

**Temples and Palaces in the Ancient Georgia:
Interpretation difficulties in the Context of the
Near Eastern Archaeology**

A number of remains of the Antique period structures have been discovered in last few decades in Georgia. Naturally except trying to date them one of the main point is to identify their function.

Majority of those sites (buildings) is dated with high level of certainty which is based on the analyses of found artifacts and using of new technologies. It seems natural that discovered archaeological context and correct date has to help to define correctly function of discovered sites (buildings), but surprisingly exactly in this field scholars encounter difficulties.

I would argue that current situation in Georgian archaeology and history of architecture reflects general situation in the Near Eastern Archaeology. Checking relatively recently published literature on the Near Eastern archaeology and especially history of architecture shows that in fact there is not one dominated (or commonly shared) opinion about interpretation of excavated buildings or certain compositional schemes. In many cases controversial opinions have been expressed.

As an example it can be indicated on the site Takht-i Sangin in Tajikistan. I. Pichikian, archaeologist who excavated the site identified it as a fire temple, but this opinion was criticized by P. Bernard.¹ Different interpretations were suggested for Square Hall in Old Nisa (G. Pugachenkova, G. Koshelenko).² Speaking about earlier period it is obvious that there are controversial hypotheses about those structures discovered on the territory of ancient Iran which had been interpreted as temples, especially fire temples and tower buildings (K. Schipmann, Cl. Rapin, etc).³ Even conventional interpretation of Persopolis as a royal residence was argued and proposed hypotheses that it was a ritual city (A. U. Pope).⁴

In Georgia a situation is the same. That is confirmed by a number of articles where authors expressing their reservations on functional interpretation of some discovered structures (sites).

A good example to illustrate this is Uplistsikhe where totally different interpretations are suggested for majority of rock-hewn structures – palaces/residences (K. Melitauri,⁵ D. Khakhutaishvili⁶), temples (T. Sanikidze,⁷ K. Khimshiashvili⁸), tombs (G. Kipiani⁹) or even a library (G. Kipiani¹⁰).

Interpretation of Tsikhia Gora site as fire temple by Georgian scholars (I. Gagoshidze,¹¹ G. Kipiani,¹² K. Khimshiashvili¹³) became subject of discussion by foreign colleagues during conference in 1997 organized by the Center for Archaeological Studies. They found possible to interpret the site as a palace.

I. Gagoshidze interpreted Dedoplis Mindori site as a temenos (temple site)¹⁴, but O. Lorkipanidze¹⁵ and N. Apkhzava¹⁶ expressed their reservations and indicate that the interpretation can be different.

Probably reason for different opinions on interpretation of sites that have been regarded as fire temples can be explained by distinct contrast between Tsikhia Gora and Dedoplis Mindori. At Tsikhia Gora archaeologists discovered whole range subsidiary structures like a barn, a “mill”, a wine-cellar (marani), residential (dwelling) structures for priests or servants while at Dedoplis Mindori site precinct

nothing like this has been discovered, at least until now. This difference between two sites, even nobody has indicated specially on it can hint to and became a clue for some important conclusions.

A. Bokhochadze found possible to interpret a mosaic floor bath discovered at Dzalisi as a bath-temple.¹⁷ This opinion raises many doubts.

All above-mentioned facts show how limited is our knowledge of the Antique period society, its beliefs, and its daily life.

I would like to finish with the same statement as I started: examples demonstrate that Georgian archaeology and history of architecture of the Antique period face the same difficulties and follow the same way as the archaeology of the Ancient Near East. I hope that further study of sites, buildings and structures discovered in Georgia can become a key for finding answers on many questions of the Near Eastern archaeology.

Notes:

1. Compare: I. R. Pichikian, Composition of Oxus Temple within Context of Architectural Parallels. – *Informacionnij bi'lleten MAIKCA*, vol. 12, 1987 (in Russian); and P. Bernard, Le temple du Dieu Oxus à Takht-i Sangin en Bactriane: Temple du feu ou pas? – *Studia Iranica*, vol.23, 1994
2. Compare: G. A. Pugachenkova, Ways of Development of Architecture of South Turkmenistan in the Ancient and Feudal Times, Moscow, 1958, p. 38(in Russian); and G. A. Koshelenko, Parthian Culture, Moscow, 1966, p. 22 (in Russian)
3. K. Schippmann, Die Iranischen Feuerheligtümer, Berlin, 1971; Cl. Rapin, Les sanctuaires de l'Asie Centrale à l'époque Hellénistique: État de la question, *Études de Lettres*, No4, 1992; About different interpretations of tower buildings see G. Kipiani, Pagan Temples of Colchis and Iberia and questions of Origin of Georgian Christian Architecture, Tbilisi, 2000, p.54, note 9 (in Georgian)
4. A. U. Pope, Persepolis as a Ritual City – *Archaeology*, vol. 10, 1957
5. K. N. Melitauri, Castles of Pre-feudal and Early Feudal Periods in Georgia, Tbilisi, 1969 (in Russian)
6. D. Khakhutaishvili, Uplistsikhe: Rock-hewn City, Tbilisi, 1989 (in Georgian)
7. T. Sanikidze, Uplistsikhe (in Georgian), Tbilisi, 1987
8. K. Khimshiashvili, The Architecture of Uplistsikhe, Georgia, *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, Vol. 43, 1999
9. G. Kipiani, Who had been Buried in Uplistsikhe, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Chair of the History and Theory of Art, Collected Papers, Study of Art, t.2, Tbilisi, 2001 (in Georgian)
10. G. Kipiani, "Two-pillar Hall" Architectural Complex in Uplistsikhe, (Pre-print), Tbilisi, 1990 (in Georgian)
11. J. Gagoshidze, Georgian Pre-Christian Temples, IV International Symposium on Georgian Art, Tbilisi, 1983
12. G. Kipiani, Pagan Temples of Colchis and Iberia and Questions of Origin of Georgian Christian Architecture, Tbilisi, 2000 (in Georgian)
13. K. Khimshiashvili, On the Temple Architecture of Iberian Kingdom, *Architectural Heritage*, vol.1, Tbilisi, 2001
14. J. Gagoshidze, The Temples at Dedoplist Mindori – East and West, vol. 42, Pt. 1, 1992;
15. O. Lorkipanidze, (Some Problematic Aspects of the History of Kartli (Iberia) in the 5th – 1st centuries), *Matsne*, No.1, 1985, p. 144 (in Georgian)

16. N. Apkhazava, Lower Alevi in the Early Medieval Period, Tbilisi, 1988, p.80 (in Georgian)
- 17 A. Bokhochadze, Dzalisi, in Summa, Historical and Cultural Monuments of Georgia, book 5, Tbilisi, 1990, pp. 329-333 (in Georgian)