 176; VIII (1986) 109f, fig. 93.

⁶⁹ Iberia: B. A. Kuftin, *Arkheologicheskie raskopki 1947 goda v Tsalkinskoi raione* [Archaeological Excavations of 1947 in Tsalka District] (Tbilisi 1948) 8, pl. III; D. Koridze, *Arqeologiuri dzeglebi, Tbilisi* [Archaeological Remains, Tbilisi] II (Tbilisi 1958) pl. IX, fig. 13; K. D. Kvizhinadze, *Pamyantniki ranneantichnogo perioda jugo-vostochnoi Gruzii* [Remains of the Early Classical Period of Southeastern Georgia] (diss. Tbilisi 1975) 32f; Armenia: G. A. Tiratsyan, "O raspisnoi keramike drevnei Armenii [On the Painted Pottery of Ancient Armenia]," *Istorico-filologicheskii zhurnal* 3 (30) (Yerevan 1960) 272.

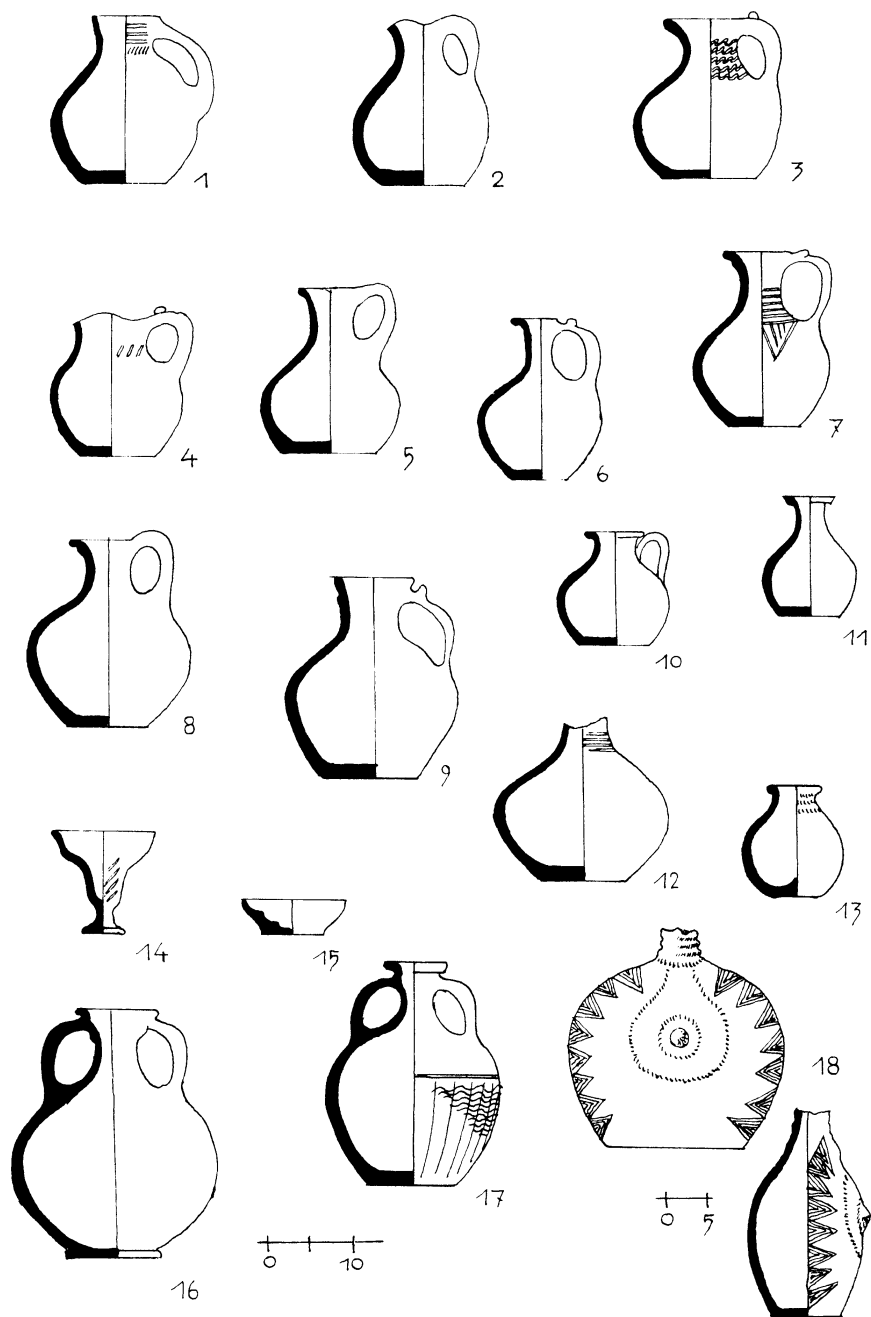


Figure 5. Local Pottery, fourth-third centuries B.C. (Phase III)

though direct analogies with Greek works are uncertain,⁷⁰ the bells on the figures show the influence of Greek jewelers. Parts of gold wreaths representing an olive leaf and a laurel branch and seeds are likewise of local manufacture but following Greek models.⁷¹ The discovery of wire rods of gold and a set of bone articles, presumably jewelers' tools, in cultural layers of the fourth and third centuries attests the unbroken local tradition of manufacturing gold ornaments (*Vani* VII [1983] 114, fig. 24).

Alongside locally produced articles, however, imported Greek ornaments are also found, such as a necklace of plaited chain ending in cornelian beads and miniature heads of horned lions (PLATE 11a), polychrome plaques (from chance finds), and parts of a diadem with a representation of a Heracles knot, decorated with garnet, enamel, gold rosettes, palmettes, and grain-shaped pendants.⁷² The provenience of these imports, widespread throughout the Classical world, is difficult to ascertain.

Phase III at Vani also witnesses innovation in Colchian glyptic, a local craft developed early from Hittite (Cappadocian) and Assyrian influence. Local engravers now carved legal seals, including insignia (e.g. the gold signet ring of the noble warrior Dedatos) as well as official and personal seals.⁷³

Furthermore, economic and cultural relations with the Greek world rose to a new level in Phase III. The varied imports of Greek pottery include amphorae from Chios, Thasos, Mende, Sinope, Heraclea, and Rhodes—the so-called Solokha I type—Attic red-figure and black-glazed vessels, and Asia Minor clayware; though numerically small in comparison to finds at

⁷⁰ Closest are gold figures found in Colchis at Ochamchire: cf. Kuftin (*supra* n.5) 272, pl. 73.4. Another figure of unknown provenience is preserved in the Historico-Ethnographic Museum at Kutaisi.

