Vani: An Ancient City of Colchis
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For some 140 years 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). Beginning in the 1870s


2 M. Brosset, Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l’Armenie. 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 Kavkaszkogo istoriko-arkheologicheskogo instituta v Tiflise II [Tbilisi 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
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). 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). 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, _Arqueologiuri 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, _Kollektsii Kavkazskogo museya_ [Collections of the Caucasian Museum] (= _Museum Caucasianum_ 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. 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. 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.

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.

5 B. A. Kuftin, 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.


8 The results of the excavations are regularly published in Vani, the collected papers of the Vani Archaeological Expedition; see also the annual PAl. 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.
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.²⁹ Other significant routes, running from southern Georgia (Meskheti) through the passes of the Lesser Caucasus and from southwestern Georgia (modern Guria), also passed through Vani.³⁰ 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

²⁹ 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 indoetidan shavi zghvisaken mimavali satransito-savachro gizis shesakheb [On the Transit and Trading Route from India to the Black Sea],” Sakartvelos metsniereba akademis moambe [Bulletin, Georgian Academy of Sciences] 19.3 (1957) 377–84, and DK 154ff, 191ff.

structuress, 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.). Analogous pottery is typical of Colchian sites ca 800–ca 650.

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


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 millenium, and is widely found in settlements and burials of the first half of the first millenium. See Kuftin (supra n.5) 121, 143, 256, 276; A. I. Kakhidze, Saqartvelos zgvispirtetis 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 II (Sukhumi 1969) 51ff; T. K. Mikeladze, Arqoologiuri kveleva-dzieba rionis kvemo tselze [Archaeological Explorations in the Lower Reaches of the Rioni] (Tbilisi 1978: hereafter ‘Mikeladze, Rioni’) 24ff (with Russian summary), and Kolkhetis adrarkinis khanis samarooqebi [Colchian Burial Grounds of the Iron Age] (Tbilisi 1985) 20ff (with Russian summary); T. K. Mikeladze and D. A. Khakhutaishvili, Drevnekolhidskoe poselenie Namcheduri [The Namcheduri Settlement] (Tbilisi 1985) 13–20; E. M. Gogadze, Kolkhetis brinjaoa da adreuli rkinis khanis namosakharta 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 representations\textsuperscript{13} but widespread as bronze pendants in so-called Luristan bronze.\textsuperscript{14} Yet their date and association with Luristan bronze is questionable, since most derive from private purchases on the market.\textsuperscript{15}

Such figures, also common in the Greek world and generally assigned to the geometric period,\textsuperscript{16} have been found in eighth- and seventh-century contexts at Olympia, Delphi, Athens,
Crete, Rhodes, Samos, and elsewhere. In Italy these figures frequently appear in seventh- and sixth-century contexts.

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


19 M. Rostovtzeff, “A propos de quelques bronzes d’Anatolie, de Syrie et d’Armenie,” 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 eterusca, 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.\(^\text{20}\) 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.\(^\text{21}\) 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).\(^\text{22}\) 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.\(^\text{23}\) The entire Colchian lowland was economically
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).  

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. 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 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...
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. Other, typologically diverse vessels (jugs, bowls, phialae) 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. 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). 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. Thus the discovery at Vani of


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 Nimfei [The Finds of Colchian Coins and Pithoi at Nymphaeum]," VDI 1952, 238–42; I. B. Zeest and I. D. Marchenko, "Nekotorie tipi tolstostennoi keramiki iz Pantikapeya [Some Types of Thick-walled Pottery from Panticapaeum]," Matiliss 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.

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, dipyrnidal 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


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, 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. 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), 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

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

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 Manaeans, 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 Manaeans 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.
while it also became fashionable in western areas \textit{ca} 700–\textit{ca} 500, occurring in the most diverse combinations of finishing gold ornaments in Cyprus, Samos, mainland Greece, Macedonia, Etruria, and the Black Sea littoral.\textsuperscript{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 millennium with the Hurrian-Urartian population of Mana and Media.\textsuperscript{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 resulting\textsuperscript{48} in the creation of the strikingly original style of Colchian goldsmiths abundantly attested at Vani.\textsuperscript{49} 

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

\textsuperscript{47} According to Herodotus the Colchians and Saspires (east Georgian tribes) immediately bordered on Media: \textit{cf.} 1.104: “from the Colchi it is an easy matter to cross into Media: there is but one nation between, the Saspires”; 6.84: “the Scythians themselves should essay to invade Media by way of the river Phasis.” Herodotus (\textit{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 Saspires 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).

\textsuperscript{48} Some stylistic elements linked to Manaean-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 (\textit{Vani} I [1972] 225, pl. 201) may also have stemmed from this culture, as analogous decorations of beads appear at Marlik (Negahban 319, pl. 1x, fig. 16) and at Hasanlu, an area within the diffusion of Manaean culture at the beginning of the first millennium (\textit{cf.} R. Ghirshman, \textit{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: \textit{cf.} Ghirshman 128, fig. 70; R. N. Dyson, “Problems of Prehistoric Iran,” \textit{JNES} 24 (1965) 200, fig. 7.

