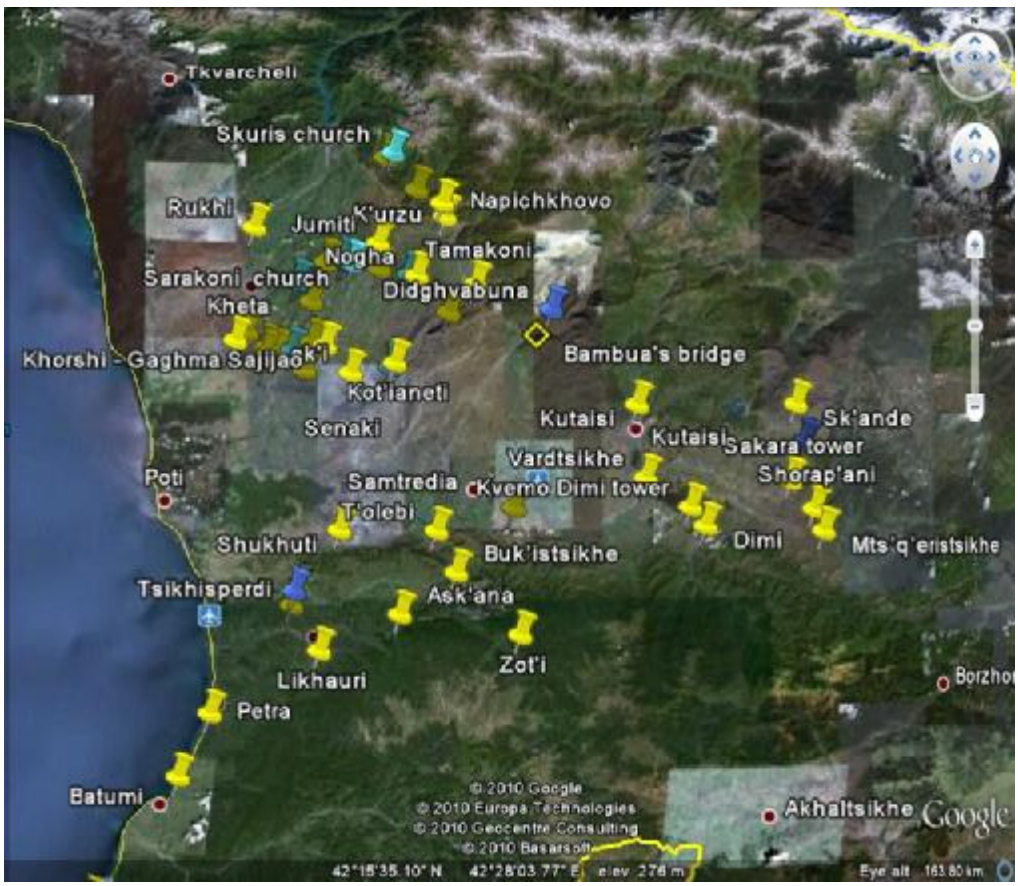
Nikoloz Murghulia

FaRiG Project:

The Fortification system of Lazika (Egrisi) kingdom in the 4th-6th centuries

(Research into West Georgian Castles)

Final report



Tbilisi – 2010

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

The main aim of the scientific survey project 'The Fortification system of Lazika (Egrisi) kingdom in the 4th-6th centuries *(Research of West Georgian Castles)',* financed by FaRiG, was the complex investigation of castles situated in West Georgia. As a result I visited and recorded 45 sites in West Georgia in 3 stages during last three months – March, April and May.

The 1st stage started on the fifth of March and lasted 20 days. I visited 14 sites* during the trip. 12 of them were monuments that were in the list before leaving for west Georgia. In addition I visited 3 further castle sites after receiving information about them during the trip from local people: in the villages Jumiti, K'urzu and Nogha. Roman Tolordava, the deputy chair of Chkhorots'q'u municipal assembly informed me about a castle at Jumiti. Unfortunately I found there only a cornfield, on which appeared to be a few remnants of the castle – a local inhabitant told me that he saw these ruins 20 years ago, but they were presumably destroyed by the local during agricultural work on that field. I could find only two small pieces of masonry (45 cm X 80 cm) there. But to make up for that, I discovered two new castles in Nogha and K'urzu – both of which appeared to be castles of the 4th-6th centuries.

Four sites I visited appeared to be ruins of churches. One site (K'irtskhi) yielded absolutely nothing – apparently my information about this place was mistaken, for I could not find anything resembling an ancient monument in that village and local people did not have any information about a castle in their village.

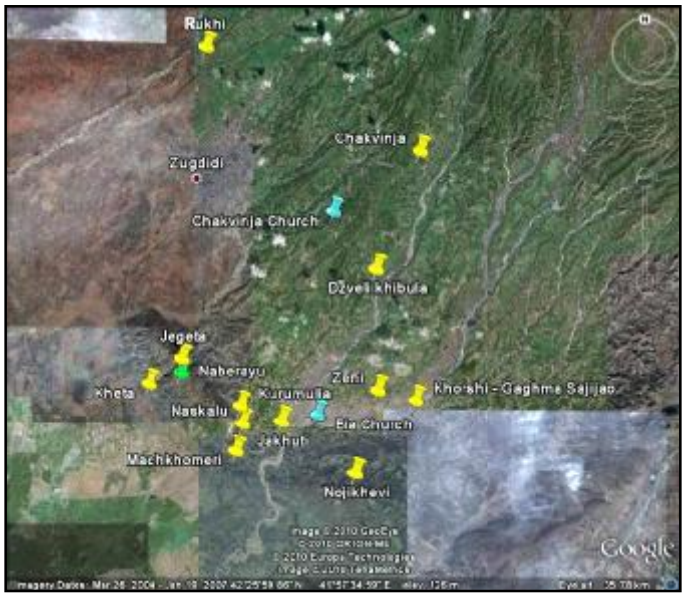
The 2nd stage started on the 13th of April and lasted 19 days. I visited 14 sites** during the trip to Khobi and Zugdidi municipalities. 11 of them were ancient monuments that were in the list

* Abedati, Tamakoni,Kot'ianeti, Ek'i, Khomak'irde, Osindale, Sarakoni (2 sites), Akhuti, Napichkhovo, K'irtskhi (none), Skuri, K'urzu, Nogha

** Machkhomeri, Nask'alu, Q'urumulia, Jakhuti, Bia Church, Gaghma Sajijao (same as Khorshi castle), Zeni, Dzveli Khibula, Nojikhevi, Jegeta, Kheta, Ch'akvinja Church, Ch'akvinja Castle (same as Jikhask'ari castle) and Rukhi.

before leaving for west Georgia. Two of them (Gaghma Sajijao and Khorshi castle) were apparently alternative names for the same place.

In addition I visited 4 further sites after receiving information about them during the trip from local people: in the villages of Bia, Jakhuti, Jegeta and Ch'akvinja. The monuments situated in Bia and Ch'akvinja appeared to be churches. But to make up for that, I discovered two new castles in Jakhuti and Jegeta.



Gogita Chitaia, the Senior-specialist of Cultural Heritage of Khobi municipality supported me during the trip as a guide and adviser. He informed me about the castles of Jumiti and Jegeta. He also took me to the village of Bia, where he thought that there were ruins of a castle tower. This turned out to be the remains of a church. There is some general information about most of the castles, which I visited in Khobi municipality in Gogita Chitaia's work "Poti and Khobi eparchy, Historical monuments". This book has helped me very much during the trip.

The 3rd stage started on 20th of May and lasted 21 days. I visited 17 sites*** during the trip in Imereti, Guria and Adjara regions. There is information about most of the monuments in the scientific literature. The Imereti region has been widely researched by Archaeologists V. Japaridze and O. Lanchava and there are 2 monographs about these sites. The book - 'Guria, vol. 1' helped me very much during the trip in Guria. But, I did not have any information about Kvemo Dimi and Sakara towers

*** Shorap'ani, Vardtsikhe, Kvemo Dimi tower, Dimi, Sakara tower, Sazano, Sk'ande, T'olebi, Shukhuti, Likhauri, Ask'ana, Buk'istsikhe, Zot'i, Tsikhisperdi, Petra-Tsikhisdziri, Batumi and Mts'q'eristsikhe.

from any literature; local people informed about these two monuments.
Although some of the researched monuments have been previously studied, including archaeological excavations and architectural drawings, there were not any drawn plans of others, like Zot'i, Shukhuti, Likhauri, and Batumi and I had to record these monuments completely. Also I used old drawings of some castles (Shorap'ani, Vardtsikhe, Petra-Tsikhisdziri) for my report.

2.0 Research Methodology

The main goal of the project was to gather as complete as possible information about the castles being researched. To achieve this goal I used several disciplines – Archaeology (collecting material from the earth of the castle territories), Landscape Archaeology (recording sites, preserved as humps and hillocks that remain above ground and probably represent the lines of the walls), Historical Geography (for describing the areas surrounding the sites) History of Art (using terminology to describe each site's architecture), Architecture (for drawing the castle), and Geography (work on topographical maps, Google Earth, GPS, for exact coordinates and altitudes).

These research methods allowed me to do complex investigation (chronological and typological) of the castles and in addition, finally, to use historical (written) sources for a better understanding of the genesis of the castles.

3.0 Transliteration system

For transliteration of Georgian Geographic and Personal names I used Georgian national system of Romanization copied From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

This system, adopted in February 2002 by the State Department of Geodesy and Cartography of Georgia and the Institute of Linguistics, Georgian Academy of Sciences, establishes a transliteration system of the modern Georgian alphabet in Latin characters.

Georgian	**Latin**
a	a
b	b
g	g
d	d
e	e
v	v
z	z
T	t
i	i
k	k'
l	l
m	m
n	n
o	o
p	p'
J	zh
r	r
s	s
t	t'
u	u
f	p
q	k
R	gh
y	q'
S	sh
C	ch
c	ts
Z	dz
w	ts'
W	ch'
x	kh
j	j
h	h

4.0 The Survey

4.1 1st and 2nd stages - Samegrelo region

Ek'i castle

This castle is situated at the South entrance of the village of Ek'i, in Senaki district, 8.5 km to the north of the town of Senaki. GPS coordinates: N42 19.568; E42 03.950; Altitude: 111 m.

The castle was built on a high hill (fig. 1), which rises 40m above the level of the road. The river Tsivi flows 500 metres away to the east and south sides of the hill. The hill has a steep slope on all 4 sides, especially from the south and east. From these sides it would be very difficult to reach the top of the hill. The easiest access to the castle was from the north side, but even so attackers would not have found it easy to reach, especially on account of the defensive ditch, which surrounds the castle (fig. 2). This ditch is 4 metres wide and 1 metre deep today. Its original depth must have been more then 1 metre, but over the centuries it has filled with soil. The ditch forms a circle surrounding the castle from all sides. Its total length attains 270 metres and its diameter is 93-99 metres. The smallest distance between ditch and centre point of castle is in the west part of the castle – 32 m; the biggest is to the East – 67 m.

The castle included fortified walls and tower (fig. 3). The tower is situated in the middle part of the castle and has a rectangular shape: 9.5 m. E-W by 12.0 m. N-S externally; internal dimensions 6.30 m. X 9.0 m. The south wall of the tower survives in better condition than any other part of the tower or fortified walls. The height of this south wall attains 7.5 m. Because of the height of the tower we can infer that the tower had at least 2 floors. Two little sockets are visible in the interior part of the tower's south wall (fig. 4); these probably held the beams that supported the tower's second floor. The thickness of the tower's walls is 2.0 m. The entrance (door) to the tower was probably in the east wall. That part of the tower, like the western and southern walls, is largely destroyed and stands only to a height of 1-2 m. But in the middle of the tower's eastern wall there is a gap (1.5 m.), which appears to be the entrance to the tower (fig. 5), though this cannot be proved conclusively.

The fortified walls of the castle remain only in two places around the Tower – to the south and to the north. To east and west only formless humps and hillocks remain above ground. These probably represent the lines of the walls, but we cannot say for sure without excavation.

The surviving length of wall to the south of the tower (the distance between the southern wall of the tower and the surviving wall is 9.5 m.) extends 8 m. and reaches 1 m. in height. Its orientation is E-W and at both ends the wall just disappears into the ground.

The other surviving wall is situated 8 metres to the north of the tower's north wall and extends only 2.75 m. This wall also runs E-W and disappears into the ground at both ends. The thickness of both sections of the castle wall is 1.20 m. Because of the poor condition of the castle, we unfortunately cannot say where the castle's main gate stood (fig. 3).

Unfortunately there is no information about Ek'i Castle in the Georgian or foreign (Byzantine) historical sources. Chronological and Typological identification of the castle have to be made according to the characteristics of the building and archaeological materials found on the site.

The building material, style of construction, shape and size of Ek'i Castle is typical for Lazika Kingdom castles of the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries. The castle complex includes, the central tower with thick walls, an outward fortified wall, and a defensive ditch (fig. 3). The facings (fig. 6) of the walls were built of elegantly cut limestone blocks (dim: min: 15X20 cm; max: 30X90 cm.) and mortar. Between these facings, the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone. There are bands surrounding the walls' first floor bottom level. These bands protrude 20cm out from the wall to a height of 40 cm. All these are very typical for other castles discovered in west Georgia, dated to the 4^{th}-6^{th} century. Surface finds of archaeological materials (ceramic fragments) were collected within the territory of the castle during the survey. The collected materials include small fragments of pottery, made of red clay and characteristic of 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries' pottery wares.

Ek'i castle occupies a very interesting and strategic location. The central tower commands long views in all directions. It has an especially long and wide view to the north (~5 km) and to the south-west. On a clear day it should be possible to have a wide view from the top of the tower to the south-west, unfortunately, because of the poor state of the construction, I couldn't get there to check it. It also seems likely that one could see the tower of Menji castle to the south-west from the top of the tower. This fortress was built in same period as Ek'i castle (4^{th}-6^{th} cc) and was in the same fortification system as Ek'i. The distance between those two castles is 6 km. Nowadays, it is impossible to see one castle from the other, but that is because the tower of Ek'i castle is in too bad a condition to climb on and the tower of Menji castle is completely destroyed.

If we add 7-8 metres to the current altitudes of those two castles, probably it would be possible to have visual contact between them.

Figure captions:

1. View of Ek'i castle from the South;
2. Defensive ditch to the north of the castle, from the west;
3. Plan of the Castle;
4. South interior wall of the tower, from the north; small sockets indicated by arrow
5. 'Gate gap' in the eastern wall of the tower, from the south-east;
6. Masonry of the south façade of the tower, from the south.

Figures

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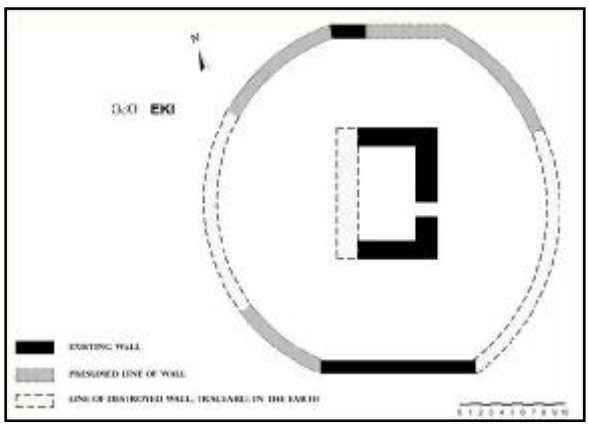

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Khomak'irde castle

This Castle is situated at the South part of the town of Chkhorots'q'u, called 'Garakha'. The name of the place where the castle stands, 'Khomak'irde', comes from the Mingrelian name for a fruit tree, 'date-plum'. GPS coordinates: N42 29.779 E42 07.897; Altitude: 244 m.