⁷¹ Chqonia (*supra* n.50) 59–62, and “Yuvelirnoe iskusstvo Kolkhidi v IV–III vv. do n.e. [The Jeweler's Art of Colchis in the 4th–3th Centuries B.C.],” in *Prichernomorje v epokhu ellinizma* (=Materiali III Vsesojuznogo simpoziuma po drevnei istorii Prichernomor'ya. Tskaltubo, 1982 [*Materials of the Third Symposium on the Ancient History of the Black Sea Littoral. Tskaltubo, 1982*] [Tbilisi 1985: hereafter ‘Symposium III’]) 519–29.

⁷² Chqonia (*supra* n.50) 113, figs. 40f; for details on diadems with the ‘Heracles knot’ see H. Hoffman and P. R. Davidson, *Jewelry from the Age of Alexander* (Mainz 1965) 51ff with references.

⁷³ M. N. Lordkipanidze, “Arqauli da arqaizirebuli sabechdavi-bechdebi Vanidan [Archaic and ‘Archaizing’ Signet Rings from Vani],” *Vani* II (1975) 134ff.

barbarian settlements of the northern Black Sea littoral, these indicate the principal directions of Greek trade with Colchis *ca* 350–*ca* 250. A gradual decline of Attic imports coincides with the general loss of Athenian dominance in Black Sea trade, but the ever-increasing finds in recent years of Sinopean pottery at Vani and other Colchian sites demonstrates Sinope's commercial activity in the area beginning with the mid-fourth century.⁷⁴ Indeed the discovery of Sinopean coins and amphorae locally made after Sinopean types shows the extent of Sinopean economic influence.⁷⁵ But Macedonian gold staters of Philip II, Alexander II, and Philip III also occur, probably used for exchanges between communities and replacing Cyzicenes in the monetary market of the Black Sea littoral.⁷⁶

Greek trade with Colchis stimulated imitation of Greek customs. Burials now yield, for example, greaves, strigils, gold wreathes (symbolizing veneration of the deceased as hero), and adornments with the Heracles knot (to which Greeks ascribed miraculous healing power).⁷⁷ The spread of some elements of Greek urban architecture should also be dated to this period: abundant finds of Sinopean roof tiles appear in layers of the fourth and third centuries at Vani along with a relatively small number of local manufacture.

Burial customs reflect this new period at Vani, as novelties occur alongside traditional elements: wooden burial structures are no longer covered with cobblestones but with large boulders

⁷⁴ See Lordkipanidze, *DK* 182f, 193ff; for Greek imports see *Vani* VII (1983).

⁷⁵ Colchian amphorae of the Sinopean type, possibly the work of visiting Greek potters, occur elsewhere in Colchis: see R. V. Puturidze, "Kolkhidskie amphori iz Vani [Colchian Amphorae from Vani]," *KSIA* 151 (1977) 68–71. They were also exported to the northern Black Sea littoral, as now known from the urban site of Elizavetinsky on the lower Don and the Chersonese: see I. B. Brashinski, *Grecheskii keramicheskii import na Nizhnem Dony* [*Greek Ceramic Imports on the Lower Reaches of the Don*] (Leningrad 1980) 32; V. V. Sozник, "Tsetskhlodje kolkhidsvie amphori ellinisticheskogo perioda v Chersonese [Colchian Amphorae of the Hellenistic Period in Chersonese]," *VDI* 1991.2, 62.

⁷⁶ G. F. Dundas and G. A. Lordkipanidze, "Monetebi vanidan [Finds of Coins from Vani]," *Vani* III (1977) 195, fig. 114.25; O. Lordkipanidze *et al.*, "Vanis arqeologiuri eqspeditsia [Vani Archaeological Expedition]," in *PAI. v 1978 godu* (1981) 118, pl. IX.2; cf. D. B. Shelov, *Monetnoe delo Bospora v VI–II vv. do n.e.* [*Minting in Bosphorus in the 6th–2nd Centuries B.C.*] (Moscow 1956) 129.

⁷⁷ *Vani* I (1972) 211, figs. 172f; VIII (1986) 86 nos. 11f, fig. 65.2; Chqonia (*supra* n.50) 59f, fig. 39.

of local sandstone or its ground mass, to which clay may be added. At the village of Dablagomi, 10 km north of Vani, a rich burial from the beginning of the third century has a covering of Sinopean tiles.⁷⁸ Amphorae accompany the burials. Coins found on the deceased—one burial yielded eighty silver Colchian pieces (PLATE 11b)—reveal the influence of Greek views of the afterlife. Further, the custom of slaying servants and slaves for interment with their master comes into fashion, and pithos burials become prevalent in the territory of Vani.⁷⁹

Thus identification of Phase III as a new stage in the history of Vani is warranted and confirmed by stratigraphic evidence. On the one hand, (a) the burial of a 'noble warrior' on the central terrace lay on the cult site of an earlier period;⁸⁰ (b) places of the ancient cult on the hilltop also received fourth- and third-century burials, while sanctuaries and cult structures of the "Colchian period" (Phase II) were destroyed. On the other hand, the same burials were covered (or destroyed) by the construction of walls or other buildings of a later period (*i.e.*, from the end of the third century).⁸¹

The spread of pithos burials to Vani may reflect definite ethnic changes in eastern Colchis, related to the settlement of east Georgian (Karthian-speaking) tribes there, as the practice occurs concurrently from the second half of the fourth century in both Colchis and eastern Georgia (Iberia). Ceramic vessels and other grave goods in east Colchian burials notably resemble those of eastern Georgia. Presumably this custom came to Georgia from the interior of Asia Minor.⁸²

⁷⁸ See V. A. Tolordava, "Pogrebenie s cherepichnim perekritiem iz Dablagomi [A Burial with a Tiled Roof from Dablagomi]," *KSIA* 151 (1977) 48–54, and "Mdidruli samarkhi dab lagomidan [A Rich Burial from Dablagomi]," *Vani* II (1975) 68–79.

⁷⁹ N. Sh. Kiguradze, *Dapnarskii mogilnik* [*The Dapnari Burial Ground*] (Tbilisi 1976) 49f; V. A. Tolordava, *Dakrdzalvis tsesebi elinisturi khanis sarkartveloshi* [*The Burial Rites in Georgia of the Hellenistic Period*] (Tbilisi 1980; with Russian summary).

⁸⁰ The burial cuts through a thick layer of the fifth and fourth centuries; an altar, built of vertically set stone slabs and connected to the burial, shows traces of a conflagration. See V. A. Tolordava, in *Vani* VIII (1986) 80ff.

