

Nomads on the Territory of Eastern Georgia (Middle of the first Millennium BC)

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ABSTRACT. This article discusses how, in the middle of the first millennium BC, the nomadic, so-called Scythian archaeological culture was reflected in the territory of Eastern Georgia. The first part of the work is devoted to information from written sources – in particular, Leonti Mroveli's "Exodus of the Khazars" ("The Life of Kartli") – about the historical processes which took place in the territory of Kartli in this period. The second part refers to the archaeological sites that fall within the same chronological range, which, according to the funeral rites, as well as the artifacts confirmed there, are associated with an alien ethnic element. The debatable issue in the scientific literature about the cultural identity of the Treli burials 16 and 24 is also put forth.

Keywords: Nomads, Scythians, Cimmerians, Early Iron Age, Georgia

Written sources

The first half of the first millennium BC in the Caucasus region was defined by two significant events. The first occurred in the 8th–7th centuries BC, when nomads from the Black Sea steppes raided the Near East by passing through the Caucasus region, in particular, Georgia. The second event corresponded to the end of the Early Iron Age, a period during which iron eventually replaced bronze as the primary material for making weapons. This transition marked the onset of the proper Iron Age in the entire Caucasus region by the 6th century BC.

The point of view expressed in the scientific literature, that one section of the Georgian Chronicles of the 11th century "Kartlis Tskhovreba" ("The Life of Kartli"), namely, "Gamoslva Khazarta" ("The Exodus of the Khazars") by Leonti Mroveli reflects the Scythian campaigns in the Near East, has never been questioned¹. Specialists share the opinion that by "Persia" and "Persians" Media and Medes are meant in "Kartlis Tskhovreba" (Kovalevskaya 1975:66). After Media had lost its independence in the 6th century BC and had fallen under the rule of the Achaemenid Empire, the territory of the former Media was often referred to as Persia and its inhabitants as Persians. By this name it is known to the author of "Kartlis Tskhovreba" as well (*ibid*).

In general, according to ancient tradition, the Scythians are considered the successors of the Cimmerians (Herodotus. [I.15](#)). Ancient Near Eastern documents and Greek legends distinguish these two groups from each other (Rostovtsev [1918:27](#))². The nomads who came to the south Caucasus are also distinguished by Leonti Mroveli, according to whom two waves of nomadic peoples came here. The first wave comes from the north, through the Caucasian passes. The author identifies these people with the “Khazars” familiar to him, who lived in the north of Caucasus in the period prior to his time. The second wave comes from the south and these are “Turks” expelled from the Near East (Kartlis Tskhovreba [I:125](#))³.

According to a Georgian Chronicles, the Khazars initially entered the south Caucasus through the Derbent Pass and after the Khazar’s king raided the lands, they crossed back over the Caucasus Mountains (Kartlis Tskhovreba [I:108,109](#)). Subsequently, the Khazars explored both ways leading through the Sea Gate, or Derbent, and the Aragvi Gate, that is Dariali (*Ibid*). In case of crossing the Derbent, the Khazars would have entered the territories of the Near East bypassing the territory of Georgia. But they, apparently, returned from the Near East to their homeland through the Dariali Gorge. This return route is confirmed by archaeological evidence, details of which are provided below.

Based on toponymy, Iv. Javakhishvili suggested the arrival of peoples carrying Scythian culture in the territory of Georgia, precisely, from the south (Javakhishvili [1950:241-250](#)). After the first crossing of the Caucasus, the Khazars’ movement becomes intense - "the exodus of Khazars multiplied..."(*Ibid*), which is to be explained by the warrior nomads’ continuous connection with their homeland from the Near East, and not by the primary purpose of raids on the territory of the south Caucasus. Presumably, this is indicated by the fact that after the end of the Near East campaigns, after the 6th century BC, the trace of so-called Scythian culture on the territory of Georgia actually disappears. It is possible that the northerners lose interest in their movement in the Caucasus or, perhaps, the political union on the territory of Kartli closes the crossings of the Caucasus and no longer allows nomads to cross them.