The castle was built on the longitudinal top of a small mountain, oriented to the N-S. The mountain has a steep slope from the West, East and South, especially from the West. On this side of the hill the river Ochkhomuri flows 500 metres to the south. The easiest access to the castle was from the north side, and the main gate of the castle was probably there. The top of the mountain extends 300 m. in this direction and joins another little hill, on which we found ruins of a small hall church, characteristic of XVII-XVIII century West Georgian Christian architecture.

The castle included two towers, fortified walls and a defensive ditch (fig. 1), which surrounds the castle from 3 sides, except on the steepest, 45 degree, western slope. This ditch is 3 metres wide and 1 metre deep in some places today. Its original depth would have been more than 1 metre, but over the centuries it has filled with soil. The distance between castle walls and inner edges of the ditch is 7-10 metres (fig. 2).

The castle is completely destroyed; because of this it was very difficult to understand the original shape of its towers and walls. As already mentioned, there were two towers standing inside the castle. The one at the north end of the castle has a rectangular shape - 7.5 m. by 7.5 m. externally and is aligned SE-NW by SW-NE. The north-eastern wall survives in better condition than other parts of the tower. This wall attains 2.0 m. in height and its thickness is 2.40 m; the other walls of this tower are 2.0 m thick. I was unable to determine the exact internal dimensions of the tower, because the collapsed parts of the walls lay in the middle of the tower. However from the dimensions of the remaining parts we can say that the internal dimensions of the tower would have been approximately 3.10 m. (SW-NE) by 3.50 m. (SE-NW). The gate to this tower was presumably on the second floor, because we could not find any gap in the surviving walls of the tower (fig. 3).

The other tower stands in the south-eastern part of the castle. The tower is largely destroyed (fig. 4). It has the same shape and orientation as the northern one. But there is a difference in size – the southern tower's external dimensions are 7.0 m. (SE-NW) by 7.5 m. (SW-NE) and its

internal ones are 3.0 m. (SE-NW) by 3.5 m. (SW-NE). The thickness of all four walls of this tower is 2 m (fig. 5).

The fortified walls of the castle remain in only 4 places on the territory of castle. Two of them are linked to the north tower - one starts from the middle part of the SE wall of the tower, extends only one metre to the east diagonally from the tower, and then disappears into the ground. The other part of the wall comes out from the west corner of the tower to the south and extends only 0.7 metres. The rest of the west fortified wall of the castle has disappeared – presumably the erosion of the slope on which it stood led to its collapse down the cliff along with the part of the ground, on which it was built.

Another surviving wall stands east of the south-east tower and extends 11 metres in a N-S direction; it appears to be the east wall of the castle. The fourth surviving piece of wall stands in the south-west corner of the mountain top. This wall is aligned E-W and extends 8 metres. The thickness of all surviving walls is 1.40 m. Formless humps and hillocks remain above ground in the south part of the castle territory. These probably represent the lines of the walls, but without excavation we cannot say for sure. In other parts of the castle the shape of the walls can be reconstructed by analogy with the plan of other castles and by linking the surviving walls. Of course this kind of reconstruction cannot be exact. On the east slope of the mountain, 5-10 metres below the walls we found pieces of collapsed walls that had tumbled down the slope.

Unfortunately, we do not have any information about Khomak'irde Castle in Georgian or foreign (Byzantine) historical sources. We have to define the chronology and typology of the castle according to the characteristics of the building and the archaeological material discovered on the site.

The building material, style of construction, shape and size of Khomak'irde Castle is typical for Lazika Kingdom castles of the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries: the castle complex includes two towers with thick walls at the North and South ends of the castle, an outer fortified wall, and a defensive ditch. The facings of the walls were built of well-cut cut mortared limestone blocks (dim: 25X30 cm, Fig. 6). Between these facings, the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone. All these are very typical for other 4^{th}-6^{th} century castles discovered in west Georgia.

Khomak'irde castle occupies a very interesting and strategic location. The two towers were built to control south-west and north-west regions of the country –the towers have an especially long and wide view in these directions. It would be possible to have a wide view from the top of the towers to the south-west (~10 km) and north-west (~4 km) on a clear day. This means, that presumably the Khomak'irde castle's main function was control of the valleys of the Khobi and Ochkhomuri rivers and of the territory between these two rivers. It also seems likely that the hill of the village Jumiti (4.5 km to the north from Khomak'irde) where there used to be the ruins of a castle according to local information, could be seen from the north tower of Khomak'irde castle. We visited Jumiti during this survey, but found there only 2 small pieces (40X80 cm) of stone walls. The rest of the walls had been completely destroyed by local people during the course of their agricultural work. Thus, if we assume that there really was a castle on the hill at Jumiti, then according to topographical maps, the Google Earth program, GPS coordinates and altitudes, it would have been possible to have visual contact from Khomak'irde's north tower to this hill, though this cannot be proved conclusively.

Figure captions:

1. Plan of the castle;
2. Defensive ditch to the north of the castle, from the west;
3. The north tower, from the south;
4. South-east tower, from the north;
5. Interior of the south-east tower, from the south;
6. Masonry of the north façade of the north tower, from the north.

Figures:

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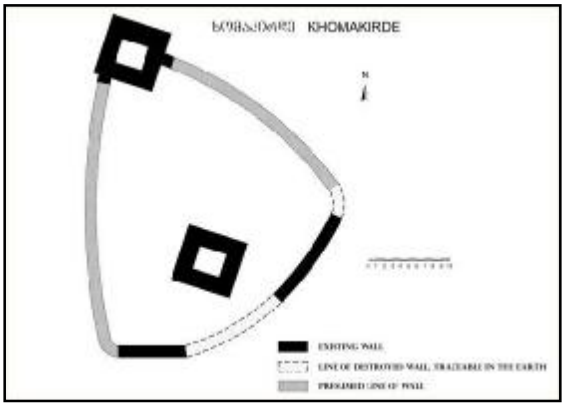

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Napichkhovo castle

This Castle is situated at the east part of the village of Napichkhovo, called 'Leberie'. The name of the place where the castle stands, 'Leberie', comes from the surname of the local inhabitants - 'Beria'. GPS coordinates: N42 36.119 E42 16.303; Altitude: 430 m.

The castle was built on a little hill, but differently from other castles: it does not have a steep slope on most of the sides; only to the south of the castle is there a really steep slope. From all other sides the castle is surrounded by plain and because of this, it would be very easy to access the castle.

The castle is completely destroyed; because of this it was difficult to understand the plan of the walls. The best surviving part of the castle is the north wall. It is 3-4 metres high and extends 8 metres before disappearing into the ground to the east. The west wall survives to the height of 1 metre and extends 15 metres, which seems to be the total length of the castle because both corners (NW and SW) of this wall are extant. The west part of the south wall extends 8.5 metres and then disappears into the ground, the same as the north wall (fig. 1). The east wall of the castle is completely destroyed and only formless humps and hillocks remain above ground in this part of the castle territory. These probably represent the lines of the walls, but without excavation we cannot say for sure. As already mentioned, there is a steep slope to the south of the castle; it seems likely the instability of the slope caused the south wall of the castle to collapse down this slope (fig. 2).

The castle has a rectangular plan – 15.0 m. N-S by 11.5 m. E-W externally. There is no evidence of the tower or a church on the territory of the castle; presumably the castle must have had a tower, by analogy with other Laz Castles but we cannot say whereabouts exactly.

Unfortunately there is no information about Napichkhovo Castle in Georgian or foreign (Byzantine) historical sources. Chronological and typological identification of the castle must be made according to the characteristics of the building and the archaeological materials found on the site.

The building material, style of construction, shape and size of Napichkhovo Castle is typical for Lazika Kingdom castles of the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries: the facings (fig. 3) of the walls were built of cut limestone blocks (dim: 20X35 cm.) and mortar. Between these facings, the mortar and rubble fill

contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone. The thickness of the surviving walls is 1.20 m. Unfortunately we cannot say anything about the tower or defensive ditch, because there are is no evidence of them on the territory of the castle. Napichkhovo castle's construction, orientation, size and shape is very typical of other castles discovered in west Georgia dated to the 4^{th}-6^{th} century. Surface finds of archaeological materials (ceramic fragments) were collected within the territory of the castle during the survey. The collected materials include some few fragments of pottery, made of red clay and characteristic of 4^{th}-6^{th} century pottery wares.

Despite the fact that Napichkhovo castle is not very big in size and does not have a very strong defensive system (being approached from the plain and lacking a defensive ditch), it seems to be a very important castle in the fortification system of the kingdom of Lazika.

As it is shown on the GIS map and on Google Earth image (fig. 4), Napichkhovo castle occupies a very interesting and strategic location. (Unfortunately there was heavy rain and fog when we visited the castle and it was impossible to see anything beyond 50 metres). As we were told by local inhabitant Rezo Patsatsia, the castle has an especially long and wide view to the south and on a clear day it is possible to see K'urzu Castle, located 2.5 km to the south from Napichkhovo castle. This is confirmed by study of topographical maps and Google Earth, which shows, that between these two castles lies the valley of the river Ochkhomuri and there is a wide view to allow visual contact between them (fig. 5). In addition, the road that exits the east of Napichkhovo village, and heads south-east towards the village and castle of K'urzu and Martvili, passes 300 metres south of the castle.

Figure captions:

1. View of the castle (North, West and South walls), from the south-east;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. Masonry of the north façade of the north wall, from the south;
4. Location of Napichkhovo, K'urzu and Osindale Castles (Google Earth image);
5. The valley of the river Ochkhomuri, between Napichkhovo and K'urzu Castles, from the west.

Figures:

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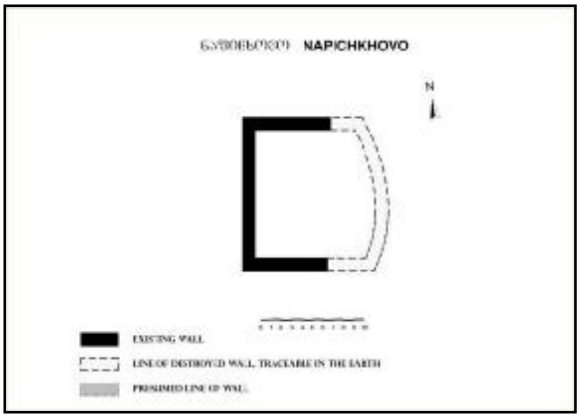

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K'urzu Castle

This castle is situated in the north of the village of K'urzu, called 'Bodogani'. GPS coordinates: N42 34.779 E42 16.623; Altitude: 458 m.

It was built on top of a hill, oriented to the E-W. The hill has a steep slope from all four sides, especially from the South and North (fig. 1). 700 metres to the north of the hill, the river Ochkhomuri flows in a westerly direction. The easiest access to the castle was from the east side and the main gate of the castle was probably located there. There is a little gap in the east wall of the castle, which could be a gate, but this is only conjecture and cannot presently be proved. Two sections of the defensive ditch are preserved to the east and west of the base of the hill. The width of the ditch is ~3 metres and depth ~1 metre; Its original depth must have been more then 1 metre, but presumably over the centuries it has filled with soil.

The castle included fortified walls, two towers, and a defensive ditch, though the castle walls, including the towers are largely destroyed (fig. 2). It consists of three presumable parts: the eastern part of the castle, the middle rectangular tower and the semi-circular west tower. The north-eastern wall survives in better condition than other parts of the castle. In this part the walls survived to 2-3 metres in height and are circular in plan. The south line of walls is completely destroyed, leaving only formless humps and hillocks visible above ground in the southern part of the castle territory. These probably represent the lines of the walls. The eastern part of the castle is linked to the rectangular tower, which is completely destroyed – only the east wall of this tower stands to a height of 3 metres. The west wall of this tower survived at ground level. There is no sign of the north and south walls of the middle tower. The dimensions of this tower are 7.60 m. (E-W) by 7.80 m. (N-S), the N-S size of the tower is conjectural. There is another surviving N-S wall 40 cm to the west of the west wall of the middle tower. This must be the east wall of the semi-circular tower of the castle. This wall survived to a height of 5 metres, but all the other conjectural walls of this tower have been destroyed, leaving only rounded humps above the ground (fig. 3).

Unfortunately there is no information about K'urzu castle in Georgian or foreign historical sources. From the building materials of the castle – the facings of the walls were built of elegantly cut limestone blocks and mortar - it was probably built in the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries. But, the south wall has mixed masonry, in which the lower courses were built with limestone blocks and

the upper courses with rubble stone (fig. 4), suggesting that in the late medieval (16th-18th centuries) period the castle was rebuilt.

Figure captions

1. The castle hill, view from the west;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. Humps, representing the lines of the west tower's wall;
4. The mixed masonry of the south wall.

Figures

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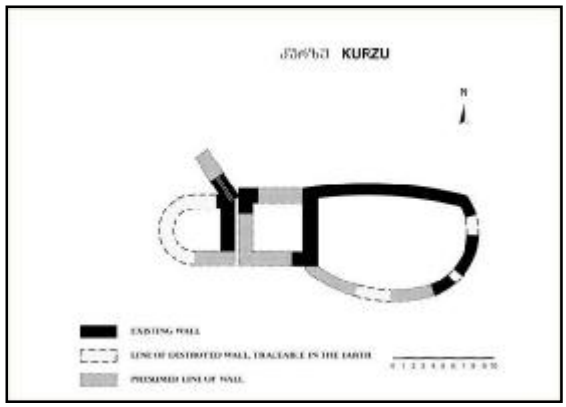

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Abedati Castle

This castle is situated to the north of the village of Abedati (Martvili district). It is surrounded by steep slopes: rising to the north and falling away to the south, giving wide views in the latter direction. GPS coordinates: N42 25.400 E42 17.064; Altitude: 372 m.

Abedati castle was widely studied in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century by the Nokalakevi Archaeological expedition team (head of team – D. Lomitashvili). Early medieval (4th-6th cc) and late medieval (16th-18th cc) archaeological and building layers were discovered during the archaeological excavations in Abedati castle. The head of the Nokalakevi Archaeological expedition, Prof. P. Zakaraia, identified Abedati castle with the Onoguris fortress mentioned by 6th century Byzantine historian Agathias Scholasticus during his account of the Byzantine-Persian wars in Lazika. However, this conjecture could not be proven decisively, because most of the archaeological material discovered on the castle dates from the 16th-18th cc. Also, according to the most recent investigation of Samegrelo region castles, Onoguris castle ought to be sited closer to the Archaeopolis road than Abedati castle is.

The Abedati castle was recorded completely during the 80s of the 20th century – a description (including the published article), exact plan (architectural measuring off), and identification of archaeological finds can be found in volume 3 of the published reports of the Nokalakevi Expedition. Because of this my main mission was to obtain digital photographs, to take GPS coordinates and altitude, and to see the castle for myself.