⁸¹ Details in *Vani* IV (1979) 7–57, 135ff.

⁸² See Tolordava (*supra* n.79). In recent years fourth- and third-century pithos burials have been found in Turkey on the east bank of the Euphrates: U. Seraroglu, "Agin and Kalaycic Excavations, 1970," in *Keban Project, 1970* (= *Activities*, Ser. 1.3 [Ankara 1970]) 32f, figs. 18, 25.

These developments, so clearly seen at Vani, are related to the new Hellenistic impulses greatly changing the Near East and Caucasian Iberia (eastern Georgia), where in the second half of the fourth and the third centuries there can be no doubt of an explosion of urbanization, hitherto attested solely in the Old Georgian historical tradition but now seen in a series of sites (e.g. Samadlo, Nastakisi, Tsikhiagora).⁸³ Excavations of these cities already yield traces of contacts with the Hellenistic world, demonstrating the wide diffusion of some material culture of patently 'southern' provenience (principally Asia Minor): e.g. fine painted pottery (showing eastern Anatolian influences, in particular the late Phrygian style), and locally manufactured tiles with Greek letters resembling letter styles of Asia Minor, especially in Cappadocia.⁸⁴ Further, the name Δεδάτος, inscribed on the signet ring of the 'noble warrior' from Vani, has a close affinity with Cappadocian proper names,⁸⁵ and Cappadocian influences appear on other glyptic items from Vani.⁸⁶ In sum, the 'great expansion' of Caucasian Iberia and the colonization of eastern Colchis by Karthian-speaking tribes in the early Hellenistic period probably played no small rôle in introducing Cappadocian cultural elements to Colchis, as the Karthian speakers had been in contact with eastern Anatolia since the Iron Age.⁸⁷

⁸³ For Vani see O. Lordkipanidze, "O nekotikh innovatsiakh materialnoi kulturi Kolkhidi v IV–III vv. do n.e. [On Some Innovations in the Material Culture of Colchis in the 4th–3rd Centuries B.C.]," in *Kulturnoe nasledie Vostoka* [Cultural Inheritance of the Orient] (Leningrad 1987) 151–63; Iberia: Lordkipanidze, *Iberia* 14, and AG 146–61; Yu. M. Gagoshidze, *Samadlo I* (*Arkeologiuri gatkhrebi*) [*Samadlo I* (Archaeological Investigations)], II (*Catalogue*) (Tbilisi 1979–81; in Russian); A. I. Bokhochadze, "Nastakisi, Sarkine, Dzalisi—goroda Iberii antichnoi epokhi [Nastakisi, Sarkine and Dzalisi: Iberian Cities of the Classical Period]," *KSIA* 151 (1977) 93–102; G. G. Tskitishvili, "Rezultati rabot na 'Tsikhia-Gora' (1971–1974) [Results of the Work at Tsikhia-gora (1971–1974)]," *KSIA* 151 (1977) 87–93.

⁸⁴ Gagoshidze (*supra* n.83) I 87ff; N. V. Khazaradze and G. G. Tskitishvili, "Tsikhia-goras kramiti [The Tsikhiagora Tile]," in *Kavkasiur-akhloadghmosavluri krebuli* [Caucasian-Near-Eastern Collection] VI (Tbilisi 1980) 146–53 (with Russian summary); cf. Gagoshidze I 63f.

⁸⁵ The name of the owner of the signet ring is given in the nominative. ΔΕΔΗΣ does not occur among Greek proper names, but a Cappadocian, Δαδάτης Καππάδοξ, was buried in Athens: L. Robert, *Noms indigènes dans l'Asie Mineure gréco-romaine* (Paris 1965) 518. On names of the Δαδάς type see P. Kretschmer, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache* (Göttingen 1896) 337.

⁸⁶ Lordkipanidze (*supra* n.73) 134–46.

⁸⁷ It is noteworthy that Parnavaz, the first king of Iberia, built two strongholds on the border with Colchis, Shorapani and Dimna, serving as major outposts for the political domination of Iberia over the eastern areas of Colchis.

In the present state of knowledge, the function of Vani *ca* 350–*ca* 250 is difficult to judge. Given the weakening of the Colchian kingdom and clear traces of ethno-cultural changes, it cannot be ruled out that the region acquired a measure of independence and that new rulers (perhaps Dedatos was the first)⁸⁸ became local petty kings. The discovery at Vani of third-century tiles marked Βασιλική may provide indirect confirmation.⁸⁹

Phase IV (*ca* 250–*ca* 47)

A new phase at Vani began in the second half of the third century. The hill was enclosed with thick defensive walls, within which mainly religious structures, temples and altars, were built. Construction of these buildings ignored the former function of these sites, and at many places cemeteries of Phase III were destroyed (*Vani* IV [1979] 143). Vani seems to have become in Phase IV a peculiar city-sanctuary similar to the temple communities common in Asia Minor.⁹⁰ For this new period three construction periods are stratigraphically identifiable with fair accuracy.

The city gate and adobe defensive walls on a stone socle were built in the second half of the third century, along with a stepped ceremonial altar on the hilltop and a number of buildings of which the plans can only be partially reconstructed from sockets hewn in the rocky ground.⁹¹ At some point in the second quarter of the second century, all these structures were de-

See Lordkipanidze, *AG* 156ff; S. G. Qaukhchishvili, ed., *Kartlis Tskhovreba* [*History of Georgia*] I (Tbilisi 1955) 24; cf. N. A. Berdzenishvili, *Sakartvelos istoriis sakitkhebi* [*Questions of Georgian History*] VIII (Tbilisi 1975) 42ff; G. A. Melikishvili, *K istorii drevnei Gruzii* [*Toward the History of Ancient Georgia*] (Tbilisi 1959) 303ff.

⁸⁸ For this burial see *Vani* I (1972) 202–40; Lordkipanidze, *DK* 180–84.

⁸⁹ To date, at different sites within Vani both a well stratified layer of the fourth and third centuries and shifted layers have produced dozens of tiles of local clay bearing the stamp ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ ΜΗΛΗΒΗ[Σ ?] and the names ΟΡΑΞΟ and ΧΟΡΖΙΠ. See D. V. Akhvlediani, “Les tuiles estampillées de Vani,” in Lordkipanidze/Lévêque 283ff.

⁹⁰ O. Lordkipanidze, “K lokalizatsii τὸ τῆς λευκοθέας ἱερὸν [On the Location of τὸ τῆς λευκοθέας ἱερὸν],” *VDI* 1972.2, 106–25; cf. G. A. Perikhanyan, *Khramovie obshchiny Maloi Azii i Armenii* [*Temple Associations of Asia Minor and Armenia*] (Leningrad 1959); L. Boffo, *I re ellenistici e i centri religiosi dell’ Asia Minore* (Florence 1985).