Leonti Mroveli in his work mentions only one northern nomad's name, the son of the first Khazar king, Uobos (Kartlis Tskhovreba [I:109](#)). It maybe a coincidence, but attention is drawn to the fact that Leonti Mroveli’s Uobos and Strabo's Κώβου (Strabo [I.3.21](#)) are similar in phonetic sound. In both cases these names are related to the events of northern nomads’ campaigns. If the similarity of the names Uobos-Κώβου could be accepted, then it should indicate that both authors (Strabo and Leonti Mroveli) mention the same name, common among the nomadic peoples moving from north to south and vice versa⁴. According to Strabo, Κώβου is the leader of the Treres and an ally of the Cimmerians, and the Treres are the Cimmerians or one of the tribes of the Cimmerians. Also, according to Strabo, the Treres are also neighbors of the Thracians, and also a Thracian tribe (Strabo [I.3.18; XII.1.8](#)). Hence, for Strabo the Treres, Thracians and Cimmerians are related peoples. Leonti Mroveli considers Uobos the father of Ossetians. According to him, after the Khazar’s king raided the south Caucasus and returned through the Dariali Gorge, he gave the Georgian and Armenian captives to Uobos. Together with these people, Uobos settled in the lands to the West of the Lomeki River (Terek), and his descendants are Ossetians (Kartlis Tskhovreba [I:109](#)). For

Leonti Mroveli, Ossetians are people composed of Khazars, Georgians and Armenians (Javakhishvili 1950:277).

Considering the issues of Scythian weaponry, M. Pirtskhalava (1989)⁵, relies on V. Kovalevskaya, in whose opinion, in the north Caucasus, where the tradition of experience in working with complex methods of metal is not observed archaeologically, the emergence of high-quality metal products in the 7th-6th centuries BC, is explained by the migration of south Caucasian metallurgists to the north Caucasus. Kovalevskaya associates this migration with the movement of Scythian tribes, citing information provided by Leonti Mroveli on the Georgian and Armenian captives as supporting evidence (Kovalevskaya 1985:45).

The ethnicity of the Cimmerians is unknown, unlike the Scythians, whose Iranian-speaking origin is not in doubt among the majority of experts. According to Greek sources, the Cimmerians inhabited the northern coast of the Black Sea, near the Cimmerian Bosphorus, from where they were displaced by the Scythians (Herodotus IV, 12; Strabo I.1.10; I.21.9). Herodotus notes that during the Scythian pursuit of the Cimmerians, they did not follow the route from Lake Maeotis to the Phasis River and Colchis (Herodotus I.103-104). Instead, according to him, the Cimmerians consistently moved along the sea (Herodotus IV.12). Some researchers share the point of view expressed by A. Manandyan that the data given by Herodotus indicate the use of the eastern coast of the Black Sea by the Cimmerians (Manandyan 1944:44-46). According to Strabo, the Cimmerians passed along the western coast of the Black Sea through the Bosphorus to Ionia (Strabo I.1.10). The Khazars of Leonti Mroveli use the Caucasian crossings - Dariali and Derbent. The possibility of using these routes remains a subject of discussion among researchers. Regardless of how the controversial issue of establishing the roads used by the nomads is resolved, the fact is that based on Georgian written sources and archaeological evidence the movement of northern nomads during Near Eastern campaigns in the south Caucasus was not a single occurrence.

The upper date of the events related to the Khazars of Leonti Mrovelis assumed to be in the first half of the 7th century BC, since according to him, the Khazars were driven from Kartli until the enthroning of Phraortes in Media (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:110-124) - the years of Phraortes's reign are: 647-625 BC by Herodotus, 674-653 BC by I. Dyakonov (1956:20), 678-625 BC by I. Medvedskaya (2004:99). The year 625 BC was assumed as the upper date of Phraortes's rule by M. Dyakonov (1961:52)⁶. According to the given chronology, the enthroning of Phraortes falls in the 40s, and to a greater extent in the 70s of the 7th century BC (647 or 674/678 BC). After that, Leonti Mroveli's work says nothing about the nomads and in connection with their campaigns there is a chronological gap in the Georgian Chronicles. The similar gap in Greek is explained not by a decline in nomadic activity but by the absence of written records (Artamonov 1974:30). The reappearance of the nomads on the territory of Kartli, according to the information of the same source, is connected with the events of the beginning of the 6th century BC.