The castle survives in reasonable condition, the height of the fortified walls is 6-7 m (fig. 1). It includes two phases of fortified walls, 3 rectangular towers, some unknown buildings at the north end of the castle territory and the hall-type church (fig. 2) in the middle of the site (fig. 3). The one small tower was built into the south part of the inner wall, two other towers are situated at the south and east parts of the outer wall (fig. 4). The facings of the castle walls were built with cut limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 5)

Abedati castle occupies a very strategic location. It seems that its main function was controlling the road coming from the south-east regions of the kingdom, the modern Kutaisi district. This road passed Kutaisi ('Ukimerioni') castle, then crossed the Tskhenists'q'ali at "Bambua's bridge", before passing Didghvabuna castle, and then Abedati and K'vauti castles in the direction of the north-west parts (Sebastopolis) of the kingdom (fig. 6).

Figure captions

1. General view of the castle from the north-east;
2. The church, view from the south-West;
3. Plan of the castle;
4. The south tower, view from the south-west;
5. The masonry of the wall;
6. Google Earth image – Location of the Abedati castle, connected with SE-NW road and other castles.

Figures

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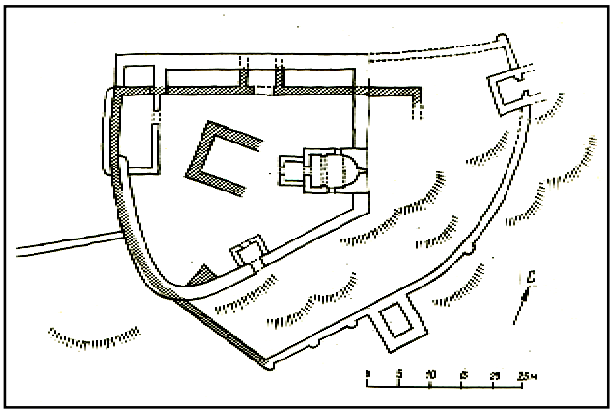

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Nogha castle

This castle is situated at the north part of the village of Nogha, Martvili district, on a little hill, surrounded by a steep slope to West and South. GPS coordinates: N42 29.096 E42 12.844; Altitude: 280 m.

The castle survives in very good condition – it appears that the fortified walls, the gatehouse and three towers are preserved to their original height – 6 m; 7m; 10 m (fig. 1).

The castle is circular in plan and had three towers (2 rounded, 1 rectangular) to the south, east and north. The circular gatehouse stands in the middle of the west wall (fig. 2). It appears that the castle had two concentric walls. One of them, which has survived almost completely and is joined to the towers and gatehouse, was an inner wall, but I found the ruins of another wall, destroyed to ground level that surrounds the inner wall at a distance of 2-3 metres (fig. 3). The internal dimensions of the castle are – 30 m (EW) by 40 m (SN). The total length of the wall is – 16 m; Thickness – 1.10 m. The rectangular (south) tower (ext. dim: 6.50 m (SN) by 7.90 m) has one entrance from the west (inner part of the castle) side (fig. 4). The east rounded tower (diameter: 4.10 m) has two entrances – from south and west (fig. 5) and the north tower's entrance was cut on the level of the second floor, on the south side (fig. 6).

Nogha castle occupies a very strategic location; it appears it would be possible to control wide areas from the towers of the castle including the whole districts of Chkhorots'q'u and Martvili.

Unfortunately there is no information about Nogha castle in Georgian or foreign historical sources. From its building materials (wall facings of well-cut limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 7)) the castle was probably built in the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries AD. However, the round shape of the towers is characteristic of the16^{th}-18^{th} centuries. Also, the surviving embrasures (fig. 8) in the walls of the castle show that the castle continued in use until the late medieval period.

Figure captions

1. The exterior of the north-west part of the castle, view from the west;
2. The gate-house, view from the east;
3. Plan of the castle;
4. The south (rectangular) tower, view from the north;
5. The east tower, view from the south-west;
6. The north tower, view from the south;

Figures

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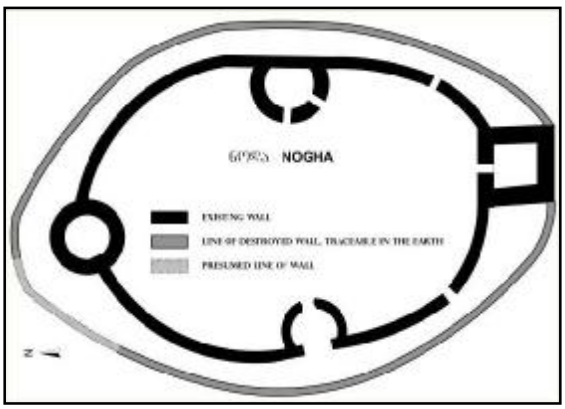

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Osindale Castle

This castle is situated at the north end of the village of Taia (Chkhorots'q'u district). It stands on a very high mountain. The easiest access was from the north and west sides of the mountain. GPS coordinates: N42 37.461 E42 12.919; Altitude: 661 m.

There is a very wide view to the South, to the East and especially to the west. It is possible to see a long way in the direction of Poti and Ochamchira. On a clear night it is possible to see the harbour lights of those two towns.

The castle includes ruins of fortified walls (which survived to a height of 1-3 m.) and four towers (fig. 1). In addition there is a church in the middle of the castle, which continues in use today. The dimensions of the castle are: 32 m (SN) by 60 m (EW). The facings of the walls of the fortified walls and towers were built of well-cut, large (30X60 cm.) limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 2). This kind of building style is very characteristic of the early medieval period, especially for 6th century architecture. But the building material and ornaments of the church are common in 12th century Christian architecture.

The main tower of the castle must have been the east one, which also served as a gate-house – this tower is largely destroyed to ground level. It was rectangular in shape (ext. dim: 7.30 m (SN) by 8.60 m (EW)) and was built outside of the wall. Another tower (fig. 3), situated at the west end of the castle, is square in shape (ext. dim:7.40 m by 7.40 m). This tower may have provided accommodation, perhaps for a priest (there are several niches inside the tower, which are characteristic for Christian architecture). The 1.35 wide entrance of this tower was in the east wall.

There are two other towers built in the south fortified wall of the castle, both of them are rectangular in shape. The dimensions of the west one are: 7.70 m by 7.70 m. and those for the east one – 7.20 m (SN) by 8.20 m. It appears that the main function of these towers was to control approaches to the castle from the south.

The fortified walls and towers were built with cut limestone blocks and mortar; the dimensions of the building materials are: 20X30, 40X60, and 50X100 cm.

Unfortunately there is no information about Osindale castle in Georgian or foreign historical sources. But according to the building material of the castle, it was probably built in the 4th-6th cc AD and was in use until the 17th-18th cc judging from archaeological material (Pottery fragments) collected on the site. According to the local inhabitants there is an old road near the castle, which connected Samegrelo region with the north-west parts of west Georgia (Abkhazia). This castle was probably built to control this road locally and also to control wide areas to the south of the castle.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the castle;
2. The church, view from the north-west;
3. The west tower, view from the east;
4. The view from the castle to the south (Chkhorots'q'u district).

Figures

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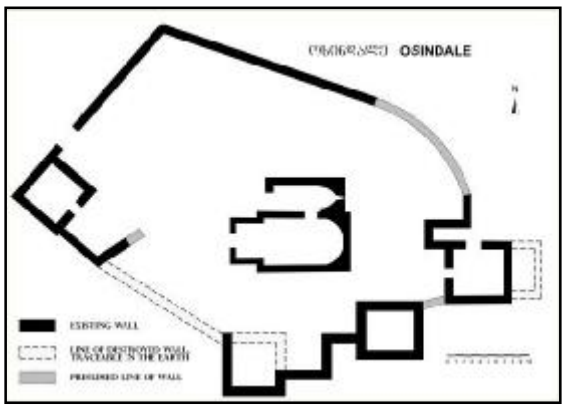

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Skuri 'White' Castle

This castle is situated at the south part of the village of Skuri (Ts'alenjikha district), on the left bank of the river Ch'anists'q'ali. GPS coordinates: N42 40.604 E42 08.835; Altitude: 412 m.

The easiest access is from the south-east, there is a small cliff dropping to the river gorge to the west and north sides of the castle (fig. 1).

The castle includes ruins of fortified walls, which survive to a height of 1-2 m., and a tower, which stands in the middle of the castle. The castle and the tower are semi-circular in plan (fig. 2). The thickness of the wall is – 1.35 m. The dimensions of the castle are – 25 m (SN) by 30.40 m (EW). The main entrance to the castle must have been from the east side, but this part of the walls is destroyed to ground level and I could not find any sign of the gate there. The tower survives in better condition than the fortified wall; the height of its walls is 3-4 m (fig. 3). Its dimensions are – 12.5 m (EW) by 13 m (SN). The tower's entrance must have been at the second floor level in the west wall.

Unfortunately there is no information about Skuri castle in the Georgian or foreign historical sources. From its building materials (wall facings of well-cut limestone blocks and mortar – it must have been built in the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries AD.

The castle was built in the gorge of this river and its main function must have been controlling and securing the road, which ran through the Ch'anists'q'ali gorge here. This road goes to the northern village of Jvari, which lies at the junction of the Samegrelo, Abkhazia and Svaneti regions (fig. 4).

Figure captions

1. View of the castle from the south-east;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. The tower, view from the east;
4. Google Earth image – The road connecting Skuri castle with Abkhazia and Svaneti.

Figures

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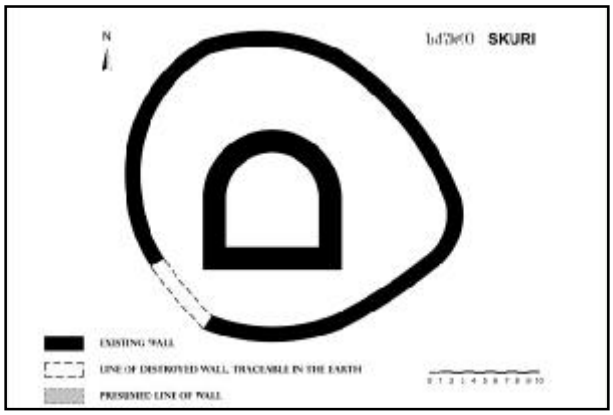

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Tamakoni Castle

This castle is situated at the south-east end of the village of Tamakoni (Martvili district). GPS coordinates: N42 28.137 E42 20.633; Altitude: 393 m.

It stands on a little hill with slopes to the north, east and West. The easiest access to was from the south (fig.1). Its dimensions are: 34 m. (NS) by 45 m. (EW).

The castle is largely destroyed and it was consequently very difficult to understand the shape of the castle. It appears that two towers stood in the middle and in the north-east corner of the castle territory, but this is conjecture and is not currently proved.

Unfortunately there is no information about the Tamakoni castle in Georgian or in foreign historical sources. The building material of the castle suggests that it was built in the late medieval (16^{th}-18^{th} centuries) period, because the facings of the walls were built of rubble stone and mortar, which is characteristic only for the late medieval period.

This castle seems to occupy a very interesting and strategic location, because from the castle it is possible to have a wide view in all 4 directions, and it can control some regions of Martvili and Chkhorots'q'u districts and the upper valley of the River Tekhuri (fig.2).

Figure captions

1. View of the castle from the east;
2. Google Earth image – The castle and valley of r. Tekhuri.

Figures

1.

2.

Church in the village of Sarakoni

The ruins of this church are situated at the east entrance of the village of Sarakoni (Chkhorots'q'u district). GPS coordinates: N42 30.256 E42 04.266; Altitude: 211 m.

A local informant told us there was a castle there, but when I visited the ruins appeared to belong to a hall type church with narthexes. The church is destroyed to ground level; consequently it was difficult to determine its exact shape. However, it is clear that the church was a hall type building, with a rounded apse. Dimensions: 6m (NS) by 10m (EW). This narthex is 3.30 metres long (EW) and 4 metres wide (NS). There are two more narthexes in the South and North walls of the church. Presumably the church had three entrances in the South, West and North walls.

There are ruins of the wall surrounding the church on all four sides. This wall was built with quarry-stone. The Church was built with a low quality building technique – with rubble-stone and mortar. This type of Christian architecture is very typical for West Georgia in the 17^{th}-18^{th} centuries.

Unfortunately there is no information about the name of the church. Even local people do not know which Saint this was church named after.

Figure captions

1. View of the church from the east;
2. The fragment of quarry-stone wall.

Figures

1.

2.

St. George's Church in Sarakoni village

The ruins of this church were situated at the west end of the village of Sarakoni (Chkhorots'q'u district) at the cemetery of family name 'Jalaghonia'. GPS coordinates: N42 30.562 E42 03.121; Altitude: 170 m.

The church is completely destroyed. We could find only one line of wall covered with ground. Zaur Jalaghonia, a local inhabitant, told us that at the beginning of the 20th century a wooden church stood here on a stone foundation. Judging from the wall humps visible above the ground, the length of the church was ~13 m. and width 8 m.

This territory has another name, 'Klaskari', which means 'place of class'. According to tradition, in the early 20th century the local priest opened an elementary school for children in the church, as a result of which it was called 'Klaskari'.

Kot'ianeti church

The ruins of this church are situated to the west of the village of Kot'ianeti (Senaki district). GPS coordinates: N42 20.112 E42 09.193; Altitude: 185 m. The local inhabitants of the village informed us about this place and told us, that it might be the ruins of a tower. We visited the place, which appears to be the remains of a small hall-church (length (EW) ~7 m.), built with well-cut white limestone. The church is completely destroyed; however, we could find the inner corners (NW and SW) of the church and a niche on the NE part of the apse.

Unfortunately there is no information about the Kot'ianeti church in written sources or even from the local inhabitants. The surviving building materials of the church (well-cut white limestone) are very characteristic of West Georgian early medieval (4th-6th cc) Christian architecture. But we can not say for sure that the church was built exactly in the early medieval period.

Our Savior church in the village of Akhuti

The Our Savior church is situated in the eastern part of the village of Akhuti (Chkhorots'q'u district), named – 'Legersame' – at the cemetery of family name 'Gersamia'. GPS coordinates: N42 29.134 E42 11.696; Altitude: 283 m.

It was built with elegantly cut yellow limestone blocks and is a one-nave basilica with a protruding semi-circular apse at its east end. It has three entrances cut into the west, north and south walls. The church is well preserved. (It was restored two years ago). There is a ruin of a crypt 15 metres to the east of the church, which was built with grey limestone blocks.

According to the local government the church was built in the 19^{th}-20^{th} centuries.

Figure captions

1. View of the church from the north-west;
2. The crypt, view from the east.

Figures

1.

2.

Machkhomeri Castle

This castle is situated in the east part of the village of P'irveli Maisi, called 'Machkhomeri'. GPS coordinates: N42 20.595 E41 52.564; Altitude: 99 m.

It was built on the longitudinal top of a low mountain, oriented to the E-W. The mountain has a steep slope to the North, East and South. The easiest access was from the west side, and the main gate of the castle was probably located there. From this side the castle is surrounded by plain which continues 100 metres to the west.