⁹¹ Details in *Vani* VIII (1986) 54f.

stroyed, forming layers with material of the first half of the second century, which significantly include stamped handles of Rhodian amphorae from the so-called Pergamene complex (220–180).

After a short interval, new construction dating to the second half of the second century occurs throughout the site: remains of the destroyed structures were cleared away, and besides new temples, altars, and public buildings, the city gate was repaired and defensive walls were built along the slopes of the hill. Excavations in various parts of Vani demonstrate that for all new building of the second half of the second century a new construction level was created by covering the site with well-rammed clay.

The layout of the city-sanctuary had already taken shape in the second half of the second century. As detailed descriptions of most structures of this period have already been published,⁹² a list should suffice (*Figs. 6, 7*): a 'small' gate and strong defensive

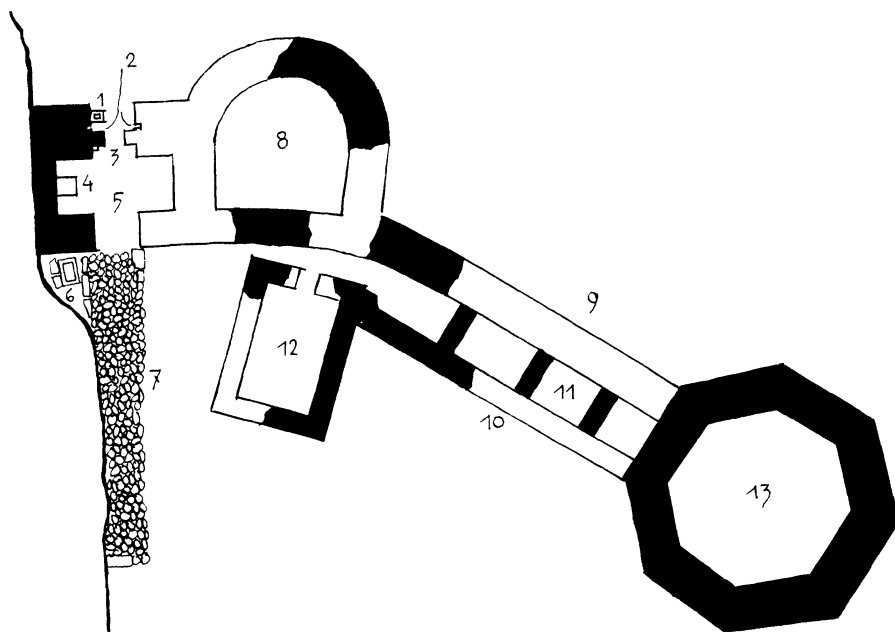


Figure 6. City Gate and the Northern Line of Defense (Fig. 2.1)

1, statue pedestal of goddess-protectress; 2, portcullis; 3, wicket; 4, altar; 5, inner court with shrine in west part; 6, sacrificial bath; 7, cobblestone path; 8, semi-circular tower; 9–10, defensive wall; 11, storage rooms; 12, barracks; 13, polygonal tower

⁹² See O. Lordkipanidze, "La Géorgie et le monde grèc," *BCH* 98 (1974) 921–36, figs. 10–25, and the *Vani* series.

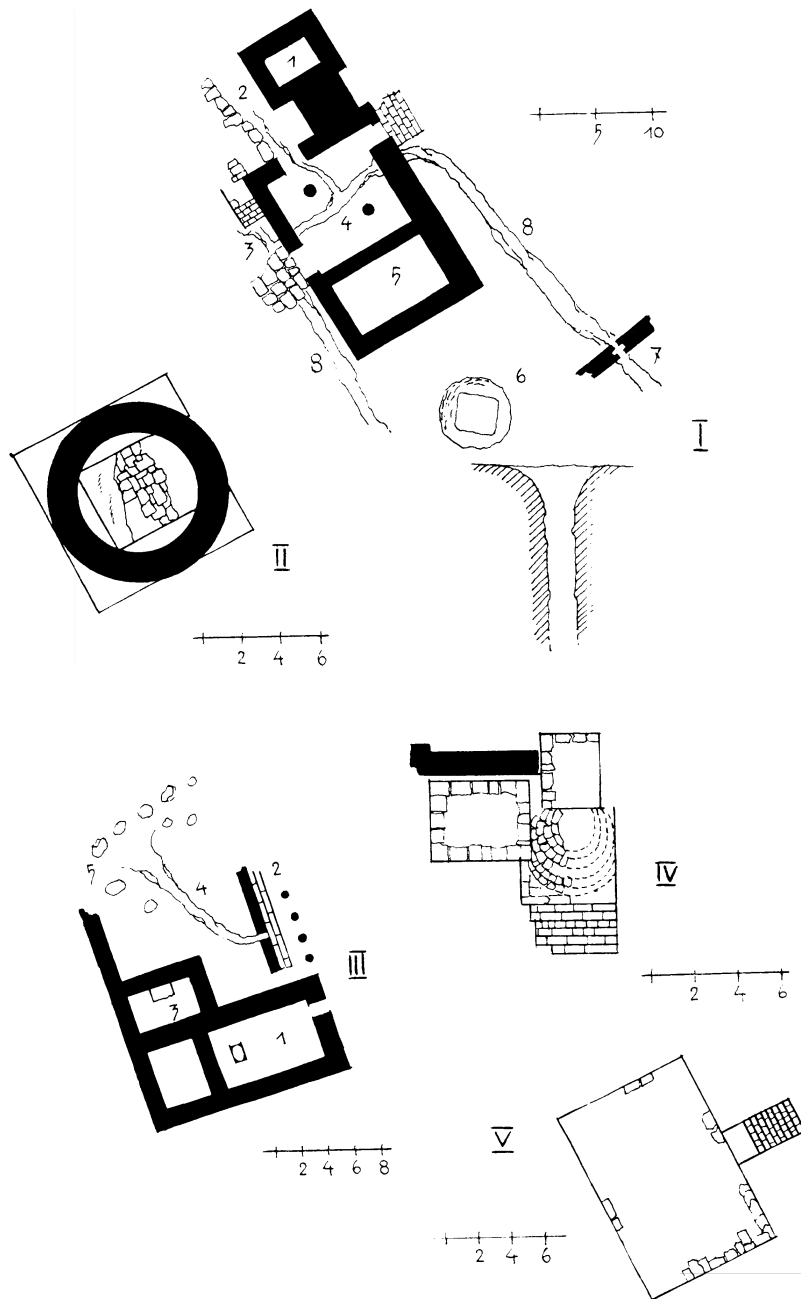


Figure 7. Main Cult Structures

I. temple complex (*Fig. 2.2*): 1, tower-like building; 2, sacrificial ground; 3, altar with steps; 4, colonnaded hall; 5, "hall of offerings"; 6, shaft (studied to 21 m.); 7, "watergate"; 8, ritual channels; II. round temple (*Fig. 2.18*); III. temple complex (*Fig. 2.8*): 1, room with mosaic floor, altar; 2, colonnaded altar with steps; 3, hall with altar; 4, ritual ditches; 5, ritual channels; IV. ceremonial altar with 12 steps (*Fig. 2.26*); V. ceremonial altar (*Fig. 2.35*).