Leonti Mroveli enumerates the names of the rulers of Media in chronological order: Kekapos, Pharaborot, Kaikhosro (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:122,124-125)⁷. Researchers equate the identification of "Pharaborot" mentioned by Leonti Mroveli with Herodotus's "Phraortes" (Kovalevskaya 1975:67), as well as the identification of "Kaikhosro" (Leonti Mroveli) with "Kiaxes" (Herodotus) (Kovalevskaya 1975:68). The Phraortes of Herodotus is the son of

Deioces (Herodotus I.102); the Pharaborot of Leonti Mroveli is the son of Kekapos (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:124). Deioces and Kekapos belong to the same chronological period⁸, and his reign as the father of Phraortes - Pharaborot coincides with the appearance of the ethnonym "Turks" in "Kartlis Tskhovreba". According to the Georgian Chronicles, Kekapos engages in conflicts with the Turks in Media and subsequently turns his attention away from the Caucasus (ibid). The ethnonym "Turks" is introduced for the first time in "Kartlis Tskhovreba" in this context, referring to the movements of these peoples within the territory of Media. In connection with the events which took place on the territory of Kartli, the same ethnonym is associated with the Scythians who, following their expulsion from Media by Pharaborot's son Kaikhosro (Kiaxares), came to the territory of Kartli (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:124-125).

In the scientific literature, there is an opinion suggesting that the "Khazars" mentioned by Leonti Mroveli correspond to the Cimmerians, while the "Turks" align with the Scythians (Kavtaria 1999:25). This is quite possible, but only from the point of view that the "Khazars" of the Georgian source correspond to the so-called "Cimmerian" phase of the Near East campaigns of the northern nomads. It is difficult to say to what extent these names have ethnic connotations. According to G. Melikishvili, in the 7th-8th centuries AD, Khazars living in the north of the Caucasus became a significant power in the south Caucasus. He believes that it is with the legacy of this period, that in "Kartlis Tskhovreba", "Khazar" is used with the general meaning of the northern peoples (Melikishvili 1959:35). According to V. Kovalevskaya, Leonti Mroveli employs the ethnonyms "Turks" and "Khazars" to refer to the Scythians (Kovalevskaya 1975:67). A. Ivantchik supports the idea that "Cimmerians" in Akkadian sources from the 7th century BC doesn't yet serve as a collective term for peoples of the Scythian-Saka culture, as is the case in later Babylonian texts from the Achaemenid era (Ivantchik 2001:18-20).

Evidently, Leonti Mroveli had information about diverse ethnic groups participating in the campaigns of the northern nomads during ancient times. Consequently, he used different ethnonyms to describe them. Leonti Mroveli does not specify the self-designation of these peoples, nor does he adopt ethnonyms from the Ancient Near Eastern and Greek sources. Therefore, it can be concluded that the "Khazars" mentioned by Leonti Mroveli represent the initial group of northern nomads who arrived in the south Caucasus. By employing contemporary terms like "Khazar" and "Turk," the author distinguishes between different waves of nomads that migrated to Kartli in the distant past.

The evidence that the "Khazars" and the "Turks" in the Georgian source are related to a common event (the nomads of the Near East campaigns), finds indirect support in "The Life of Kartli." Here, the author lists the peoples that migrated to Kartli and the languages they used. According to this account, alongside the Georgian language, Armenian, Khazarian, Assyrian, Hebrew and Greek were also used in Kartli (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:128). The only language not mentioned in the list is Turkish, which is explained by the fact that for Leonti Mroveli, the Khazars and the Turks might have been peoples speaking the same language (Alasania 2000:25-26; 2008:16). At least, these peoples, regardless of the linguistic or ethnic difference between them, represent a single cultural and historical entity.

On the territory of Near East, the King of Media Kaikhosro-Kiaxares (son of Pharaborot-Phraortes) actively opposes the Turks (Scythians) mentioned in "Kartlis Tskhovreba" (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:125). The Scythians, displaced from Media by Kiaxares, are no longer warriors

but refugees seeking asylum. They return to their homeland by various routes. One group of displaced Scythians, having gained approval from the head of Mtskheta, settles in the vicinity of this town under the condition that they will participate in war during the anticipated attack by the Medes (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:125-126).

This covers the basic information about the campaigns of the northern nomads in the south Caucasus and, in particular, Kartli according to the information of “Kartlis Tskhovreba”.