The castle is completely destroyed; because of this it was difficult to determine the plan of the walls. Its only surviving parts are the west wall and the tower, situated in the North-West corner (fig. 1). The wall is oriented to the N-S. It is 1-2 metres high and extends 22.5 metres (fig. 2). I could find both ends of this wall (North and South). The north end joins the corner tower, which survives to 1 metre high (fig. 3). The external dimensions of this tower are: 5.50 (W), 5.30 (S), 5.30 (E), 5.70 (N). There is another surviving wall, oriented E-W, which joins the east wall of the tower. This wall is destroyed to ground level and extends only 7 metres before disappearing into the ground to the east. There is the same picture at the south end of the west wall – this wall turns left to the east and extends 5 metres before disappearing into the ground. For this reason I infer that the missing parts of the castle lay to the east of the west wall. There are some remains of the constructions, represented by a heap of cut stones. I estimate the total area of the castle would have been around 2000 square metres, which is quite a large area. I also found the ruins of another tower outside the castle's south-west corner. It appears that this tower was attached to the wall from outside (south). Its external dimensions are: ~ 5.70 m. (EW) X 7.70 m. (SN).

The building material, style of construction, shape, and size of Machkhomeri Castle is typical for Lazika Kingdom castles of the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries: the facings of the walls were built of cut limestone blocks (dim: 20X35 cm) and mortar. Between these facings, the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone. The thickness of the surviving walls is 1.00 - 1.10 m.

The mountain on which the castle stands is surrounded by other mountains from the north, east and south sides to a distance of 2-3 km. There is a long and wide view to the south-west of the castle. In this direction it is possible to see wide areas (around 20 km) to the Black Sea coast. Also, as can be seen from the Google Earth diagram (fig. 4), it is possible to see the Nask'alu

watch tower to the north from Machkhomeri's North tower. And the distance between these two castles is only 1.7 km.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the castle
2. The west fortified wall, view from the west;
3. The north-west tower, view from the south;
4. Google Earth image, distance between Machkhomeri castle and Nask'alu watch tower.

Figures

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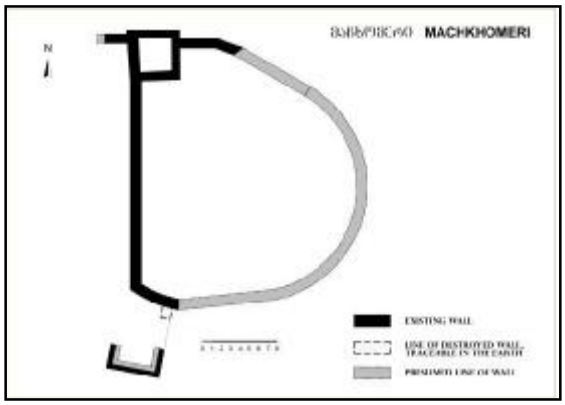

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Nask'alu watchtower

This watchtower is situated in the north part of the village of P'irveli Maisi, on the left bank of the river Munchia. The high mountain on which the tower stands is called 'Nask'alu'; which presumably means the place where the hive ('Ska') was. GPS coordinates: N42 21.505 E41 52.883; Altitude: 168 m.

The tower has steep slopes to the North and West. The easiest access to the castle was from the South and East sides.

The tower is circular in plan, external diameter: ~7 m; inner: ~4.5 m (fig. 1); the tower is destroyed completely to ground level (fig. 2). The walls' facings (fig. 3) were built of cut limestone blocks and mortar. Between these facings the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone; the surviving walls are 1.00 - 1.50 m thick.

The tower's location is very interesting. There are long and wide views in all 4 directions from the tower. It is possible to see Q'urumulia castle 1 km to the North and presumably it would be possible to see the North tower of the Machkhomeri castle as well (fig. 4).

Unfortunately, I could not find any ceramic materials on the territory of the tower by which to date it. Its building material and connections to the Machkhomeri and Q'urumulia castles suggest this tower was built in the same period – 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the watchtower;
2. The collapsed walls, inside the tower;
3. The surviving masonry of the wall;
4. Google Earth image – location of the Nask'alu watchtower between Q'urumulia and Machkhomeri castles.

Figures

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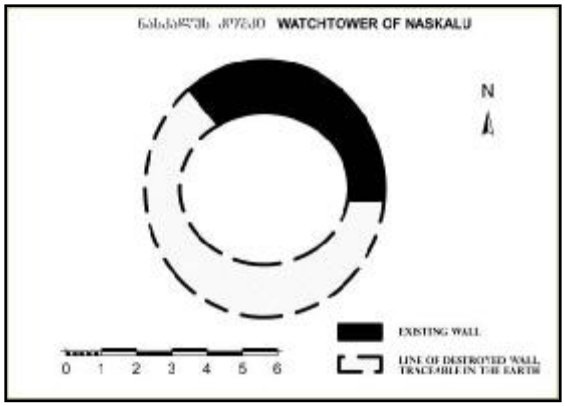

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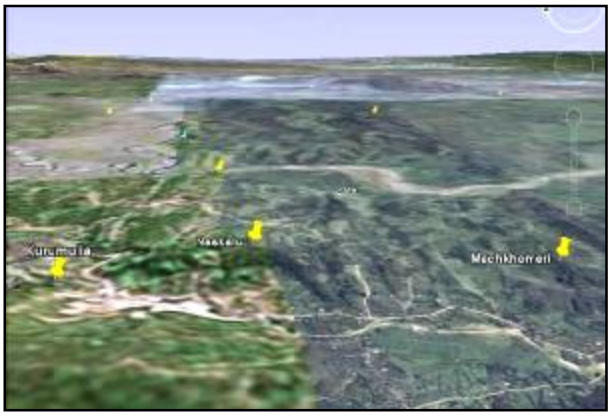

Q'urumulia castle

This castle is situated at the north end of the village of P'irveli Maisi, called 'Q'urumulia'. GPS coordinates: N42 22.072 E41 52.795; Altitude: 80 m.

It was built on top of a hill (fig. 1), which has a steep slope on all four sides, especially from the East and North. 100 metres to the south side of the hill, the river Chkhaia joins the river Munchia. The castle is located on the right bank of the Munchia. The easiest access to the castle was from the south-west, but even from this side it would be very difficult to take the castle by storm.

It is not very large. Its external dimensions are only 8.5 m (SN) by 9.5 m. (EW). The gate to the castle was presumably in the north wall, but because the castle is largely destroyed today this cannot be proved (fig. 2). Only some pieces of the south, west and north walls have survived (the maximum height of the surviving walls is 4 m.), while the east wall has disappeared completely.

The facings of the walls (thickness – 1.50 m) were built of elegantly cut limestone blocks and mortar. Between these facings the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone (fig. 3), which is very characteristic for 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries fortifications. In addition, I found several fragments of pottery of the same period on the territory of the castle.

Q'urumulia castle occupies a very interesting and strategic location. In my opinion the main function of the castle must have been the control and security of the road, which followed the Munchia gorge. This road leads north to Abastumani village and then goes in a northerly direction (Zugdidi and Gali districts) over the top of Urta mountain and Jegeta wall (fig. 4). The castle is surrounded by mountains on all sides, except the south-west. There is a wide view from the castle in this direction to the Black Sea coast.

Figure captions

1. The castle hill, view from the south;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. The masonry of the castle wall;
4. Google Earth image – The road connecting Q'urumulia castle with Jegeta and other north-west parts of the region.

Figures

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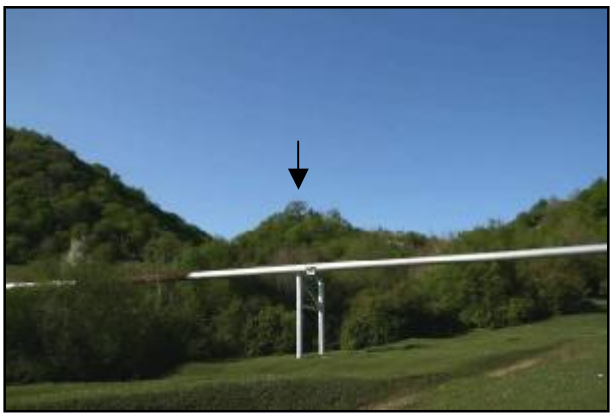

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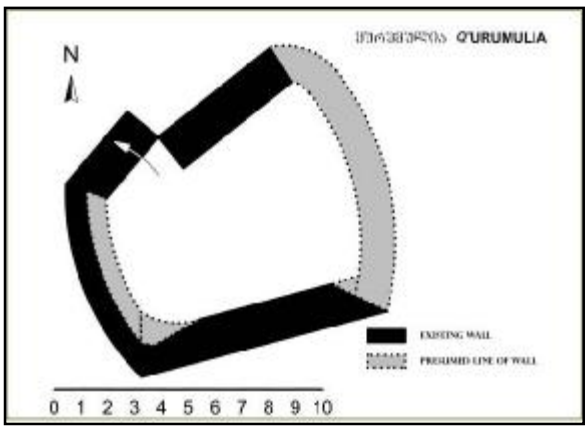

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Jakhuti castle

This castle is situated in the north-east part of the village of P'irveli Maisi, called 'Jakhuti'. GPS coordinates: N42 21.560 E41 54.600; Altitude: 70 m.

It was built at the east end of the longitudinal top of a small mountain, oriented to the E-W, on the right bank of the river Khobi. Consequently castle territory has steep slopes to the North and East; and a very steep slope from the south. The easiest access to the castle was from the west side, from the level top of the mountain, and the main gate of the castle was probably there.

The castle includes fortified walls, 2 or 3 towers and the ruins of some other, unknown building. In plan the castle is elliptical, and ends with a rectangular tower in the west part (fig. 1). Next to this tower, outside of the wall, lie the remains of another tower. The distance between these two towers is only 4 metres and they are linked by an 80 cm thick wall. The west tower is destroyed to ground level (dim: 6.80 m (SN) by 6.90 m (EW) thickness – 0.80 m.), the east tower stands to a height of 2-3 metres (dim: 8.50 m (SN) by 9.5 m (EW)); the fortified walls survive to the level of 1-2 metres, total length of these walls is – 133 m. The total length of the castle is 64 m; wide – 36 m.

Jakhuti's building materials and method of construction are very interesting – the walls were built with vertically standing large limestone blocks (length: 3-4 m; height: 1-1.5 m; thickness: 20-25 cm.). These blocks are very similar to megaliths (fig. 2), but this castle must have been built in the medieval period. I am unaware of any other monument of similar construction type in west Georgia in this period. In my opinion this kind of construction could not be very high, and consequently I think that these vertically standing large limestone blocks served as a fence at the edge of the cliff, at the east, south and north sides of the castle, where there was no danger that the enemy would be able to attack. The west part of the walls were built with cut limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 3), - this was probably because this side of the castle was of easier access and would therefore have required a higher wall, more easily achieved with this traditional building material.

Jakhuti castle occupies a strategic location; it was built near the junction of the Ch'anists'q'ali and. Khobi rivers. As can be seen from the Google Earth diagram (fig. 4), the castle's owners could control the valleys of both rivers to the north-east direction. They could also see Q'urumulia Castle from Jakhuti and control the lower (south-west) valley of the River Khobi.

Presumably it would be possible from Jakhuti.to see Machkhomeri, Nask'alu, and Q'urumulia castles to the west as well.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the castle;
2. The vertically standing large limestone block;
3. The traditional masonry of the west fortified wall;
4. Google Earth image – valleys of the r. Ch'anists'q'ali and r. Khobi.

Figures

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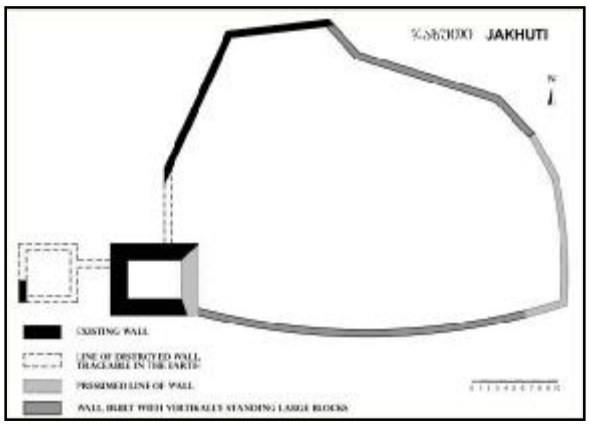

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Gaghma Sajijao (Khorshi) Castle*

This castle is situated at the east end of the village of Gaghma Sajijao. GPS coordinates: N42 22.245 E42 00.583; Altitude: 54 m.

It was built on a low mountain on the left bank of the river Zana, where it joins the river Khobi (fig. 1). This mountain has a steep slope on its northern side, making it impossible to reach the castle from this side. The river Khobi flows 75 metres away to the west of the hill. The castle is surrounded by gentle slopes on the other two sides, from which it would be very easy to reach it. Because of this a defensive ditch provided protection on these sides.

The castle includes fortified walls and a tower (fig. 2) that stands in the North-West corner. The internal dimensions of the latter are (fig. 3) – 5.10 m. by 5.10 m; external – 7 m. by 7 m. Its walls are 1.60 m thick. The castle's total length is 32 m E-W; its width – 12 m. Its walls are1.30 m thick.

The facings of the walls were built of cut limestone blocks, river cobbles and mortar. Between these facings, the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone. The building material (limestone facings), style of construction, shape and size of Gaghma Sajijao (Khorshi) is typical of Lazika Kingdom castles of the 4th-6th centuries: the castle complex includes the tower with thick walls (1.60 m.), an outward fortified wall, and a defensive ditch.

The main function of this castle would have been to control the r. Zana and r. Khobi valleys. One would also have been able to see Ek'i castle, 6 km to the south-east, from this castle (fig. 4).

* There is information about Khorshi castle in scientific literature (See D. Lomitashvili 'Central Colchis 8th c. BC – 6th c. AD, Cikhegoji-Archaeopolis-Noakalakevi' 2003), Also, there is information about Gaghma sajijao castle in G. Chitaia's book 'Poti and Khobi eparchy, Historical monuments' I was planning to visit both of these castles, but it appears they are the same monument, situated at the border of two villages – Gaghma Sajijao and Khorshi.

Figure captions

1. Google Earth image – location of the castle;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. The tower, view from the south-east;
4. Google Earth image – Gaghma Sajijao and Ek'i castles.

Figures

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4.

Zeni castle

This castle is situated at the south entrance of the village of Sajijao. 'Zeni' was the old name of this village from which the castle's name is derived. GPS coordinates: N42 22.579 E41 58.898; Altitude: 39 m.

It occupies an unusual site for a castle. It was built on a plain. Consequently it would be very easy to attack from any side. The castle survives in good condition. The walls and the towers remain to a height of 5-6 metres.

The castle includes a fortified wall and two rectangular towers with merlons and embrasures (fig. 1), characteristic of the architecture of the 17^{th}-18^{th} centuries. The facings of the walls were built of river cobbles, which also dates the castle to this period.

The castle is semi-circular in plan (fig. 2). There was a gate in the mid-point of the rounded, north wall, which was fortified with a tower (fig. 3). The internal dimensions of the gate-house are: 1.70 m (N-S) by 3.10 m (E-W). The gate was 1.95 m wide (fig.4-5). Another tower stands in the south part of the castle. The castle's maximum dimensions are: 20 m. (N-S) by 30 m (E-W). The entrance in the south wall was cut at the second floor, from the north side. The north wall of this tower is 7 m long; the east and west walls are 5.25 m long.