system were erected in the northern part of the hill; the lower terrace housed a large temple complex occupying an area of approximately 800 m² (Fig. 7.I).⁹³

The central terrace contained a number of structures. On the southern part an intricate architectural complex consisted of a sanctuary of the god of wine-making and viticulture and a monumental colonnaded altar, its capitals adorned with figures; the altar had ritual ditches and sacrificial holes (Fig. 7.III).⁹⁴ In the eastern part of the central terrace, close to the slope, stood a 'round temple' (Figs. 7. II; 8) and a 'sacred barn' in which Colchian amphorae filled with wheat and millet were stored.⁹⁵ A monumental platform (24 m. long), built of stone blocks, and a sewer constructed from stone slabs occupied the northeastern part, while on the western side of the terrace stood an altar with twelve steps (six rectangular and six semicircular: Figs. 7.IV, 8).

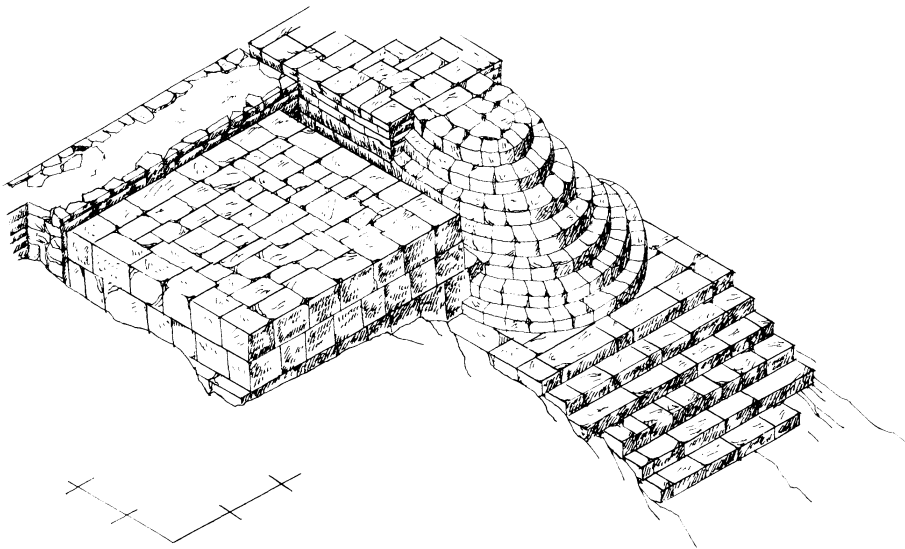


Figure 8. Ceremonial Altar with 12 Steps (Phase IV)

⁹³ Lordkipanidze, *GKK* 14f, 65–69, and “The Fortification of Ancient Colchis,” in *La fortification dans l’histoire du monde grec* (Paris 1986) 179–84, figs. 222ff.

⁹⁴ *Vani* VIII (1986) 34–51; Lordkipanidze, *GKK* 24–32.

⁹⁵ *Vani* I (1972) 189ff, II (1975) 26f.

Not far from the altar was a 'treasury' with numerous offerings: e.g. about two hundred pyramidal clay weights for a vertical loom, Colchian pithoi and amphorae, earthenware basins and jugs, red-painted thymiateria for the ritual fire, iron daggers and spearheads, bronze umbones, a mirror and a torque, a silver medallion with a bust image of a goddess in high relief (PLATE 12a), small silver sculptures of nude youths (PLATE 12b), and gold ornamented plaques (*Vani* VIII [1986] 64ff). On top of the hill stood another monumental altar (*Fig. 7.v*), representing a stone platform (16 m. wide, 9 m. long) with staircases leading to it from the east (eight steps are recorded: *Vani* IV [1979] 143–46).

Thus in all areas of the city only cult buildings have come to light, with walls of well-hewn, rusticated quadrels and adobe and roofed with flat and curved tiles.⁹⁶ Some buildings feature a fairly original technique of roofing: ceramics (60 × 60, 50 × 50 cm.) covered with similar flat or curved tiles (the so-called calipers) arranged upside down to provide drainage (*Fig. 9*).⁹⁷ The build-

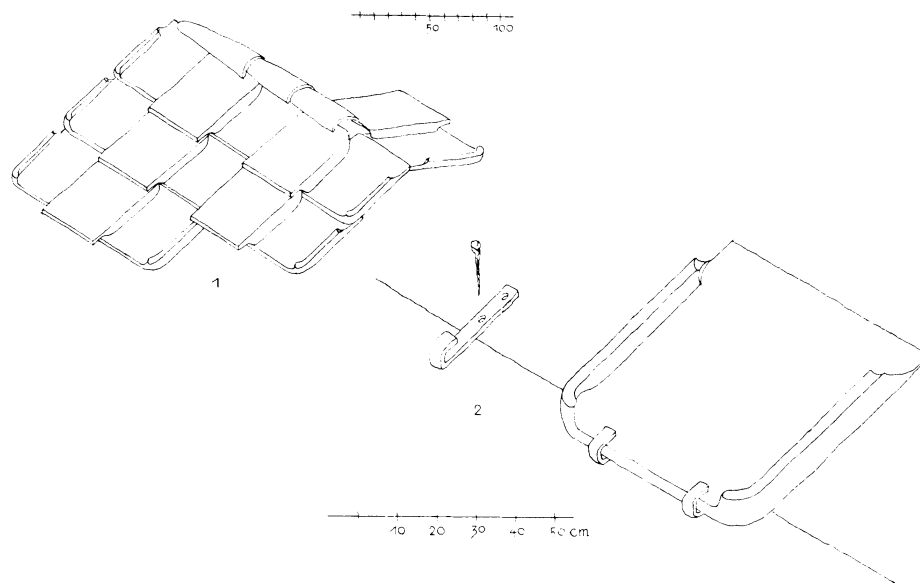


Figure 9. System of Tile Roofing

⁹⁶ G. G. Qipiani, *Arkhitektura i stroitelnoe delo Vanskogo gorodishcha* [*The Architecture and Construction of the Ancient City Site of Vani*] (diss. Tbilisi 1983).