Archaeological evidence

To this day, the investigation of nomadic archaeological cultures remains one of the primary challenges in south Caucasus Late Bronze/Early Iron Age archaeology. In studying this problem, emphasis is placed on metal objects, particularly weapons and ornaments, as nomads predominantly utilized ceramics from settled peoples. On the territory of Georgia, among these metal objects that are associated with the Near East campaigns of the Traco - Cimmerian and Scythian - Sarmatian tribes, both weapons and horse harnesses as well as art works of animal style defining so-called Scythian culture, have been found. These objects, in settlements or sanctuaries, are found only on the territory of east Georgia (Shida Kartli, Kakheti). In Shida Kartli such settlements are: Khovlegora (Muskhelishvili 1978) and Treligorebi; In Kakheti, they are: Mochrili Gora (Pitskhelauri 1973:31-33), Tsiskaraant Gora (Maisuradze & Pirtskhalava 2004:193), Usakhelo Gora (*ibid*) and the Melaani sanctuary (Pitskhelauri 1973:117-121). On all these archaeological sites, the so-called Scythian type bronze arrowheads are mostly confirmed in destruction layers. According to D. Muskhelishvili, most of the arrowheads confirmed in the destruction layer on Khovlegora (horizon II - the 5th century BC) are typologically unknown to the “Scythian” world itself (Muskhelishvili 1978:97). Typical “Scythian” arrowheads were found in an earlier layer (horizon III, the 7th-6th centuries BC) (*ibid*:75-77), but there are no traces of destruction in this layer. Due to the typological uncertainty of the arrowheads found in the destruction layer, it is difficult for the author to determine the invasion of which peoples is associated the Khovlegora catastrophe (*ibid*:96). K. Pitskhelauri considers that the sites he studied were destroyed by Scythians, but he does not exclude non-Scythian warriors with Scythian arrows (Pitskhelauri 1965:109; Pitskhelauri 1973:48).

In addition to arrowheads, a diagnostic Scythian culture artifact is a bone bouterolle found at Treligorebi (Tbilisi) in the layer dated to the 7th-6th centuries BC (building №53). At the same settlement, in building №17, fragments of zoomorphic vessels in the form of a ram and a bird were discovered. Similar ceramic objects were found in Treli burials №16 and №24 located in the vicinity of the Treligorebi settlement. These two Treli burials are related, on the one hand, to the local Samtavro culture (ceramics) (Abramishvili 1995:fig, 12₁₋₁₁, 22-24). On the other hand, to Scythian culture: funeral structure, funeral ritual⁹ - funeral chamber built of logs and later burned, cremation of the deceased, imitation of horses harnessed to chariots (*ibid*:fig.5) and bridles bent at one end (*ibid.*, fig.5₆). Further, it is related to the Near East: horse neck manes (*ibid*: fig.6), horse headgear (*ibid.*, fig. 4₅), zoomorphic vessels (*ibid*:fig.11), agalmatolite bowl (*ibid*: fig.16₁). The date of both Treli burials was assigned to the end of the 8th century and the first half of the 7th century BC (Abramishvili 1995:37). Based on the construction of the burials, the funeral rite, and certain funeral goods, Treli burials are

associated with the arrival of foreign ethnic groups, specifically the Thraco – Cimmerian-Scythian tribes (*Ibid*:30-38) - forming part of the broader cultural sphere known as the so-called Scythian culture. This encompasses all tribes, from an archaeological standpoint, that are considered to belong to the Scythian culture.

In Treli burials №16 and №24, no artefacts defining so-called Scythian culture have been discovered. Consequently, the question of the cultural attribution of these burials remains open to discussion among scholars (Ivanchik 2001:188-189). The connection of the owners of the Treli burials with the Near East, on the one hand, and with the nomads of the circle of Scythian culture, on the other hand, is most clearly traced by the minor plastics of Treli burial №16. Such are: an anthropomorphic sculpture on an open work pedestal (Abramishvili 1995:fig.1), a horse head-figured standard (*Ibid*:fig.2₆₋₁₁), cheek-pieces for horse-bits with sculptural decoration (*Ibid*:fig.5_{4, 5, 11-15}). These objects were studied from an artistic point of view by N. Gomelauri, who examined the connections between the Treli minor plastics and Iranian art, as well as materials of the synchronous and subsequent period of Treli, widespread in nomadic culture, the area of which covers a vast territory- From Eastern Europe to northern China (Gomelauri 2009:41-42). Based on these comparisons, Gomelauri suggests that these nomadic tribes probably played a mediatory role in the contacts between the south Caucasus and Iran and that, most likely, representatives of these tribes were the importers of the new artistic taste (*Ibid*). According to N. Gomelauri's conclusion, the Treli minor plastics are the items of local production. This is confirmed by the fact that the forms assimilated by nomads in the Near East, in particular, Luristan and northwestern Iran, acquire new artistic qualities on the territory of Georgia (Gomelauri 2008:tab.VII; 2009:42). The author substantiates that these formal changes are associated with the tradition of the archaeological culture spread on the territory of the central south Caucasus in the third quarter of the second millennium BC, which in turn, is connected with the flows coming from Anatolia (Gomelauri 2008:tab.VII; 2009:42). Based on the minor plastics, N. Gomelauri identifies two waves of interactions between Georgia and the Near East. One is associated with Anatolia in the middle of the second Millennium BC and the other with Iran in the second quarter of the first Millennium BC (Gomelauri 2009:42). The second wave is represented by the minor plastics found in Treli burial №16. However, Gomelauri points out that this artistic influence from the Iranian world, outside of the territory of Tbilisi is not found and its occurrence at Treli burial №16 is episodic (*Ibid*).