It is unlikely, given its location on a plain, that military defence was the main purpose of Zeni castle. Because of this I think Zeni was built for local interests – perhaps to protect a local ruler from robber groups or as a customs-house for merchants travelling through its territory (fig. 6).

Figure captions

1. The merlons on the top of south wall of the gate-house;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. The gate-house, view from the south;
4. The gate, view from the south (inside);
5. The gate, view from the north (outside);
6. The view of the castle from the south-west.

Figures

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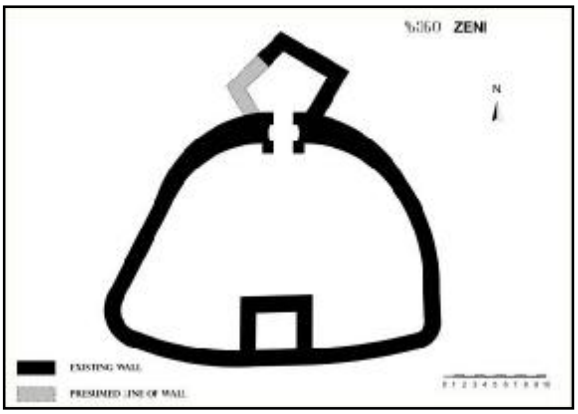

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Dzveli Khibula Castle

This castle is situated at the south part of the village of Dzveli Khibula ('Old Khibula'). GPS coordinates: N42 26.586 E41 58.824; Altitude: 127 m.

It was built on the longitudinal top of the mountain, on the right bank of the river Ch'anists'q'ali, oriented to the E-W. As a result the castle is bordered by slopes to the North and East; and a steep slope to the south. The easiest access to the castle was from the west side—the approach on this side has only a gentle slope—and the main gate of the castle was probably located there.

The castle includes two fortified walls, a tower, and a palace and the ruins of what is probably a church (fig.1). There are at least two chronological layers of construction. The first is represented by the tower and defensive wall. These are situated in the east part of the castle territory. The facings of this tower and wall were built with elegantly-cut pumice-kind stones (fig. 2), the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone. The wall is 20 metres in circumference and round in plan. It protects the tower from the east and south, but to the west and north the tower is protected by slopes and there was no need for an extra wall. The tower is rectangular, dimensions: 7 m. (SE-NW) by 7.60 m. (SW-NE). The entrance to the tower must have been on the 3rd floor, cut into the west wall (fig. 3). This type of construction is typical of the 4th-6th centuries and the 10th-12 centuries AD.

There are ruins of another defensive wall, which follows the north, west and south edges of the mountain (fig. 4). This wall, now largely destroyed, was built with river cobbles, which is very characteristic for 17th-18th centuries' architecture. There are ruins of two other buildings inside this wall – one of them may be a palace (fig.5) and another one - the church (fig. 6), but this is only conjecture and cannot be proved for the moment. The territory, which is protected by the second (river cobbled) wall occupies a large area, nearly – 2000 square metres.

The mountain on which the castle stands is protected by mountains to north and west to a radius of 2-3 km. There is a wide view to the south and south-east. The river Ch'anists'q'ali flows 750 metres to the south. I think that the main function of the castle was controlling the valley of the Ch'anists'q'ali and the road that ran along it.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the castle;
2. The wall built with pumice-kind stones, view from the west;
3. The tower, view from the north;
4. The wall built with river cobbles, view from the south;
5. The interior of the palace, view from the south;
6. The ruins of the ’church’, view from the north-west.

Figures

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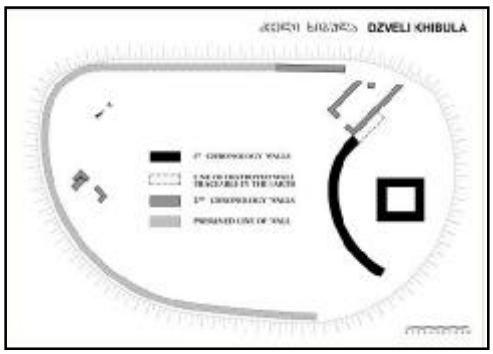

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Jegeta

There is high mountain at the east end of the village of Kheta called Urta. GPS coordinates: N42 23.645 E41 50.309; altitude: 432 m.

At the top of this mountain is a gorge, orientated E-W. The gorge is flanked by little hills to the south and north. The ruin of a wall crosses the gorge perpendicularly on the territory of this mountain (fig. 1). This wall, which extends 125 metres, was built with un-mortared lime stone (fig. 2), for which reason it seems unlikely it was high and its main function could not be the defence of the territory. More probably there was some kind of border and/or customs-house for controlling local travellers and traders. There remains a cart-road 500 m. to the north of the site, for which reason I think that the gorge situated on the top of the Urta mountain may have been used as a road, connecting the southern regions of the country (Khobi district) to its northern parts (Zugdidi and Gali districts).

On the west hill of the gorge are the ruins of a small, hall-type church (dim: 3.55 m. by 7.25 m.) and dwelling for a priest (dim: 8 m. by 9.80 m.), GPS coordinates: N42 23.639 E41 50.224; Altitude: 456 m. Also, there must have been some buildings (probably a tower) on the east hill, as it is strewn with cut limestone fragments.

Jegeta site occupies a very strategic location - there is an especially wide view to the west as far as the Black Sea coast and to the north-west into Gali district.

Figure captions

1. North view of the wall crossing the gorge road;
2. The masonry of the wall.

Figure

1.

2.

Kheta castle

This castle is situated at the south entrance of the village of Khamisk'uri, on the west (left) side of the Senaki-Zugdidi main road. GPS coordinates: N42 22.798 E41 48.687; Altitude: 9 m.

The castle was built on the level ground and is of easy access from all sides (fig. 1). It includes a fortified wall (circular in plan) and three rectangular towers in the north-east, south and west parts of the castle. There is a gate in the north part of the walls (fig. 2). The castle survives in good condition (fig. 3-5). The walls reach 6-8 metres in height and are 1.50 m thick. The facings of the walls were built of cut limestone; the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone.

The inner area of the castle is about 3000 square metres. Total wall circumference is 245 metres. The Kheta castle was partly researched by archaeologists and architects 4 years ago. No signs of other buildings have been discovered during excavations on the site. The castle is dated to the 16^{th}-17^{th} centuries by archaeological material – pottery, found in the towers.

Further, it seems unlikely that the castle was built in the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries, because there are no examples in Georgia of castles from that period that were built on a plain. Architects of that period always tried to use the local landscape for building their castles (fig. 6).

For this reason I think Kheta castle, like Zeni castle, was built for local interests – to protect the local ruler from robber groups and as a customs-house for merchants, who had to move through the Kheta castle territory.

Figures captions

1. Google earth image – the castle territory;
2. The sketch-plan of the castle;
3. The north-east tower, view from the south-west;
4. The west tower, view from the south-east;
5. The south tower, view from the north;
6. The general view of the castle from the north.

Figures

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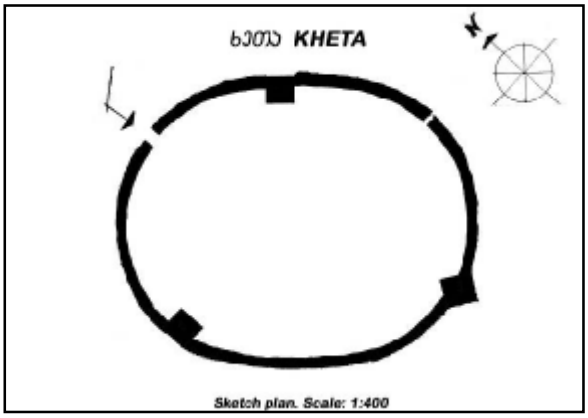

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Ch'akvinja castle

This castle is situated at the south entrance of the village of Jikhask'ari*. GPS coordinates: N42 30.462 E42 00.786; Altitude: 237 m.

The castle was built on the longitudinal top of a high mountain, on the west (right) bank of the river Ch'anists'q'ali. It is surrounded by steep slopes on all four sides, but the easiest access was from the north. On that side there is a gate (fig. 1) in the north fortified wall (fig. 2).

The castle includes fortified walls, four towers, and the ruins of a church and palace. The towers are rectangular in plan. Three of them were built on the inner side of the north wall and one at the east end of the wall, on the outside. The church was built in the east part of the castle territory and the palace in the middle (fig. 3). The total length of the castle is 100 m. (EW) and its width – 35 m. (SN).

The castle survives in good condition –its walls and towers attain 10-15 metres in height (fig. 4). It was studied extensively by archaeologists and an art-historian of the S. Janashia State Museum of Georgia in 1968-1979 (Head of expedition academician P. Zakaraia). The scientific monograph "Ch'akvinja" was published in 1980 (Author – P. Zakaraia).

The castle has a multi-period scale – The earliest archaeological and building layers of the castle date to the 4^{th}-5^{th} centuries. The three north towers and some parts of the wall must have been built in that period. The next layer includes ruins of a hall-type church. All other surviving buildings were built in the late medieval period (16^{th}-18^{th} cc). Also some rebuilding of the towers and the walls was made in the same era. The facings of the walls were built with cut limestone blocks; also some building layers were built with river cobbles and mortar.

According to P. Zakaraia the surviving castle of Ch'akvinja was the acropolis of a bigger castle (fig. 5). During excavations the expedition discovered the ruins of two towers 50 metres to the north and 200 metres to the north-west of the castle; also there is one wall, which extends 10 metres northwards from the north wall and then disappears into the ground. Because of this P. Zakaraia thinks that the remaining part of the castle is only the acropolis, which would have been

* Ch'akvinja is the old name of the village, which had been divided into two villages "Ch'akvinja" and "Jikhask'ari" in 20s' of 20^{th} century.

the south part of the original larger castle, and the total area of the lower town would have been approximately 1 hectare and of the acropolis – 3000 square metres.

The castle occupies a very interesting and strategic location. There are especially wide views to the south and west, where it is possible to see the r. Ch'anists'q'ali valley and areas of plain as far as the Black Sea coast (fig. 6).

Figure captions

1. The main gate of the castle, view from outside (north);
2. The view of the castle from the west;
3. Plan of the castle (Acropolis);
4. The interior of the castle, view from the east;
5. General plan of the castle;
6. The view from the castle to the south-west.

Figures

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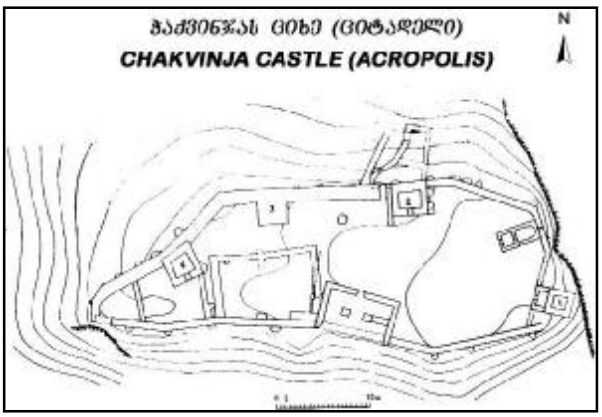

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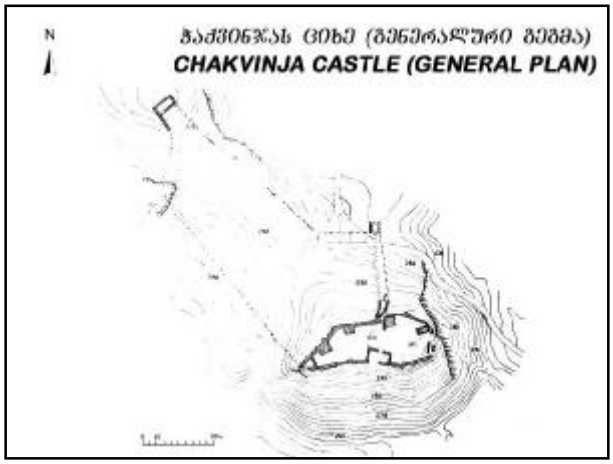

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Rukhi castle

This castle is situated in the village of Rukhi, on the west (left) edge of the Zugdidi-Gali main road. GPS coordinates: N42 33.890 E41 51.246; Altitude: 114 m.

According to Vakhushti Bagrationi (18th c. author) the castle was built by the ruler of Odishi (Samegrelo) principality Levan the 2nd Dadiani in 1647.

The castle was built on a small hill surrounded by level terrain (fig. 1) at the left bank of the r. Enguri, and it would be very easy to access it from any side. The plan of the castle is semi-circular in shape. The castle includes a lower town and an acropolis (fig. 2). Its main gate enters through the rectangular south-east tower (fig. 3); another tower is situated in the south-west corner of the castle (fig. 4). The acropolis occupies the northern part of the castle and has a longitudinal plan, orientated to the east-west. The acropolis has two additional towers at the east and west ends (fig. 5).

The castle survives in good condition. The height of the remaining walls is 10-12 metres. The facings of the walls were built with vertical rows of river cobbles (fig. 6).

The castle was probably built to defend the principality of Odishi against attack from the north-west. Because of this the castle's acropolis is situated in the northern part and had an especially wide view in this direction. According to historical sources there was a battle between the west Georgian principalities' forces and Ottoman troops, which attacked Odishi's borders from the north-west, near Rukhi castle in 1779.

There is no sign of the early medieval (4th-6th cc) building or cultural layers on the territory of the castle, and in any case we have exact information that the castle was built in the 17th c. Because of this it can be said for sure that Rukhi castle is not connected with the fortification system of the Lazika Kingdom.

Figure captions

1. The view of the castle from the east;
2. The Acropolis of the castle, view from the south;
3. The main gate and gate-house of the castle, view from the west.

4. The south-west tower and fortified walls, view from the outside (SW);
5. The interior and the east tower of the acropolis, view from the west;
6. The masonry of the fortified walls.

Figures

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Nojikhevi castle

At the north-east corner of the village of Nojikhevi stands a low mountain. GPS coordinates: N42 19.862 E41 57.879; Altitude: 143 m. 'Nojikhevi' means 'place where the castle was'. I was told by G. Chitaia that on top of this mountain are the ruins of a castle.

I visited this place, but unfortunately I could find there only one small piece (2 m.) of wall built of limestone, river cobble and mortar 6 metres below the top of the mountain. It was difficult to define exactly – is that wall fragment in-situ or has it moved down from the top of the mountain?

One possibility is that a small castle or watch tower was built there. The site is surrounded with slopes to north and east, and a steep slope to the south.

There is a wide view from that place to the south and to the west. Because of this the site would be very useful for building a castle there. This is only conjecture and cannot be proved at this time.

Bia church

This church is situated in the village of Bia. GPS coordinates: N42 21.767 E41 56.205; Altitude: 66 m.

G. Chitaia was my guide to this place, where, he informed me, stood the ruins of a tower; but it appeared to be a little hall-type church with semi-circular apse. External dimensions: 4.80 m. (SN) by 7.20 m. (EW). The church is largely destroyed. The thickness of the wall is 65 cm. The northern half of the apse and the east entrance of the church have completely disappeared. The

maximum height of the remaining walls is 2-3 metres in the south and north parts of the church. It seems like that the only entrance to the church was cut in the west wall, which is completely destroyed.

