

Challenges in Urban Archaeology in Tbilisi (Gudiashvili Square as a source of Medieval Ages Urbanism)

Gudiashvili Square is located in Kala, in the historical part of Old Tbilisi. Due to its location, it is obvious that it has a great historical and archaeological importance. In late medieval ages this square was named as Bezhana Garden. Until 1828 it was known with the name of Moghnisi (as Moghni, as Moghnini) on the behalf of the Virgin Armenian Church, located near to the square. This place until today is known with the name- Kolortaghi, same as Klortaghi. In 1828 this square was named of Abas-Abad on the behalf of capturing Persian city- Abas Abad by the Russian Imperial General Paskevich. In 1923 the square was named Alaverdiani, on the behalf of Stefane Alaverdovi. What about the contemporary name- Lado Gudiashvili Square, it was given in 1988 (**Elisashvili, Amashukeli, Elisashvili, Tsotskhalishvili, Gordeladze, 2011, p.3**)¹.

With the name of Bezhana Garden, Gudiashvili Square is marked on the Map of Kartli created by Vakhushti Batonishvili in 1735 (**Dumbadze, Guchua (Ed.), 1990, p.459, pl.65-E (Figure 1)**). As it appears, the square is located near to the one of the gate of Tbilisi called „Kojori Gate”, which was located at the place, where Leselidze Street (contemporary Kote Apkhazi street) joins to the Liberty Square (it was located in the western part of the defensive wall of Tbilisi) (**Dumbadze, Guchua (Eds.) 1990, p.243**). Over the centuries, the square has undergone multiple reconstructions, finally assuming its contemporary layout in 1844, complete with surrounding streets, dead-ends and corresponds to the present-day situation. (**Suramelashvili, Chachkhunashvili 2007, pp.5-6**). There is an important note about the name of Bezhana. Bezhana could be Phirkhulaant Nzarbega’s son, the uncle of Osepha, whom belonged this garden and was well-known citizen living during the reign of the king Erekle II in 18th century (**Berdznishvili 1965, pp.26-27**).

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Cellars in medieval ages had different functions. According to Maia Mania they were used for storing food and often contained refrigerating wells constructed with the bricks. Cellars also

¹ Special thanks to Tsira Elisashvili, Lia Bokuchava and the whole team of ICOMOS Georgia for their support and contribution during the works and the research.

² Rehabilitation-restoration project started in 2018 and is funded by Tbilisi Development Fund and Tbilisi City Hall. Archaeological monitoring was being carried out from the beginning of the project (2018) by National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia (by Z.Giorgadze, T.Niniashvili, T.Gurgenidze). From 2019 archaeological monitoring continued by myself and Lana Chologauri. For nowadays archaeological monitoring still continues by myself.

served for commercial purposes and as wine cellars with Kvevri (*pithos*- big wine vessel buried inside it). Sometimes they were used in order to live (**Mania 2003, pp.151-152**). All these cellars were built using so called ‘Georgian bricks’, which have different sizes that changed over the centuries. Jamlet Jghamaia gives detailed description what sized bricks were used during the medieval ages (see **Jghamaia, 1980**).

On Gudiashvili Square have been revealed cellars with different functions. Some of them are very badly preserved and is difficult to identify their function. Here have been excavated refrigerating well under the basement of Akshopireli 1/6 building and is preserved in quite good condition. It have been found inside the circular shaped cellar with elongated semi circled arches and with small niches for oil-lamps. This refrigerating well was a part of a big cellar which by art critics is roughly dated to back to the first half of 19th century and the end of 19th century as well. The cellar, of which part is this above discussed refrigerating well has rebuilt for several times³.

Such refrigerating wells were widely spread on Kutaisi settlement, about 40 such dwellings have been found. As Apolon Gabriadze mentions, those constructions were characterized for Feudal and other wealthy people’s palaces (**Gabriadze 2013, p.149**). According to J. Songhulashvili, collecting and keeping of snow and ice has a long history and is very well presented in ethnography and also in historical sources (such is legal code ‘Dasturlamali’). Such refrigerating wells were used in dukhan-bazaars, for cooling wine, meat, fish and other food (**Songhulashvili 1962, p.171**). J. Songhulashvili remarks that there are four types of depository for keeping the snow and ice. For an example in Shida Kartli snow and ice were kept in the pits, which were arranged to the north of the dwelling, thought that less sun light affect them. The second type depository were made in the rocks, near to the rivers and lakes, in his case there were arranged to the north of the rock. In the third type were unified refrigerating cellars, which were widely common in Tbilisi. The fourth type were so called ‘nook places’, northern slope of the mountains (**Songhulashvili 1962, p.172**). In Georgian medical, law books (such are ‘Iadigar Daudi’ by David Bagrationi- 16th century; ‘Medical book’ by Zaza Phanaskerteli- 15th century, and etc.) in ethnographic life is confirmed the usage of cold water, snow and ice for medical treatment. And there one more important notice that during the high temperature, ice was used as the medicine (**Phirphilashvili 1988, p.120**).