The chronological relationship between the Treli materials and their Eurasian parallels, according to N. Gomelauri, draws the following picture: The sites that are earlier than or contemporaneous to Treli burial №16, which are the source of artistic influence on Treli minor plastics, are located in Luristan and north-western Iran, specifically Ziviyeh, Marlik, Tepe Sialk necropol B, Hasanlu. Materials from these sites are generally dated to the 9th-7th centuries BC (Gomelauri 2009:41); Contemporaneous with Treli, dated to the 8th-7th centuries BC, are the so-called Greco-Macedonian bronzes on the Balkan Peninsula and the so-called Thraco - Cimmerian bronzes in Eastern Europe (*Ibid*); As for the Scythian materials themselves, they belong to the following period of Treli and are dated to the 7th -4th centuries BC (*Ibid*). Based on Gomelauri, the examination of the Treli minor plastics alongside their parallel materials provides insights into both the cultural connections between Georgia and the Near East in the second quarter of the first millennium BC and the early stages of the formation of early nomadic

and then Scythian art (*ibid*). Thus, with the Treli minor plastics and with the consideration of its parallels, it is possible to trace both the cultural ties of Georgia with Near East in the second quarter of the first millennium BC., as well as the early stages of the formation of early nomadic and then Scythian art (*ibid*).

Similar to the minor plastic artefacts found in Treli burial №16, the bone bouterolle from the Treli settlement is associated with an external ethnic influence from the south. Chronologically, it is dated to the following period of Treli burial №16. This bone object is decorated on both sides with a motif featuring a feline predator animal. It was examined by M. Pirtskhalava. According to her conclusion, the Treli bouterolle is a set of typical Scythian elements made in an early Scythian style, which is not found anywhere in this combination. The ratio of pose and composition of feline predators on the Treligorebi bouterolle is widespread in the art of Luristan (Pirtsckhalava 2016:212-213). The author considers that it is one of the earliest objects among the artefacts of this category and represents an important link in the formation and evolution of the Scythian animal style (*ibid*).

The minor plastics of Treli and bouterolle from the Treligorebi settlement confirm that one group of defining elements of so-called Scythian culture was formed in the Near East and that the south Caucasus, in particular, Georgia, is the region where this process also took place¹⁰.

As for the dates of Treli burials №16 and №24 (the late 8th century and the first half of the 7th century BC.), both are the precursors of the chronological group of monuments containing Scythian archaic objects (the second half of the 7th century and the 6th century BC). If we accept G. Kossack's chronology of Scythian archaic material, according to which Samtavro burial №106 and its synchronous sites are placed in the group of burials dated from the second half of the 8th century to the beginning of the 7th century BC (Kossack 1987:43-75), then the Treli burials can be dated earlier than this period.

The general tendency of re-dating the Scythian archaic objects to the earlier period than it was considered before, was followed by the re-dating of many archaeological sites in the south Caucasus. Relying on specialists in eastern Greek pottery (R. Cook and P. Dupont), M. Pirtsckhalava does not agree with this new chronology, as the Miletic amphora of Repyahovataya Mogila, which became the standard for re-dating, was wrongly attributed to the 7th century BC, instead of the 6th century BC (Pirtsckhalava 2001:81). By studying a wide range of parallel material, M. Pirtsckhalava comes to the conclusion that no signs are found in the Caucasian material that would lead to a chronological regrouping of the archaeological complexes with the Scythian inventory of Georgia (*ibid*).