On the evidence of the building materials (the walls were built with river-stone and mortar) the church was built in late medieval period (17^{th}-18^{th} cc).

Ch'akvinja church

This church is situated at the southwest part of the village of Ch'akvinja, called 'Bagh-Marani' ('Garden-Winery') GPS coordinates: N42 28.460 E41 56.909; Altitude: 207 m.

The church is largely destroyed. The maximum height of the surviving walls is 3 metres. The church is a hall-type building, with semi-circular apse. The dimensions of the church are: 4.50 m. by 5.95 m.

The facings of the church were built with elegantly-cut lime stone blocks. The surviving parts include one entrance from the west; an inner semi-circular apse in the east; two niches in the apse; a 60 cm iconostasis, and two bases of pilasters in the south and north walls.

The inner territory of the church was cleaned one month before my visit by local people. They had found many architectural details of the church in the ground, which they collected next to the church. There are fragments of decorated posts, arch stones and other details. Also I found one stone with traces of red paint, which 'suggests that the church was decorated with frescoes.

Judging from the decorations I estimate the church to date from the 10^{th}-12^{th} centuries. An exact date for its construction must be left to art-historians.

4.2 3rd stage -
Imereti Region

Shorap'ani castle

This castle is situated in the village of Shorap'ani, on the top of a high hill. GPS coordinates: N42 05.809 E43 04.987; Altitude: 205 m.

Shorap'ani has been widely archaeologically researched by several scientists (S. Q'aukhchishvili, S. Janashia, N. Berdzenishvili, V. Japaridze) during the 20th century. Antique and medieval archaeological and building layers were uncovered by archaeological excavations on its territory. According to Byzantine historical sources (Procopius of Caesarea, Justin's *Novella*s) Shorap'ani (Sarapanis) was the eastern border castle of the Lazika kingdom and was remote and difficult to reach.

It was built on the longitudinal top of a high hill, oriented N-S. The mountain is surrounded by steep slopes on all 4 sides (fig. 1). The easiest access to the castle was from the south side, and its main gate was probably located there.

The castle includes fortified walls, an acropolis on the highest northern point of the hill, 4 towers (dimensions: 7 m. by 8 m.) and a tunnel which linked the west wall to the river outside (west). The total length of this tunnel reaches 60 metres and ends at a tower, built on the bank of the river Q'virila (fig. 2).

The 2-4 metre-thick fortified walls of the castle were built on the edges of a sloping hill, so the castle is oriented to the N-S as well. The facings of the walls were built with elegantly-cut limestone blocks and mortar, also in some parts of the walls there are lines of bricks, which is very characteristic of Roman and Byzantine architecture (known as *opus mixtum*) (fig. 3).

As said before, several archaeological and architectural layers were discovered on the territory of the castle, but its main building layer is dated to the 5th-6th cc AD by building technique analysis and by archaeological material.

Shorap'ani castle occupies a very strategic and interesting location. The hill is situated at the junction of the Dzirula and Q'virila rivers (fig. 4). Because of this I think that Shorap'ani's main

function was to block and control the roads from Iberia (East Georgia), which follow the gorges of these two rivers.

Figure captions:

1. Shorap'ani castle, general view from South-West;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. East wall with *opus mixtum*;
4. Google Earth Image – The castle, and the rivers - Dzirula and Q'virila.

Figures

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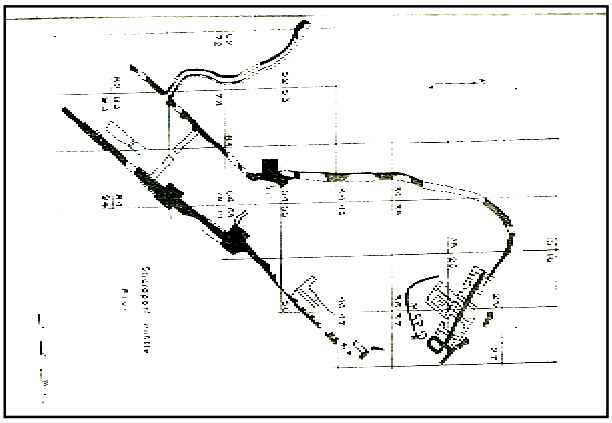

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Vardtsikhe Castle

This castle is situated in the village of Vartsikhe, on level terrain, at the junction of the Khanists'q'ali river with the Rioni and Q'virila rivers. GPS coordinates: N42 09.069 E42 42.905; Altitude: 102 m (fig. 1).

Many historical sources describe the castle of Vardtsikhe – The 6th c. Byzantine authors (Procopius of Caesarea, Justinian's *Novella*, Agathias) call the site 'Rhodopolis' ('Rose town'), a direct translation of the Georgian name – 'Vard' – Rose, 'Tsikhe' – Castle. Because of this scientists think that the Greek name derives from the local one.

The site of Vardtsikhe has been widely researched by archaeologists and historians in the 2nd half of the 20th c. (Head of the expedition Doctor V. Japaridze). According to Archaeological excavations the site includes three different building phases – 1. the castle was built in the 2nd half of the 4th c. AD. 2. It was completely rebuilt in the 2nd half of the 5th c- beginning of 6th c. AD. 3. One part of the castle was rebuilt in the late medieval period (17th-18th cc. AD) too (fig. 2).

The castle includes two concentric fortified walls of the 4th and 5th/6th c.c. The thickness of the first—inner—wall is only 1 m. and the thickness of the second outer one is 2.3 m. Unfortunately only the south, east and north-east parts of the walls remain. Other parts presumably collapsed down the cliff owing to erosion of the ground on which they were built.

Six or seven towers strengthen the south and east walls. It appears these were originally built at the same time as the first wall and protruding from it. Later, the second wall was built, linking the outermost faces of the towers, so that the towers are now situated between two parallel walls (fig. 2).

The construction techniques of the 1st and 2nd building phases of the castle are typical of 4th-6th cc AD West Georgian Fortification architecture. The facings of the walls and the towers were built with elegantly-cut limestone blocks (fig. 3.). Also there are lines of *opus mixtum* in the south wall, which also dates to the 5th-6th cc AD.

In addition, the rich archaeological material found on the territory of the site also dates the castle to the 4th-6th cc AD.

Vardtsikhe castle occupies a very strategic location. It has a most important role in the fortification system of Lazika Kingdom – 1. Because of its position inthe gorge of the River Khanists'q'ali, which connects the Lazika kingdom to the East and South-east regions, including Iberia and Javakheti, Vardtsikhe castle could control all types of traffic (Military, economical) between Lazika's souith-east regions and Iberia-Javakheti; 2. In addition, Vardtsikhe could control and protect the territories of the Rioni valley, which was the most important agro-economical part of Lazika.

Figure captions:

1. Google Earth Image – The castle, and the rivers Khanists'q'ali, Rioni and Q'virila;
2. Plan of the castle;
3. The south part of the 5th and 6th cc wall, from outside (South);
4. *opus mixtum* in the 6th c. south wall.

Figures

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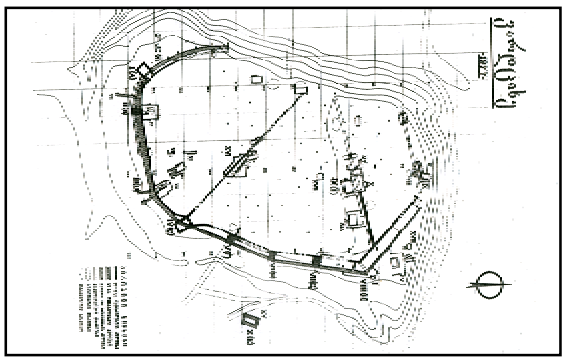

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Kvemo Dimi Tower

This tower is situated in the village of Kvemo Dimi, in the house garden of local inhabitant Guram K'vet'enadze. GPS coordinates: N42 06.161 E42 48.710; Altitude: 160 m (fig. 1).

The tower has a rectangular-shaped plan. The dimensions of the walls are: 7.65 m (SW-NE) by 8.10 m (SE-NW) (fig. 2.). The entrance of the tower must have been on the 2nd floor, in the south-east wall.

Approximately 50% of the tower remains – the height of all four walls is 3-4 metres. The facings of the walls were built with big limestone blocks (60 cm by 80 cm) (fig. 3).

Unfortunately, I could not find any ceramic material inside or outside of the tower, and therefore can not date the tower that way. Judging from the building material and technique, it could have been built in either the 4th-6th cc AD or the 9th-13th cc AD. Consequently, I can not link this tower to the fortification system of the Lazika kingdom. Nevertheless, I suppose that the main function of this tower was the customs control of merchants moving through the territory of the village of Kvemo Dimi. And from this, I infer that there was an important road system in this area connecting the south-east border parts of west Georgia to its inner regions.
This opinion is supported by the location of other monuments of the region, above all by the castle of Dimi, which is situated 4.3 km to the south-east of the Kvemo Dimi tower and which was one of the most important border castles of the Lazika kingdom in the 4th-6th cc AD. Apparently this road must have followed the valley of the Khanists'q'ali River. As was mentioned above, Vardtsikhe is also situated on the left bank of the River Khanists'q'ali. The Kvemo Dimi tower lies just 200 metres from the right bank of this river. Also Dimi castle is situated on the right bank of the upper gorge of the River Khanists'q'ali. So those three monuments each protect and control different sections of the road (fig. 4).

Figure captions:

1. Google Earth image, location of the tower;
2. plan of the tower;
3. South-West façade of the tower;
4. Google Earth image, - r. Khanists'q'ali valley – Dimi castle, Kvemo Dimi Tower and Vardtsikhe castle.

Figures

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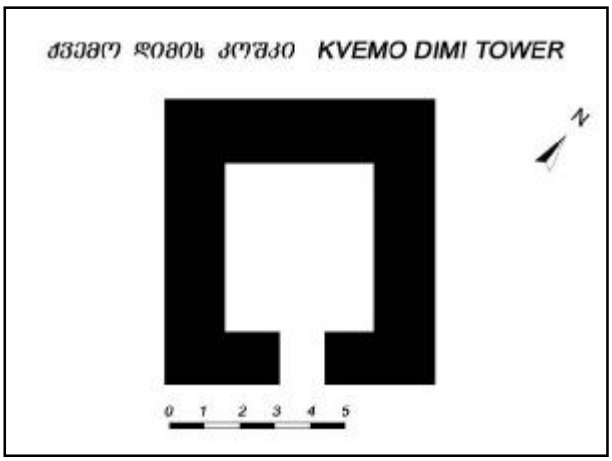

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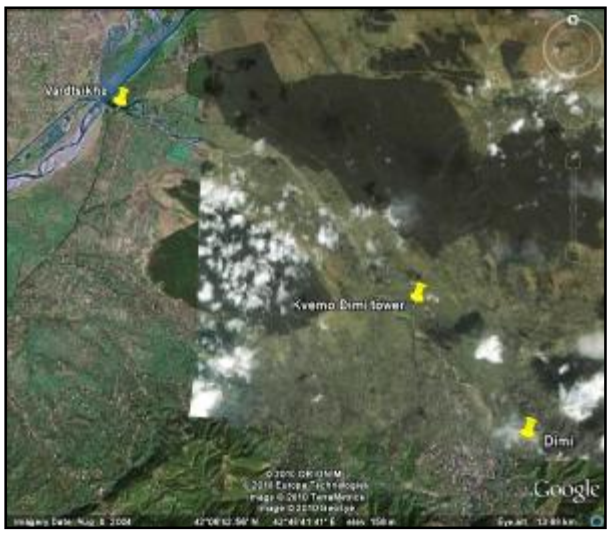

Dimi castle

This castle is situated in the village of Zeda Dimi. GPS coordinates: N42 04.312 E42 50.634; Altitude: 350 m (fig. 1).

It was built on the top of a high hill, at the right bank of the river Khanists'q'ali. The hill slopes steeply on all four sides, especially to the south-west and west. The easiest access to the castle is from the south-east, but even from this side it would be difficult to reach the castle with a massive attack, because of the slope which stretches approximately 50 metres from the bottom of hill to the south-east wall of the castle.

The castle is largely destroyed. Only the ruins of the south tower (Height of surviving walls 2-3 m), and two, small, south-east and south-west sections of the walls (2-3 metres) remain. The whole top of the hill (which can be assumed to be the inner territory of the castle ~ 100 square metres) is covered with thick, impenetrable scrub, making it impossible to see anything there (fig. 1). According to G. Tskitishvili, an archaeologist who visited the site in 1960, there are remnants of the north-east section of the wall as well, which was built with small limestone blocks and mortar, characteristic of 4^{th}-6^{th} cc architecture. Unfortunately I could find no trace of this part of the wall.

G. Tskitishvili later conducted small-scale archaeological excavations on the territory of the castle; - these uncovered late Hellenistic (2^{nd}-1^{st} cc BC) and early medieval (4^{th}-6^{th} cc) cultural layers.

There is no doubt that Dimi Castle had a very important place in the fortification system of the Lazika kingdom. As you can see on the Google Earth image (fig. 2), the hill on which the castle was built stands near the junction of the Sak'raula river with the Khanists'q'ali – this is the place where both of these rivers emerge from gorges. After their confluence the Khanists'q'ali flows on level terrain in a northerly direction. It seems probable that two roads followed the gorges of these rivers in ancient times. The Sak'raula gorge runs in an easterly direction, before turning north in the direction of the town of Kharagauli (Imereti region). From there it continues in a north-easterly direction to Surami, the western border village of Kartli/Iberia; while a side branch runs south to Borjomi (fig. 3). The second road follows the gorge of the River Khanists'q'ali south to the Zek'ari pass, and thence goes to Javakheti and the district of Akhalcikhe (fig. 4). In conclusion I can say that Dimi castle's main function was to control and

block these two roads entering Lazika from the neighbouring regions to south and east. And the lower sections of this road inside the kingdom would be controlled by Kvemo Dimi tower and above all by Vardtsikhe castle as far as the main river of Lazika – the Rioni (Phasis).

Figure captions

1. The territory of the castle, covered with plants;
2. Google Earth image, The castle and the junction of the Sak'raula and Khanists'q'ali rivers;
3. Google Earth image, the eastern road to Kartli;
4. Google Earth image, the southern road to Javakheti.

Figures

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Sakara Tower

This tower is situated in the village of Kveda (lower) Sakara. GPS coordinates: N42 08.633 E43 01.928; Altitude: 183 m.

The tower was built on level terrain, beside the high left bank of the River Cholaburi. But, the tower is easy of access from all sides, except the north, where the river runs in its gorge. Because of this, I suppose that its main function, like the Kvedo Dimi tower, was customs control for merchants moving on the road that followed the Cholaburi from the upper, northern, parts of the Imereti region to its centre (e.g. Kutaisi, Vardtsikhe).