⁹⁷ *Vani* II (1975) 25f; D. V. Akhvlediani, *Cherepitsa Gruzii ellinisticheskoi epokhi po materialam Vanskogo gorodishcha* [*Georgian Tiles of the Hellenistic Period according to the Materials of the Vani City Site*] (diss. Yerevan 1986).

ings were richly decorated, as indicated by the discovery of *e.g.* a lion head waterspout (part of a sima: PLATE 13a), figured capitals (13b), friezes with relief images (PLATE 14a), a stone acroterion (14b), and terracotta antefixes.⁹⁸

Bronze statues and sculptural compositions adorned the city. Especially noteworthy is a fragmentary bronze torso found in the destruction level of the mid-first century. The statue had clearly been dumped from another place after the demolition of the buildings, coming to rest on the debris of the walls and the tile roof. Fragments of other bronze sculptures—*e.g.* a female hand with a finely modeled palm—were found nearby.

The bronze torso (1.05 m. high), badly damaged with head, arms, and legs below the knees missing (PLATES 15, 16, *Fig. 10*), bears marks of blows from a blunt tool. It is covered with a noble patina of fine grayish-green, and the small, round orifices in the chest show that the nipples were rendered by inlay with another metal—most probably copper, a characteristic of monumental bronze sculpture.⁹⁹ Despite its poor preservation this statue clearly represents an outstanding work of Hellenistic plastic art, and can tentatively be attributed to the circle of so-called classicizing monuments of the period.¹⁰⁰

As a highly skilled portrayal of an athletic youth, the statue impresses by its striking harmony and perfection: the musculature strong but appropriate, each part subservient to an organic whole. The upright posture and frontality without any inclination or turn, almost horizontal shoulders, and arms closely fitting the body (at least in its upper part) give the impression that the statue may have been executed in the Severe Style.¹⁰¹

Individual parallels in the arrangement of the figure may be traced in the so-called Critian Boy. Both, probably in the same way, rested fully on two feet, and both can be traced to a prototype that provided the model for a number of Roman

⁹⁸ G. I. Lezhava, *Antikuri khani saqartvelos arqiteqturuli dzeglebi* [*Architectural Relics of Georgia of the Classical Period*] (Tbilisi 1979) 23, pls. CIII-CIV (in Georgian and Russian); G. G. Qipiani, *Kapitelebi* [*Capitals*] (Tbilisi 1987) 34-49 (with Russian summary).

⁹⁹ C. Rolley, *Die griechischen Bronzen* (Munich 1984) 154.

¹⁰⁰ The term usually refers to monuments of Hellenistic and Roman art, of which originals of the Severe Style and of the second half of the fifth century provide the prototypes: P. Zanker, *Klassizistische Statuen* (Mainz 1974) xviii; for a detailed discussion of the differing definitions see J.-P. Niemeier, *Kopien und Nachahmungen im Hellenismus* (Bonn 1985) 9ff.

¹⁰¹ B. S. Ridgway, *The Severe Style in Greek Sculpture* (Princeton 1970) 3-11.

copies known as the Group of the Omphalos Apollo, although the creator of the prototype and the date remain controversial.¹⁰²

Notwithstanding these similarities, the Vani statue also displays clear differences, especially in the modelling of the abdominal muscles, that indicate a particular kinship (without being fully identical) with the famous bronze statue A from Riace, which, most scholars agree, antedates the statue of another warrior (B) found with it, and which some regard as closer to monuments of the Severe Style.¹⁰³ Although the prototype of the Vani bronze statue must remain an open question—and it can only be conjectured that an original (or originals) from the period of stylistic transition from Severe to the High Classical Style provided the prototype¹⁰⁴—the Vani youth may be tentatively assigned to the cycle of Hellenistic classicizing monuments that reflect the Severe Style.

Given that the absence of the head, arms, and other parts precludes identification of purely Hellenistic structures and stylistic peculiarities, it is difficult to judge whether the Vani statue is a free imitation of an early original or a mere copy. It may be a work of the Eclectic Style combining various features, such as those of the famous Athlete of Stephanus—which stylistically resembles the Vani torso—and those of the statues of the Omphalos Apollo, going back to the Severe Style.¹⁰⁵ (Currently the Athlete is not considered a copy of an early classical original, but is treated as “an eclectic neoclassical original created *ca* 50 by the Roman sculptor Stephanus, pupil of Pasiteles.”)¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ridgway (*supra* n.101) 29–43. Considered most important are the Omphalos Apollo (preserved in the National Museum at Athens), discovered at the Theater of Dionysus in Athens beside the stone sculpture of Omphalos and at first erroneously taken for the base of a statue of Apollo (hence its name), and another well-known work of this group, the Choiseul-Gouffier Apollo, purchased on the Istanbul market and presently in the British Museum. See Ridgway figs. 94–97.

¹⁰³ See *Due Bronzi da Riace* (=BdA, Serie Speciale 3 [Rome 1984: hereafter ‘*Bronzi da Riace*’]) I–II, esp. B. S. Ridgway, “The Riace Bronzes: A Minority Viewpoint,” II 313–26; cf. O. Deubner, “Die Statuen von Riace,” *JdI* 103 (1988) 127ff.

¹⁰⁴ Marble statues of the Classical Style ordinarily provided prototypes for bronze statues: Ridgway (*supra* n.101) 73.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Zanker (*supra* n.100) 75ff, 51–58; discussion of these stylistic terms in Niemeier (*supra* n.100) 12ff.

¹⁰⁶ J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1986) 175.