On Kutaisi settlement, refrigerating wells are represented on each excavated area and are dig into early medieval ages’ cultural layers and into the soil. They have cylindrical shapes and on the bottom have been found kitchen wares (**Gabriadze 2013, p.150**). According to the author, kitchen wares from these freezers indicates on the fact that they only didn’t use for keeping snow and ice, but as ordinary refrigerators (keeping for wine, water, food and etc.) (**Gabriadze 2013, 153**). Presumably refrigerating well was also discovered in Akhospireli 3/7, which was revealed inside the domed cellar.

It is obvious that refrigerating well from Gudiashvili Square was used with the same function as well and it was a component of another big cellar. This fact confirms its practical usage and importance for each dwelling and medieval ages daily life as well. This refrigerating well might not be identified as a component of a palace, but another dwelling of a wealthy person.

On the square have been revealed ceramic workshop with its kiln and other adjacent dwellings under the basement of Gudiashvili Square 7/2 building (**Figure 2**). Near to the kiln have been found defective ceramics (bowls, oil-lamps and other sherds), which appears to be characterized for 12th-13th centuries. There have also been fixed burnt layer in Late Medieval ages (presumably 18th century) dwelling, which presumably connects to the invasion of Agha

³ Thanks to Tsitsino Chachkhunashvili for identification and dating of the cellar

Mohammad Khan Qajar in 1795, when Tbilisi was burnt down to the ground during the reign of the king Erekle II (1720-1798). The traces of this invasion was also fixed in the cellar excavated on Akhospireli 2/4 and in the cellar located under the basement of Akhospireli 3/7. And demolishing of this cellar connects of this above mentioned invasion, on this indicates the burnt layer, fixed on the shelves of the arched and on the whole interior of the cellar. This vault arched cellar by an art critic supposedly is dated back to end of 17th and 18th century⁴.

Ceramic workshop with other dwellings, ceramic kilns and pits (full with defective ceramics) have been excavated on the territory of 300 Aragveli garden in Tbilisi (**Lomtadze 1955, pp.119-170**). The materials from ceramic workshop from 300 Aragveli garden was specially studied by Marine Mitsishvili (**Mitsishvili 1979**). She remarks that generally dates back to 12th-13th centuries. And demolishing of the workshop is connected to the Monghols invasion that happened in the 30s of XIII century (**Mitsishvili 1979, p.5**). Ceramic workshop with kilns and pits full with the ceramic sherds have been excavated on Erekle II square (**Grzelishvili, Tkeshelashvili 1961, pp.16-43**). There should be remarked that on Gudiashvili Square have been revealed a wide range of ceramic assemblages, in which have been distinguished more than 20 groups. Among them are distinguished: bowls, sphero-conical vessels, tobacco clay pipes, oil-lamps, salt holders, inkpots, lids, stewing pots, pots, jugs, basket fragments, vases, tripods made of white clay, defective and imported materials and etc.⁵

All above discussed examples indicate on the fact that there was quite developed local production of ceramic materials during the high medieval ages. It could be supposed that in the workshop from Gudiashvili Square were produced a limited ceramic materials, which was presumably only used for personal purposes or only for the surrounding area. But we should not forget the fact that there might be another workshop as well and it might be located in Akhospireli 2/4, under the vault arched cellar, where have been revealed a floor level with the pit inside⁶. Such pits were excavated on other medieval ages sites, such is above mentioned Erekle II square and connects to the ceramic kilns, where defective pottery fragments were thrown. According such cases, there is an important remark that “*citizens of Tbilisi were buried ceramic production remnant into the ground, or sometimes were throwing into Mtkvari*” (**Dumbadze M., Guchua V. (Eds.) 1990, p.125**).

On Gudiashvili Square have been revealed wine cellars as well. There have been identified about three well preserved such dwellings on different addresses with Kvevri (*pithos*- big wine vessel) inside (Beglar Akhospireli street N1/3- Three Kvevri, Beglar Akhospireli street N4- Six Kvevri and Abo Tbileli Street N6- five Kvevri (**Figure 3**).

There have also been confirmed water supplying system with reservoirs and clay tubes. The fact that water supplying has a great importance for Tbilisi is proved by the historical sources and with material sites as well (**Mindadze 1958, p.32**). On Gudiashvili Square, more precisely in Abo Tbileli str. N6 have been revealed two very interesting constructions revealed, from which one has rectangle shape with a small open section from above and to it is connected with rounded collector as well. This construction is supposed to be water reservoir. Another interesting construction has well shape built by bricks, which is wholly plastered from inside. Its bottom is

⁴ Thanks to Tatia Ghvineria for identification and dating the cellar

⁵ PhD colloquium about “The two groups of artefact from Gudiashvili Square (sphero-conical vessels and tobacco clay pipes)” have been done by myself (see Butsuradze T.- “The two groups of artefact from Gudiashvili Square (sphero-conical vessels and tobacco clay pipes)”, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, 2023

⁶ An article about the pit and the ceramic assemblages from Akhospireli 2/4 building have been discussed and soon will be published in the framework of the conference- ‘The 6th International conference on: Cities Identifies in Arts & Architecture (CITAA), from 5th-6th of December, 2022

plastered presumably with lime mortar and on the sides are attached three cobble stones on different levels. This fact paid attention and because of this is supposed to be used as water reservoir.