Chronologically, Treli burials №16 and №24 and their synchronous Treligorebi structure №17 are followed by Structure №53 with the abovementioned bone bouterolle and its synchronous funeral assemblages with Scythian inventory (Treli burials №№196,198,221,222 - the second half of the 7th century and the 6th century BC (Abramishvili 2008)¹¹. The three burials (№198, 221, 222) are multi-layered. In burial №196, three disarticulated human skulls and two lower jaws were discovered. The grave goods accompanying the burial included four Scythian -type bronze arrowheads, bronze needles, a pin, and a finger ring. Additionally, an iron spearhead and fragments of pottery were also found.

In burial №198, among other things, three human skulls, fragments of an occipital skull, two horse skulls, human and horse skeleton fragments were found. Noteworthy among the

grave goods were eleven bronze arrowheads of the so-called Scythian type, a bronze pin, and a finger ring. Additionally, there were artifacts such as a curved iron knife, spearhead, and fragments of pottery.

In burial №221¹², the human bone remains included four complete skulls and occipital fragments of a skull, with two lower limbs deliberately arranged in a crossed position. The grave goods consisted of eleven bronze arrowheads of the so-called Scythian type, along with a finger rings and bracelets. Among the iron artifacts, notable items included fragments of an axe, a curved knife with an ornamented bone handle, and a spearhead. In addition to metal objects, there were also two bone fasteners for a quiver, one whetstone, and pottery.

The burial of the deceased was only confirmed in burial №222, in layer 1 of which, like in burial №221, two bones of a person's lower limb were found in a crossed position. In layer 2, a fragment of the human skull (occipital) and a limb bone were found, in layer 3 - a human spine, a skull, a fragment of a jaw and finger bones of a hand were unearthed. The main deceased was buried in layer 4, on the right side, with bent limbs. Among other items, 14 so-called Scythian-type bronze arrowheads were found on the remains of the leather of a quiver. Additionally, bronze items such as an armband, pins, and rings were discovered. Iron artifacts comprised a spearhead, a dagger, and two knives with stalks. Other items like a whetstone and six clay vessels were also found in this grave.

Thus, at the Treli cemetery there are two groups of burials that, based on funeral rites, differ from those of the local Samtavro culture. The first group includes burials №16 and №24, as well as burials №19, №23, №169-170, №172-192, which are possibly part of the funeral offerings associated with these two burials (№16 and №24). In these funeral offerings, evidence of human and horse sacrifice is attested, with no single item defining the so-called Scythian culture (see: Abramishvili 1995:30). The second group of burials (№196, №198, №221 and №222) comprises those with the same funeral rites involving human and horse sacrifices, but distinctively, they contain Scythian artifacts. These two groups reflect different stages of the movement of nomadic culture populations into the territory of Georgia, dating to the 8th-6th centuries BC. The burials from the first group (№16 and №24), owners of which had already been to the Near East, belong to the earliest stage. These monuments cannot be regarded as a reflection of the culture that was established only from the second half of the 7th century BC, shaped by the Scythian-Sarmatian and Thraco - Cimmerian tribes, along with other populations of non-Scythian origin (compare to: Dyakonov1956:228; Amandry1965:160).

As a result of fire and destruction in the 6th century BC, life in the Treligorebi settlement was interrupted (three Scythian-type arrowheads were found stuck in the outside of the stone wall of one of the buildings of the settlement). Given the historical circumstances of this period, it is quite possible that the destruction of the settlement was due to its strategic location. Treligorebi is situated on the natural hills of the Digomi Valley, a part of the Mtkvari (Kura) River valley between Mtskheta and Tbilisi, along the contemporary Georgian Military Road. This road serves as a vital connection between the south and north Caucasus. The movement of northern nomads through the Caucasian mountains, without using the territory of Treligorebi as a link to the Dariali pass, would have been exceedingly complex. The owners of the Treligorebi settlement dominated in this area - they controlled the main roads passing through

the Mtkvari Gorge. If we assume that Treligorebi as an outpost is occupied by nomadic tribes, then the destruction of this point may have been in the interests of Media.