A date for the Vani statue must remain uncertain until its original site is ascertained. Its stratigraphic context suggests that the statue may have been made in Vani at the end of the second or early in the first century. As the statue is so far one of the oldest Hellenistic works that suggest the Severe Style,¹⁰⁷ a number of difficult questions arise: when, where, and how did this trend originate in Hellenistic art? Can we speak of a revival of the Severe Style in the third century or perhaps even later? Does the statue depict simply a young athlete or, as Hellenistic rulers are often represented as nude athletes, a heroicized ruler?¹⁰⁸

Preliminary cleaning and conservation (by R. A. Bakhtadze and Ts. N. Abesadze of the chemical restoration laboratory of the State Museum of Georgia) revealed that the statue was made from a wax model with a clay core: an iron frame (a vertical bar with two extensions in the area of the legs) has survived within the statue (*Fig. 10*); the frame was covered first with a mold-forming mass (clay mixed with as yet undetermined organic matter and an admixture of fine-grained sand), then with purer and finer clay, of which the consistency permitted obtaining a thin contour. The wax model of the statue was subsequently shaped on this base.¹⁰⁹ Initial analyses of the metal and patina (under the direction of R. A. Bakhtadze) have shown that the bronze contained 88% copper, 10% tin, and approximately 1.5% lead besides admixtures of silver, iron, and arsenic;¹¹⁰ the patina (internal and external) yielded 15% tin and approximately 5% lead.

Fragments of bronze statues do not constitute isolated finds at Vani but in fact occur frequently: fragments of human body parts of various sizes (arms, legs, throat, shoulder, eyelashes, *etc.*), draperies, horse hoofs, satyr's ears, snakes, altars, and ornamented (even gilt) details of various objects. Clearly this temple-city of Colchis was impressively embellished with bronze sculptures and sculptural compositions.

¹⁰⁷ Monuments of the cycle of the Athlete of Stephanus and Omphalos Apollo would be included here.

¹⁰⁸ N. Himmelmann, *Alexandria and Realism in der griechischen Kunst* (Tübingen 1983) 87; Zanker (*supra* n.100) 76.

¹⁰⁹ Rolley (*supra* n.99) 29f, figs. 2-5; see also *Bronzi da Riace* I 83-148.

¹¹⁰ Such an alloy is considered of the highest quality: Rolley (*supra* n.99) 29.

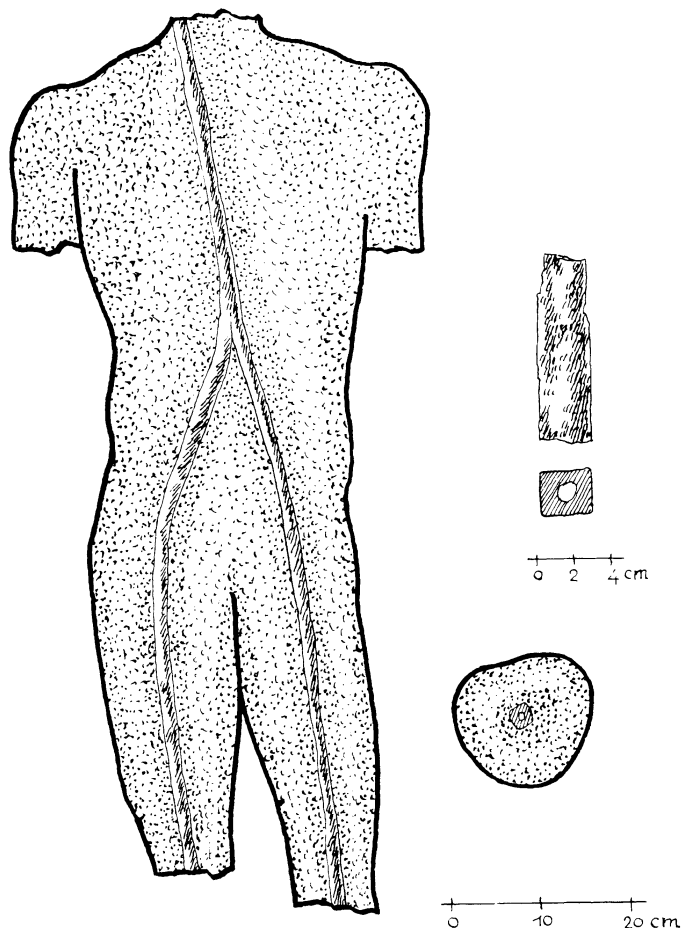


Figure 10. Inner Structure of the Torso

The statues were undoubtedly produced by visiting Greek masters or their local counterparts, well-acquainted with the canons of Hellenistic art and techniques of casting bronze.¹¹¹ Numerous finds of small rectangular inset plaques (repair patches), leaves, cuttings of sheet bronze and bars, and a large quantity of bronze fragments attest manufacture on the spot. Moreover, the remains of a foundry, dated to the end of the

¹¹¹ The centers from which the bronze sculptors at Vani were invited is a complicated problem. As a rule, they are believed to have been Athenians, but copyists from Greek cities of Asia Minor and the Aegean islands are also known. See H. Lauten, *Chronologie römischer Kopien nach Originalen des V. Jht.* (Bonn 1966) 51; cf. B. S. Ridgway, *Roman Copies of Greek Sculptures: The Problem of Originals* (Ann Arbor 1984) 84.

second or beginning of the first century (*Fig. 2.25*) and intended for casting bronze statues, were discovered in 1989: an oval pit cut in the rocky ground (length 1 m.), its walls faced with fragments of tiles plastered with clay, containing numerous parts of molds of baked clay. Funnels with traces of bronze used to pour metal were also identified. Smaller pits and channels cut next to the oval pit on two sides drained the metal and wax, and a quantity of bronze slag was found nearby.

The temple-city Vani, her sacred character confirmed by numerous traces of sacrifices, various altars, and ritual objects throughout the site,¹¹² has also produced epigraphical evidence.