\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vani} VI (1981) 29–94, 148, 154, figs. 73f.
(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.
PLATE 2 LORDKIPANIDZE

(a) Clay figurine with three heads on each side
(b) Two-headed protome
(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.)
(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) 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.
(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.
(a) Gold phiale (dm. 1 cm.), 4th century B.C.
(b) Gold earrings with bipyramidal pendants (h. 9 cm.), 4th century B.C.
PLATE 8 LORDKIPANIDZE

(a) Rich burial (of a ‘noble woman’), 5th century B.C.
(b) Detail: gold and silver ornaments
(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) Stone wall (so-called vitrified fort), 4th–3rd century B.C.
(b) Sacrificial ground laid with cobblestones, 4th–3rd century B.C.
(a) Gold necklace, beads, stater of Hieron II
(b) Colchian silver coins from a late 4th–early 3rd century burial
PLATE 12 LORDKIPANIDZE

(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) 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.
PLATE 14 LORDKIPANIDZE

(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
PLATE 16  LORDKIPANIDZE

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. 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. 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 Aeetes 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, 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.

51 Details in Lordkipanidze, DK 86ff, and (supra n.33) 261ff; Chqonia (supra n.50).
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). 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: 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, where there are also burials in ordinary ground pits and different grave inventories that only occa-

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. The situation at neighboring Sachkhere is analogous.

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 Mtisidziri near Vani. 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

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

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


\(^{60}\) A. J. Graham's review (CR N.S. 37 [1987] 312f) of my monograph, *Das alte Kolchis 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 Aeetes" (Ἀἰτίπου δὲ υἱὸς ἔτυχεν βασιλεὺς 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 Aeetes. Similarly, Pliny reports that "Saulaces the descendant of Aeetes had already reigned in Colchis" (iam regnaverat in Colchis Saulaces Aeetae 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 σκηνοσίας διηρημένην ἑχοντες τὴν χώραν μὲνος ἐκπραττον. 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 Aeetes. According to Strabo (1.2.39) "Aeetes is believed to have ruled over Colchis, and the name Aeetes is still locally current among the people of that region." Indeed a sixth-century A.D. Colchian aristocrat bears the name Aeetes in *Agathias* (*Hist.* 3.8–11).
in the rocky ground (Fig. 2.31, 36). 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 hegemons. 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. 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

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Herodotus), 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 role 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. 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, Mtisdziri, Dablagomi, Dapnari, Sulori, and elsewhere. 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.

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.

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

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 cobbles (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 cobbles, 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 cobbles 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. Such pottery, well-known in neighboring Iberia and Armenia 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 dipyrainodal 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-

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

Figure 5. Local Pottery, fourth–third centuries B.C. (Phase III)
though direct analogies with Greek works are uncertain, 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. 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. 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 (Cappadoecian) 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.

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.


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.

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 cobbledstones 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 amfori iz Vani [Colchian Amphorae from Vani],” KSI/A 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 Don [Greek Ceramic Imports on the Lower Reaches of the Don] (Leningrad 1980) 32; V. V. Soznik, “Tsetskhlodje kolkhidsvie amfori ellinisticheskogo perioda v Chersonese [Colchian Amphoras of the Hellenistic Period in Chersonese],” VDI 1991.2, 62.
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. 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.

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; (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).

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.


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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{84} Further, the name Δεδάτος, inscribed on the signet ring of the ‘noble warrior’ from Vani, has a close affinity with Cappadocian proper names,\textsuperscript{85} and Cappadocian influences appear on other glyptic items from Vani.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{87}


\textsuperscript{85} The name of the owner of the signet ring is given in the nominative. ΔΕΔΑΤΟΣ does not occur among Greek proper names, but a Cappadocian, ΔΑΔΑΤΟΣ, was buried in Athens: L. Robert, \textit{Noms indigènes dans l’Asie Mineure gréco-romaine} (Paris 1965) 518. On names of the ΔΑΔΑΣ type see P. Kretschmer, \textit{Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache} (Göttingen 1896) 337.

\textsuperscript{86} Lordkipanidze (\textit{supra} n.73) 134–46.

\textsuperscript{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) became local petty kings. The discovery at Vani of third-century tiles marked ἒστιν ικνή may provide indirect confirmation.

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. 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. At some point in the second quarter of the second century, all these structures were de-


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 ΧΟΡΦΙΙ. See D. V. Akhvlediani, "Les tuiles estampillées de Vani," in Lordkipanidze/Lêvéque 283ff.


91 Details in Vani VIII (1986) 54f.
destroyed, 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

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*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

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VANI: AN ANCIENT CITY OF COLCHIS

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. 7.1).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)

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.9 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-

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**Figure 9. System of Tile Roofing**


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


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 1988) 9ff.

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."

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.


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, 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?

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. 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; 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.

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107 Monuments of the cycle of the Athlete of Stephanus and Omphalos Apollo would be included here.
108 N. Himmelmann, *Alexandria and Realismus 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.
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. 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. Jh. (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,\(^\text{112}\) 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, “Ichrebo da 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 Evpatora 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 Σούρης (scil. nom. Σούρης) in this text increases the likelihood of identifying Vani with the Σούρης 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 hypothetized.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 bron佐voi 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., “Raboty vanskoi ekspeditsii [Papers of the Vani Expedition],” PAl v 1984-1985 gg., 53 f. On the identification of Vani with Ptolemy’s Σούρης 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 ethnocultural 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] 20f). 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 mediaeval 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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October, 1991

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