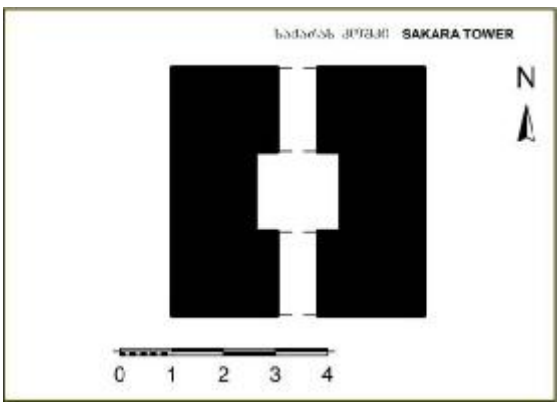
The tower is rectangular in plan: external dimensions – 4.75 m (SN) by 4.85 m (EW). It had two entrances on the 2nd floor in the south and north walls (fig. 1). Unfortunately there is no information about Sakara tower in the historical sources and no one has researched it before. Also I could not find any ceramic material from the territory of the castle to date it. The construction technique, using big limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 2.), is similar to Kvemo Dimi tower, so, it can be defined as a medieval settlement, i.e. 4th-6th or 9th-13th cc.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the tower;
2. The tower, from south-east.

Figures

1.



2.

Sk'ande

This castle is situated in the village of Sk'ande. GPS coordinates: N42 16.109 E43 02.790; Altitude: 492 m.

It was built on the top of a high hill (elevation of the hill is 120 m.), with very steep slopes to the north and west; there are also slopes to the east and south sides of the hill, but it is easier to reach the castle from these sides, although not with a massive attack (fig. 1).

Fortified walls surround the top of the hill on all sides, with ruins of a tower at the north, on the highest point of the hill. There are also ruins of a palace (fig. 2) and a hall-type church in the middle of the castle territory (fig. 3-4).

The site was visited by several scientists during the 20th c. (S. Q'aukhchishvili, N. Berdzenishvili, S. Janashia, and V. Japaridze.). According to these scholars, the palace and the church were built in the late medieval period (17th-18th cc). However, the construction techniques used—the facings of the church were built with well cut limestone blocks — and the 'the style of stone carvings found inside of the church territory are very typical for 9th-13th cc architecture. I do not think that the church can have been built later than the 13th c.

The total length of the castle territory (SN) is 100 metres and its width – 55 metres. This territory is divided into 2 terraces (fig. 5).

The facings of the defensive walls were built of cut limestone blocks and mortar, which is very characteristic of 4th-6th centuries' fortifications (fig. 6).

Several Byzantine historical sources (Menander Protector, Procopius of Caesarea, Justin's *Novella*) mention Sk'ande, alongside Shorap'ani, as one of the border castles defending the Lazika kingdom's eastern borders and controlling the roads from Iberia.

Figure captions

1. Google Earth image – top of the hill, where the castle is situated;
2. The palace arch;

3. The church interior, view from south;
4. Decorated stones from the church;
5. Plan of the castle;
6. The south facing of the southern defensive wall.

Figures

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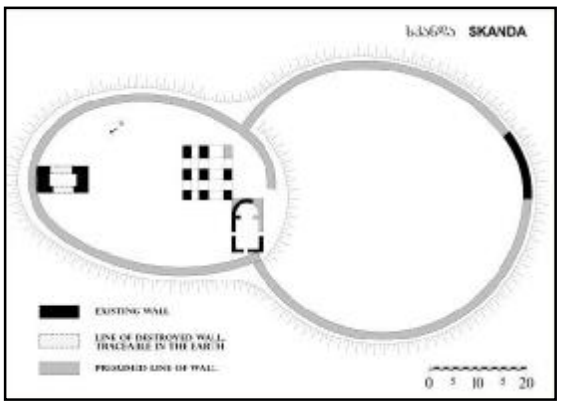

6.

T'olebi Castle

This castle is situated in the North-East part of the village of Upper T'olebi. GPS coordinates: N42 04.036 E42 15.273; Altitude: 244 m.

It was built on top of a hill, at the left bank of the River Khevists'q'ali. The distance between the river and the castle is 650 metres.

The castle is a typical early Medieval (4^{th}-6^{th} cc) monument – with fortified walls, a tower and a defensive ditch.

It is largely destroyed, with only the east and west sections of the walls remaining. The height of these walls is 2-4 metres. The small hill these ruins stand on slopes down steeply on its north side, making it impossible to attack the castle from this side. The other sides have more or less easy access to the top of the hill, for which reason the builders of the castle dug a defensive ditch on these sides. Its stretches for 130 metres all told; its width – 5-6 metres, modern depth – 1-2 metres. Its original depth must have been more then 1 metre, but over the centuries it has filled with soil (fig. 1-2).

The castle includes fortified walls and a tower, which was situated at the east side of the castle. The ruins of the tower are today represented only by the south wall line, which survives only at ground level. There are many big pieces of the collapsed walls scattered around the castle territory. It appears that the west wall was semi-circular in plan (fig. 3), but the east wall and tower – rectangular. The scale of the castle was not big – Its internal dimensions were about 12 m (SN) by 16 m (EW) (fig. 4).

The building material, style of construction, shape and size of T'olebi Castle is typical of Lazika Kingdom castles of the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries: the complex includes a tower, fortified wall, and a defensive ditch. The facings (fig. 5) of the walls were built of cut limestone blocks (dim: 30X40 cm.) and mortar. Between these facings, the mortar and rubble fill contained a variety of stones, including river cobbles and rough-hewn limestone All these are very typical of other 4^{th}-6^{th} century castles discovered in west Georgia.

T'olebi castle occupies a very strategic and interesting location. There are high mountains in a radius of 1-2 km to the south and east of the castle. But the castle has a long and wide view to the

north and north-west; it should be possible to have a wide view from the top of the tower in these directions and to control traffic along the biggest river of west Georgia, the –Rioni, and its junction with another big river the Tskhenists'q'ali (or Hippis), and the roads following their courses (fig. 6).

Figure captions

1. The defensive ditch, view from west;
2. Google earth image – Contours of the defensive ditch;
3. The west wall, seen from the west;
4. Plan of the castle;
5. The facing of the west wall;
6. Google earth image –T'olebi castle and the River Rioni.

Figures

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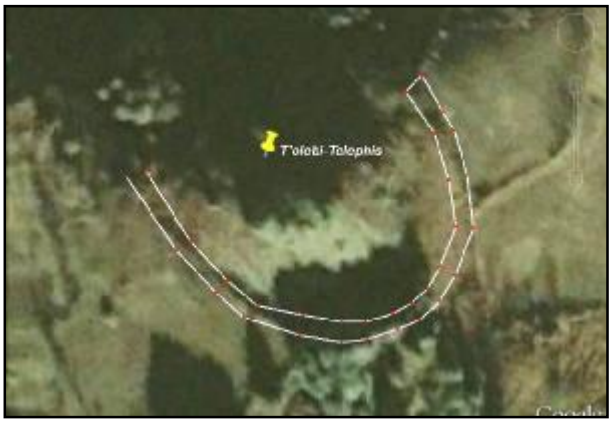

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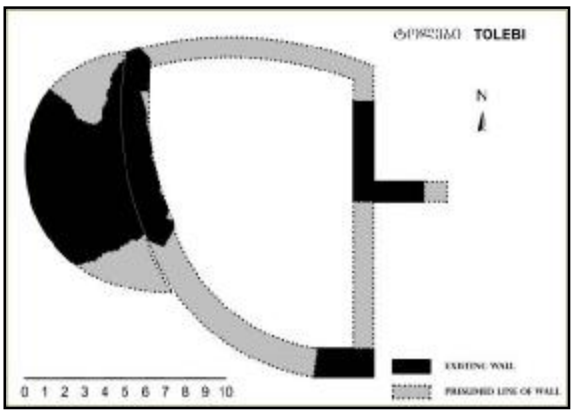

5.

6.

4.3 Guria Region

Shukhuti castle

This castle is situated at the south end of the village of Shukhuti. GPS coordinates: N42 04.117 E42 02.420; Altitude: 139 m.

It was built on the top of a high hill, which has steep slopes to the west and south. The easiest access to its territory would be from the north-east. The castle territory is completely covered with thick undergrowth (fig. 1), which made it very difficult to satisfactorily record the monument . However, I managed to define nearly half the length of the castle wall, which extends 30 metres and is round shape in plan with sharp corners (fig. 2). According to these imperfect measurements, the diameter of the castle was around 25 m. The thickness of the recorded wall is 80 cm.

The facings of the walls were built with roughly cut limestones and mortar. Because of this, I think that Shukhuti castle was built in the period of the Lazika kingdom, but this is an inference and not yet proved.

Shukhuti castle occupies a very interesting location – There is a very wide view to the north from the castle territory, and it would be possible to see the River Rioni valley's Samtredia-Senaki section and also the 'Unagira' mountain's south-east side, where there are three very important castles of the Lazika kingdom: Shkhepi, Sak'alandarishvilo and Menji (fig. 3). The distance between Shukhuti and these three castles is about 20 km, but with fire at night or smoke during the day these castles could have contacted each other to pass information about the movement of enemy troops in the Kingdom's territory.

Figure captions

1. The site of the castle, overgrown;
2. Sketch plan of the castle;
3. Google Earth image – Shukhuti castle, Rioni valley and three other castles on the south-east side of 'Unagira' mountain.

Figures

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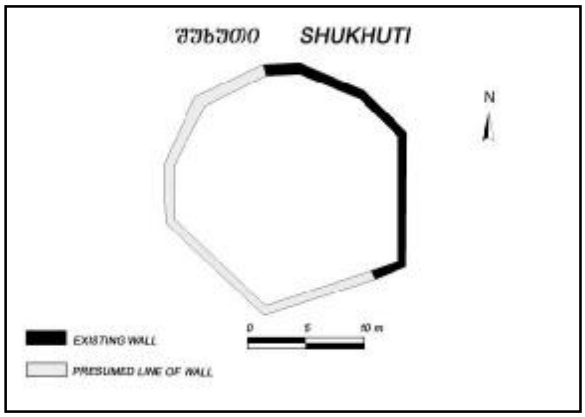

3.

Likhauri castle

This castle is situated at the west end of the village of Likhauri. GPS coordinates: N41 52.313 E41 59.785; Altitude: 255 m.

The castle was built on top of a high hill, surrounded with steep slopes on all four sides. The easiest access to the castle was from the east side.

The castle includes fortified walls and four towers (fig. 1). The main entrance of the castle runs through the north tower, which is linked to the north wall from inside (south). It would be very difficult to get inside the castle; because the entrance was located above the ground floor, at the level of the first floor level and it would be necessary to use a rope, a ladder, or wooden stairs to gain entry. The walls surrounding the yard of the castle, which has a rounded shape in plan, survive to a height of 4-5 metres. Of the other three towers standing in the east, west and south ends of the yard, two are destroyed completely, and only one – the east tower – survives in a reasonable condition – the height of this tower is 5-6 metres (fig. 2). Unlike the fortified walls and the other towers, which were built of rubble stone and mortar (fig. 3), the east rectangular tower (Dim: 7 m (EW) by 9 m (SN)) was built with cut limestone blocks (Dim: 40-60-80 cm). This leads me to suppose that the earliest building layers of the castle might date to the 4^{th}-6^{th} or 10^{th}-13th cc. AD. All other parts of the castle were built in the late Medieval period (17^{th}-18^{th} cc.), which can be proved by reference to its building material and its plan(the rounded shape with towers in the corners). The analogues for Likhauri castle's late style of plan are Nogha, Zeni and Kheta castles in Samegrelo region. The whole area of the castle is about 400 square metres.

Likhauri castle occupies a very interesting location. It stands 1.2 km south-east from the road which connects modern Ozurgeti (Centre of Guria region) to Kobuleti on the Black Sea coast, and the 4^{th}-6^{th} century castle of Tsikhisdziri – Petra, (distance between Likhauri and Petra is 23 km). It seems reasonable to conclude that Likhauri castle's main function was to control and defend this section of road (fig. 4).

Figure captions

1. Plan of the castle;
2. The east tower, view from the east;
3. The interior of north wall, view from south;
4. Google Earth image – The road connecting Ozurgeti district to Petra castle through Likhauri.

Figures

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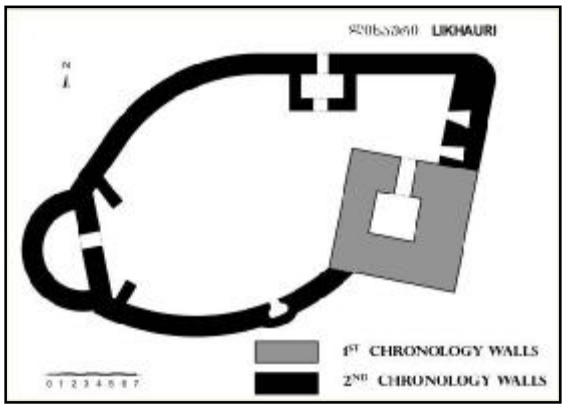

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Ask'ana castle

This castle is situated on the border of two villages Mtisp'iri and Ask'ana. GPS coordinates: N41 55.928 E42 10.442; Altitude: 405 m.

It was built at the east end of the longitudinal top of a high hill, oriented to the E-W. The mountain has a steep slope to the North, East and South. The only access to the castle was from the west side – to reach it a visitor had to climb the west slope of the mountain, then walk about 200 metres across the narrow ridge (0.5-1 m) on top of the mountain. Consequently, it would have been next to impossible to attack the castle from any side (fig. 1).

The building technique and the planning system of the castle is very interesting. It was built on 3 terraces. The first, the lower terrace (to the north), contained the main gate, and is triangular in plan. This section has a small door at the south corner, from whence one could move to the 2nd terrace section. This second terrace was fortified with walls on all sides and had a longitudinal shape, oriented to the SE-NW. It had a tower in the NW corner, which controlled the territories to the castle's north-west. The main and biggest section of the castle lies north-east of the 2nd section (fig. 2). This part includes two water reservoirs, carved into the rock (fig. 3), fortified walls, and a tower at the east end, which was partly built with limestone and mortar walls, and partly using the *in situ* natural rock. The entrance to this tower was made in the west wall, on the second floor, and was reached by steps carved into the cliff (Tab 4).

The total area of the castle is about 1800 square metres; the total length of the fortified walls – 225 metres; the thickness – 2 metres; maximum height – 6 metres.

I observed two distinct building phases during my survey: one is represented by well-cut limestone blocks (dim: 20-30 cm) and should be identified with the 4th-6th cc architecture (fig. 5); and the second phase, represented also by limestone blocks, but larger in size and better cut, must be identified with the 10th-13th cc (fig. 6). We can conclude that the castle was probably built in the 4th-6th cc AD and rebuilt during the period of the united Georgian Kingdom (10th-13th cc AD).

Ask'ana castle has a very interesting location – It stands on the left bank of the river Bakhvists'q'ali, which flows down from the high mountains. The gorge of this river connects Ask'ana Castle with the higher village of Bakhmaro to the south, so the castle could protect and

control the road coming from the southern passes to the northern, lowland territories of the kingdom.

Figure captions

1. Google Earth image – the location of Ask'ana castle on the top of the hill;
2. Google Earth image – the territory of the castle;
3. The water reservoir;
4. The east tower, view from the west;
5. The 4^{th}-6^{th} cc masonry;
6. The 10^{th}-13^{th} cc masonry.

Figures

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Buk'istsikhe castle

This castle is situated in the eastern part of the village of Buk'istsikhe. GPS coordinates: N41 59.968 E42 17.842; Altitude: 295 m.