¹¹² Some believe that Vani became a Pontic fort garrisoned by troops of Mithridates VI Eupator after his conquest of Colchis: see G. A. Lordkipanidze, *K istorii drevnei Kolkhidi [Towards the History of Ancient Colchis]* (Tbilisi 1971) 21f, cf. 24 n.4 (with English summary); G. P. Dundua, "Ichreboda tu ara moneta vanshi?" *Matsne* 1974.2. I have already pointed out that this view contradicts the archaeological evidence (*Vani* III [1977] 17–173; *Symposium* III 662–66), but it recurs in D. B. Shelov, "Kolkhida v sisteme Pontiiskoi derzhavi Mitridata VI [Colchis in the System of the Pontic State of Mithridates VI]," *VDI* 1980.3, 36: "The arguments regarding the cultic character of the Vani settlement are very convincing, but this could hardly prevent the stationing there of a detachment of Pontians." But where? In the temples and altars, where traces of sacrificing and cultic rituals are evident throughout? T. T. Todua ("Kreposti Mitridata VI Eupatora v Kolkhide [The Strongholds of Mithridates VI Eupator in Colchis]," *VDI* 1988.1, 139f) goes even further in alleging "several dozens of points of Pontian rule" in Colchis, based on Strabo's reference (11.3.28) to Mithridates' construction of 75 strongholds, although it is clear that the most important forts were in Armenia Minor. Among Todua's numerous inaccuracies is the claim that "Vani also belongs to the cities fortified by Mithridates VI" (143). But the excavations of Vani have shown that the fortification system of the city originated in the third century and was modified in the second constructional level in the second half of the second century—greatly antedating Mithridates' conquest of Colchis, occurring not before 111–110 at the earliest. Todua also conjectures that if "Vani was a temple city, this may suggest the idea that it did not have military and political functions" (144)—an unfortunate misunderstanding, as temple cities had not only strong defenses but also a powerful military organization: see Perikhanyan (*supra* n.90) 77ff. Although the finds of a relatively large quantity of Pontic coins could be taken as weighty proof of the presence of Pontic troops in Vani, "it is untenable," as Shelov notes (*Symposium* III 652), "to link the entire monetary circulation at this center only to the Pontic garrison and to assert that it was an economy of Pontic soldiers. In the first place, as a rule, the soldiers would have preferred large copper coins, to say nothing of coins of precious metals, rather than small coins, whereas here it is small coins that prevailed." The finds of coins at Vani are chiefly connected with cult buildings: it cannot be ruled out that they may have been offerings, but they doubtlessly reflect the overall political and economic situation in the area. Thus a Mithridatic garrison at Vani, though theoretically plausible, so far lacks serious proof.

A fragmentary Greek inscription (18 cm. long) on the right side of a bronze plate with a semicircular relief frame has 26 lines preserved. Dated to the third century on paleographic and linguistic grounds, the document describes temple legislation. The occurrence of the name Σούρει (*scil.* nom. Σούρις) in this text increases the likelihood of identifying Vani with the Σούριον of Ptolemy (5.5.6) and Pliny's Surium (*HN* 6.13).¹¹³

Thus the formation of a temple-city with a clearly hellenized appearance must be connected with the colonization of eastern Colchis by the Meskhian tribes, who migrated to eastern Georgia from southeastern Asia Minor.¹¹⁴ Indeed the organizational form of temple-cities with a strongly hellenized elite of priests is characteristic of Cappadocia and Phrygia, areas near which the initial settlement of Meskhians is hypothesized.¹¹⁵

Vani was destroyed in the middle of the first century. If, as I have conjectured, Vani is the sanctuary of Leucothea in Strabo, then the destruction must be credited to two invasions of Colchis—the first *ca* 49 by the Bosporan king Pharnaces and a second *ca* 47 by Mithridates VII.¹¹⁶ Excavations have clearly revealed traces of two destructions within a short period.

¹¹³ For details see T. S. Qaukhchishvili, "Grecheskaya nadpis na bronzovoi plite iz Vani [A Greek Inscription on a Bronze Plaque from Vani]," *Symposium* IV 248–61. The proposed date of the inscription does not contradict its archaeological context: the inscription was discovered in a banked clayey layer covering buildings of the second half of the third century (*i.e.*, the first constructional level of Phase IV) destroyed in the second quarter of the second century. The same layer, however, also occasionally has remains of the second constructional level (second half of the second century): *cf.* O. Lordkipanize, R. V. Puturidze, *et al.*, "Raboti vanskoi ekspeditsii [Papers of the Vani Expedition]," *PAI v 1984–1985 gg.*, 53f. On the identification of Vani with Ptolemy's Σούριον and Pliny's Surium *cf.* N. V. Khoshtaria, "Antikuri khanis arqeologiuri dzeglebi dasavlet saqartveloshi [Archaeological Remains of the Classical Period in Western Georgia]," in *Saqartvelos arqeologia [Archaeology of Georgia]* (Tbilisi 1959) 223, and *Collected Papers* II 66. Yet this identification is not yet secure, as another geographical name also appears in the inscription. Besides, an explanation is needed for Pliny's comment (*HN* 6.13) that of the Colchian cities "today only Surium exists." The archaeological data show that Vani was razed in the middle of the first century B.C.

¹¹⁴ See Lordkipanidze (*supra* n.90) 111–14.

¹¹⁵ Perikhanyan (*supra* n.90) 5ff; Boffo (*supra* n.90) 85ff. Hellenistic culture, so vividly demonstrated at Vani, does not appear in other areas of Colchis, not even at the Greek trading cities of Phasis and Dioscurias on the littoral. Thus I am inclined to link the emergence of a Hellenistic temple city to the ethno-cultural influence of the Meskhians.

¹¹⁶ Strab. 11.2.17; Dio 42.45.3; Lordkipanidze (*supra* n.90) 111ff.

One invasion undoubtedly occurred on a spring day when a festival (perhaps the Anthesteria) for the god of wine-making and viticulture was being celebrated at the city gate, as a terracotta mask of Dionysus and numerous earthenware pots were found at the altar near the gate (*Vani* I [1972] 201f). This phase of destruction included demolition of the city gate, the sanctuary and its mosaic floor, the stepped altar, and the round temple on the central terrace. Signs of havoc and conflagration abound: walls razed to the foundation, fired stones, baked tiles and adobe, and charred beams. All this recalls the hand of Pharnaces, known through excavations for his destruction of cities on the northern Black Sea littoral.¹¹⁷

After the first destruction, occupation at the site continued only on the central terrace, where defensive walls (*Fig. 2.14*) were hastily erected (the so-called third constructional level). A fresh catastrophe soon befell, following which the site ceased as a major center. Life on the hill lost its intensive character.

Roman and mediæval remains are very fragmentary. A mound-like embankment on the hilltop dating *ca* 400–*ca* 200 yielded a robbed burial of *ca* A.D. 200 in a bronze bath-like sarcophagus with lion heads soldered on its sides and holding iron rings in their jaws. A denarius of Caracalla minted at Caesarea in 197 was found not far from the burial. A church and burials without grave goods on the central terrace and a kiln on the hilltop for firing pithoi represent the early mediaeval period.¹¹⁸ To the high mediaeval period belong on the hilltop only the burial of a warrior and fragments of *e.g.* glazed crockery and bracelets of blue glass (*Vani* IV [1979] 136ff).

Excavations at the site are still in progress.

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¹¹⁷ Cf. G. A. Tsvetaeva, "Pokhod Farnaka na Fanagoriyu v svete poslednikh arkheologicheskikh otkritii [The Campaign of Pharnaces to Phanagoria in the Light of Recent Archaeological Excavations]," *MatiIss* 130 (1965) 234ff.

¹¹⁸ *Vani* III (1977) 152, IV (1979) 133, 137; Taqaishvili (*supra* n.2) 85–110.