An important is to learn more about the economic history of feudal Georgia (**see Tabuashvili 2020**). Learning more about the economic situation is important to determine the trade connections with the adjacent regions which determines and influences on the country's cultural, economic and social life. From aforementioned, it is obvious that Gudiashvili Square played an important role during the medieval ages. Because of this fact, there are revealed different functioned dwellings and a big range of ceramic assemblages among which are distinguished local production and imported materials. These indicates on the fact that Georgia had a tight cultural, trade interrelations with the adjacent regions. Presumably could be said that most of the cellars and other dwellings around the square were demolished during the invasion in 1795, on which indicates quite strong burnt layers in the interiors of different cellars.

All those above discussed issues are preliminary results of the research which needs complex study with art critics, architects and definitely with archaeologists and this is an ongoing process. These researches will give us profound knowledge and will emphasize importance of this place for medieval ages Tbilisi.

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Figures

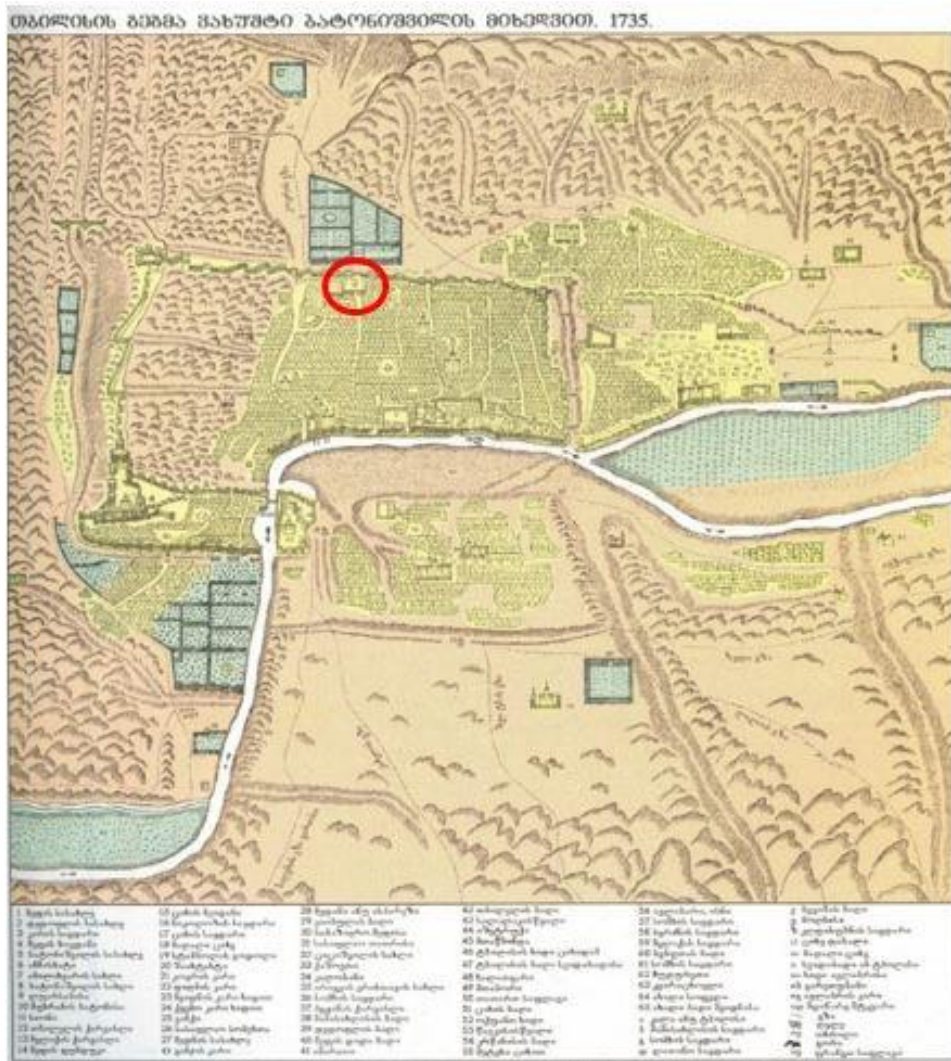


Figure 1- Map of Kartli by Vakhushti Batonishvili, 1735; with red circle location of Gudiashvili Square



Figure 2- Beglar Akhospireli Street № 1/6- Cellar with the refrigerating well inside (© Tatia Butsuradze) and Gudiashvili Square 7/2- ceramic workshop and kiln (© Tatia Butsuradze&Lana Chologauri)



Figure 3- Abo Tbileli Street №6- Wine cellar and Beglar Akhospireli Street №4- Wine cellar (© Tatia Butsuradze)



Figure 4- Abo Tbileli Street №6- Reservoir and Abo Tbileli Street №6- Water reservoir (© Tatia Butsuradze)