The castle was built on the top of a high hill, at the left bank of the River Supsa. The hill is surrounded by steep slopes on all four sides. The easiest access to the castle was from the north-west; from here the visitor had to walk on a very narrow (1 m.) path to reach the castle territory (fig. 1).

There was a small-scale archaeological excavation on the site in 1964, led by head of the expedition N. Berdzenishvili. The archaeologists found 3 building layers belonging to each of the 3 stages of the medieval period. According to the expedition report, they excavated the ruins of fortified walls, a 3 floored tower, and a hall-type church, but I could find only the rectangular ruin of the tower, with a rock winepress building (Ext. dim: 3 m N-S by 3.70 m E-W) in the south-east corner of the tower (fig. 2). This winepress is mentioned in the 1964 report as well.

The internal dimensions of the tower are: 6.20 m (E-W) by 7.40 m (N-S), the thickness of the wall – 1.80 m (fig. 3). The facings of the walls of the tower are mostly destroyed; it is probable they were built with limestone blocks and mortar.

According to archaeological and architectural research, the tower of the castle should be dated to the 4^{th}-6^{th} cc.

It is probable that the main function of Buk'istsikhe castle, like Ask'ana castle, was the control and blocking of the road located on the gorge of the River Supsa, coming from the south-eastern part of the country in a northern direction.

Figure captions

1. Google Earth image – the location of Buk'istsikhe castle on the top of the hill;
2. The winepress, view from the west;
3. Plan of the tower;
4. Google Earth image – the castle and the River Supsa gorge.

Figures

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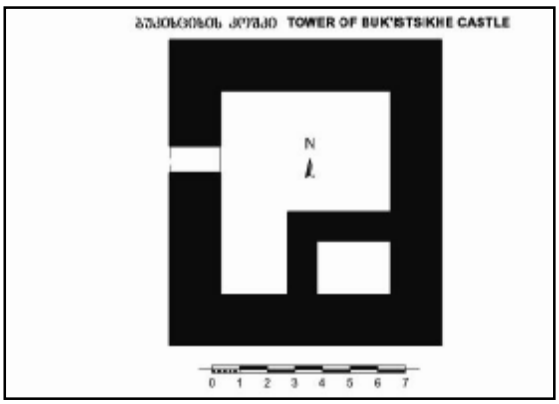

4.

Zot'i castle

This castle is situated in the south part of the village of Zot'i. GPS coordinates: N41 53.873 E42 26.170; Altitude: 813 m.

It was built on the top of a little hill, at the right bank of the River Gubazeuli. The hill has steep slopes to the north and east sides (fig. 1). There is a deep ravine of the river gorge at the west edge of the hill. The easiest access to the castle was from the south side – there a long slope comes up from the south ravine to the castle territory. A modern road leads to the castle from the north, following the river gorge, connecting the village of Zot'i with northern parts of the region (Nabeghlavi, Mtisdziri, Chokhatauri) (fig. 2).

The castle includes ruins of the fortified walls and a central tower. The wall has an irregular rounded shape in plan (dim: 23.50 m E-W by 27 m N-S), the thickness of the wall is 1.50 m. The tower is largely destroyed, with only the NE corner remaining. It extends 3.20 m. and its height is 0.5 metres. The other sides of the tower are preserved above ground only as formless humps and hillocks. (fig. 3) The dimensions of the tower were 7.80 m (N-S) by 9.50 m (E-W). The fortress wall is also largely destroyed. The western fortified wall has completely disappeared – presumably the erosion of the slope on which it stood led to its collapse down the cliff. The maximum height of the surviving wall is 3-4 m. The gate of the castle must have been cut into the middle of the south wall and was approximately 2.5 m wide (fig. 4); there is one semi-circular buttress (fig. 5) on the left (east) side of the gate, built against the outside (north) façade of the wall.

The facings of the wall were built with irregularly cut limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 6). Consequently, and also because of the buttress, characteristic of the early medieval period (4^{th}-6^{th} cc), the castle should be assigned to that period, but in addition, I found several pieces of 17^{th}-18^{th} cc pottery on the site, from which we can infer that life continued in Zot'i castle until that period.

Zot'i castle occupies a very interesting and substandard location. It was built in a very high and mountainous part of the country (the maximum altitude of the most castles is about 200-300 metres, but for the Zot'i castle it is – 813 m.) It seems likely that there was a very important road passing these high mountains. This probably followed the gorge of the River Gubazeuli, and the main function of the Zot'i castle was control of this road.

Figure captions

1. The castle hill, view from NW;
2. Google Earth image - The castle, the Gubazeuli river gorge and the road;
3. Plan of the castle;
4. The gate of the castle, view from inside (south);
5. The buttress, view from outside (north);
6. The masonry of the castle.

Figures

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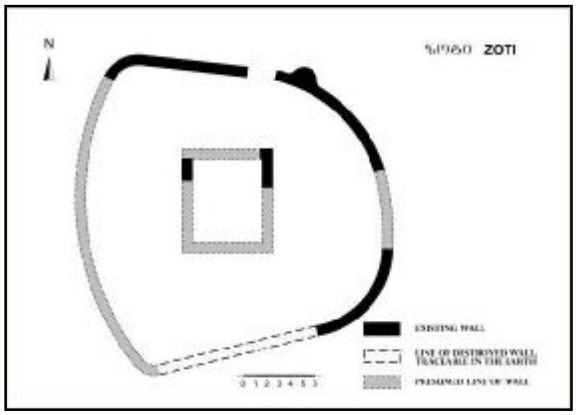

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Tsikhisperdi castle

This castle is situated in the middle part of the village of Tsikhisperdi. GPS coordinates: N41 58.122 E41 56.382; Altitude: 228 m.

It was built on top of a small hill, surrounded by steep slopes on all four sides. The easiest access to the castle is from the south (fig. 1).

The castle is completely destroyed and it was consequently very difficult to understand the shape and size of the castle. I could find 2 pieces of the walls *in situ* on top of the hill. If these are typical, the facings of the walls were built with cut limestone blocks and mortar (fig. 2) and can therefore be dated to the 4^{th}-6^{th} cc. The thickness of the wall is 1.50 m.

The castle occupies a very strategic location. There is wide view in all directions. It is possible to see the Black Sea coast to the west; the Mountains of Guria and the valleys of the Natanebi and Supsa to the north and south respectively. It appears the main function of the Tsikhisperdi castle was visual control of the region (Guria, Adjara) and roads (Black sea-Guria-Imereti) around it.

Figure captions

1. The castle hill, from the south;
2. The masonry of the wall.

Figures

1.

2.

4.4 Adjara region

Tsikhisdziri (Petra) castle

This castle is situated in the village of Tsikhisdziri. GPS coordinates: N41 46.097 E41 45.217; Altitude: 60 m.

It was built on top of a high mountain, by the Black Sea coast between the towns of Batumi and Kobuleti.

Tsikhisdziri castle is generally identified with the Petra mentioned in the early Byzantine historical sources as one of the border castle of the Lazika kingdom on the Black sea coast over the last two centuries (M. Brosse, D. Bakradze, S. Janashia, etc.). According to these sources Petra was built on the top of a cliff (Greek "πέτρα" (petra), meaning rock) by the Byzantines to control trade traffic through Lazika in the 6th c. AD.

A few scientists (S. Q'aukhchishvili and G. Grigolia) disagree with this opinion and argue that Petra castle was located elsewhere; their strongest argument is that Tsikhisdziri lacks a harbour, which would have been necessary for a trade centre, connecting different trade centres of the Black Sea coast to each other. This dispute regarding the location of Petra remains unresolved. The most cogent version is still the identification of Petra with the castle of Tsikhisdziri.

The castle had two parts, north and south, connected to each other by a long corridor (fig. 1). The southern is represented today only by a round tower. The main (northern) part of Tsikhisdziri castle includes: fortified walls; a Basilica-type church (fig. 2) (dim: 18.10 m. by 34.50 m.); a bath-house (fig. 3) with apodyterium, cold, warm and hot water rooms and a boiler-room (dim: 6.5 m by 9.2 m.); and what is presumably a long storage building (fig. 4) with three sections (dim: 5 m. by 25 m), the interior of the building was daubed with mortar. The main gate (1.20 m. wide) was in the north-east part of the walls (fig. 5). The thickness of these walls is 1.30 m.

The Castle occupies a very strategic location. According to many scientists (S. Janashia, N. Inaishvili, etc) Tsikhisdziri controlled two roads – one coming from the Roman-Byzantine trade centres of the south Black sea coast, and another road that ran along the River Chorokhi gorge,

connecting the neighbouring southern regions with Lazika (fig. 6). Tsikhisdziri (Petra) was consequently one of the most important border forts of the Lazika kingdom.

Figure captions

1. Plan of the castle;
2. The Basilica-type church, view from the north;
3. The bath-house, view from the north-west;
4. The storage building, view from the east;
5. The main gate, view from inside (west);
6. Google Earth image, - The roads coming to Petra from neighbouring regions to the Lazika Kingdom through Tsikhisdziri (Petra)

Figures

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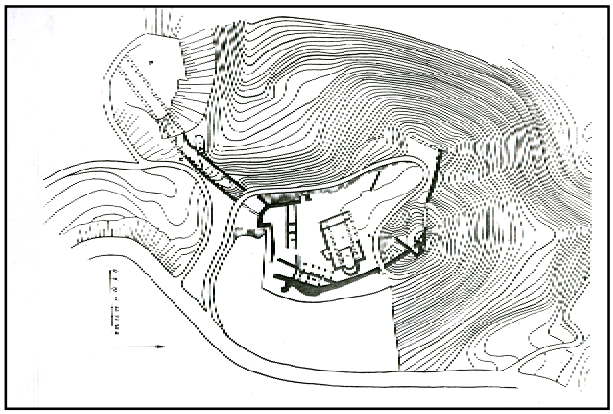

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Batumi castle

This castle is situated at the east entrance of the town of Batumi, on the Black Sea coast. GPS coordinates: N41 39.819 E41 40.969; Altitude: 24 m.

It was built on top of a little hill, at the left bank of the river Q'oroli, where this river joins the sea (fig. 1). It is surrounded by steep slopes on all four sides (fig.2), but the easiest access to the castle would have been from the south-west and the gate of the castle was therefore presumably in the south-west wall.

The castle territory was recorded in the 60s' of the 20th century by a group of archaeologists (Head of expedition – N. Berdzenishvili). Archaeological excavation uncovered several cultural and building layers dating to the 7th-6th cc BC through to the 18th-19th cc AD, including a layer of the early Byzantine period (4th-6th cc).

The castle includes rectangular fortified walls, oriented E-W, and two towers; one of them was built inside the walls, at the east end of the castle territory and another outside of the walls, in the south-east corner of the castle (fig. 3). The castle's internal dimensions are: 18.50 m (S-N) by 18.65 m (E-W). Its walls are 1.15 m thick. The dimension of the internal tower is 8.20 m (E-W) by 9.40 m (N-S), and its walls are 1.50 m thick. The entrance was in the south wall of the tower (fig. 4). Another tower was pentagonal in plan; the total circumference of this tower's walls is 17.80 m, their thickness – 1.35 m.

The most complicated construction phases of the castle are situated near the north wall. 2 parallel walls of different periods stand there; one of them, which is external, has two semi-circular buttresses.

The facings of the castle were built with elegantly cut limestone blocks and mortar, which is characteristic of 4th-6th and 10th-13th cc architecture.

Batumi castle occupies a very interesting location – it is situated exactly mid-way between two other early medieval castles – Gonio-Apsaros and Petra-Tsikhisdziri. The striking fact that the distance between each of these and Batumi is 13 km, suggests that Batumi castle was

deliberately situated to control this section of the road and at the same time to pass signals by fire and/or by smoke to these neighbouring castles to the north and south (fig. 5).

Figure captions

1. Google Earth image – location of Batumi castle;
2. The castle hill, view from the east;
3. Plan of the castle;
4. The internal tower, view from the west;
5. Google Earth image – the distances between Gonio-Apsaros, Batumi and Petra-Tsikhisdziri castles.

Figures

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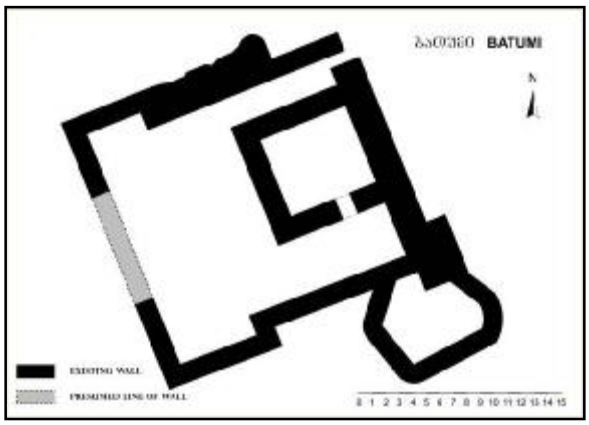

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5. Conclusion

45 sites were visited during the 3 months' project in West Georgia. 38 of them are ruins of castles and 7 – Christian churches. 13 sites were previously completely unknown to scientific society, 5 of them are ruins of churches and 8 – castles. 26 plans of the sites (24 castles and 2 churches) were drawn, 50 GPS points were recorded and more then 1200 digital photos were taken during the trips. At least 26* of the researched castles were built during the heyday of the Lazikan kingdom in the 4th-6th cc. AD. As a result, these castles can be arranged into 6 groups:

1. Black Sea coast defensive line - Petra-Tsikhisdziri and Batumi castles;
2. South defensive line – T'olebi, Sukhuti, Likhauri, Buk'istsikhe and Zot'i castles;
3. South-east defensive line – Dimi and Vardtsikhe castles;
4. East defensive line – Shorap'ani and Sk'ande castles;
5. Central defensive section - Abedati, Ek'i, Khomak'irde, Machkhomeri, Nask'alu, Q'urumulia, Jakhuti, Gaghma Sajijao, Dzveli Khibula, Nojikhevi and Ch'akvinja castles; and
6. North-west defensive line – Napichkhovo, Osindale, Skuri and K'urzu castles.

Also, 3 main functions of the castles can be defined:

1. The control and blocking of roads lying in gorges (e.g. Skuri and Dimi castles);
2. Communication: visual interrelation and signaling by smoke or fire between castles (e.g. Machkhomeri, Q'urumulia and Nask'alu castles);
3. Administrative-custom centres - e.g. Vardtsikhe and Petra-Tsikhisdziri castles.

The main aim of the project – the complex comparative investigation of the Lazikan castles, has been attained; There is complete information (textual and visual) about the 45 monuments in West Georgia, which is kept in the Georgian National Museum. This information will also be provided to West Georgian regional offices of cultural heritage and museums and to the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport for the creation of a database of Monuments (a Sites and Monuments Record).

* Abedati, Ek'i, Khomak'irde, Osindale, Napichkhovo, Skuri, K'urzu, Machkhomeri, Nask'alu, Q'urumulia, Jakhuti, Gaghma Sajijao, Dzveli Khibula, Nojikhevi, Ch'akvinja, Shorap'ani, Vardtsikhe, Dimi, Sk'ande, T'olebi, Sukhuti, Likhauri, Buk'istsikhe, Zot'i, Petra-Tsikhisdziri and Batumi castles.

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