About three km north of the Treligorebi settlement, in the direction of Mtskheta, the Nakulbakevi cemetery has revealed burials with Scythian artifacts. In three burials (№14, №22 and №28) individuals were accompanied by horses (Abramishvili 2010)¹³. In burial №14, the human skeleton was interred in a sitting position alongside two complete horse skeletons that face each other with their heads looking east (Figure 1). Iron artifacts in the burial comprised an akinakes with a kidney-shaped cross-guard accompanied by a partially preserved scabbard (a bone chape measuring nine cm), two knives found under the akinakes, a battle axe with a pointed blade at one end and a conical shape at the other, two spearheads, and two bits, one of which has bridles bent at one end. Bronze items included 32 so-called Scythian-type arrowheads, an awl, and six distributors of bridle straps. Among the bone artifacts were a four-sided arrowhead, three quiver clasps, a fragment of a quiver (possibly a clasp), worked bone, and two astragals. No pottery was found in this burial.

In burial №22, a complete horse was interred in a distinctive manner - not on its side but on its abdomen, legs bent, and the head towards the east (Figure 2). This type of position for a horse skeleton in a burial is well known in the Scythian world¹⁴, but on the territory of Georgia has so far been found only in this burial (any other such case is unknown to me). A human skeleton has not been confirmed, but due to serious damage to the burial, it cannot be excluded that the skeleton of the deceased has not been preserved. The funeral inventory of this burial included iron artifacts such as a battle axe with a pointed end on one side (badly damaged), two-part bits, and a knife with a pointed blade featuring a slightly raised tip. Additionally, the burial contained bronze artifacts, including twelve arrowheads of the so-called Scythian type and a griffon head made of bone, likely associated with a bow. Other notable discoveries comprised two carnelian beads, one glass bead, and one bead crafted from a thin sheet of bronze. Burial №28 was damaged by a medieval wall, which cut its northern part. Within the burial pit, fragments of human bones, including from the skull, pelvis, and limbs, were documented. The alignment of the human skeleton could not be determined, but it cannot be excluded that the individual was buried in a sitting position. Three horses were also placed in the burial: one horse was buried alongside the southern edge of the pit, with its head to the west, while the other two lay along the eastern edge, both with their heads to the north (Figure 3). As part of the funeral inventory, a single ceramic vessel was recorded. Iron artifacts were also discovered, including two-part bits and two battle axes. One axe was partially preserved (10 cm) with a conical head, while the second conical-headed axe consisted only of fragments. The iron objects also included a bayonet and an arrowhead with a tang. Among the bronze artifacts found in the burial were 33 complete and several fragments of so-called Scythian-type arrowheads, along with 11 arrowheads with tangs and a bridle-strap distributor. Among the bone artifacts were two worked fragments depicting the end of a horse's hoof, a quiver detail, and a chape made of horn with a silver hoop (length - 6 cm). The burial also yielded one carnelian and two agate beads, as well as the skull of a wild boar.

In the Nakulbakevi burials, the burial of a horse is presented in the form of a complete skeleton of a horse, unlike those in the Treligorebi cemetery, where, as in the pre-Scythian monuments (burials №№ 16, 24 and 26 burials, which are associated with them in the form of

remains of funerary offerings - the end of the 8th century - the first half of the 7th century BC), as well as in the burials of the next chronological group containing Scythian inventory (the second half of the 7th century and the 6th century BC), the ritual of horse sacrifice is performed not by a complete skeleton, but by one or more skulls and individual parts of the horse.

Treli – Nakulbakevi - Samtavro (Tbilisi - Mtskheta) are situated near each other on the right bank of the River Mtkvari, along the route to Dariali Gorge. They feature synchronous burials with Scythian inventory dating to the second half of the 7th century and the 6th century BC. However, at the Samtavro cemetery (Mtskheta), the burials with Scythian inventory exhibit no resemblance in funeral rituals to those of Treli or Nakulbakevi. In Samtavro, the deceased were interred according to the traditions of the Samtavro culture. Human sacrifices or the placement of horses alongside the deceased are almost absent in the Samtavro cemetery. In only one Samtavro burial (grave №27), the lower jaw of a horse was discovered¹⁵.

At the Samtavro cemetery, alongside the weapons associated with the so-called Scythian culture (such as akinakes and arrowheads), there are confirmed artifacts not typically found in burials associated with the Samtavro culture. These include a bronze distributor of the bridle, a bronze armband (serving as a protective plate for archers), bone clasps for the quiver, and fragments of bone ornaments featuring images of horses' hooves. These items are commonly found among sites attributed to the Scythian culture. Based on these findings, if Scythians were indeed buried at the Samtavro cemetery, they likely belonged to a group assimilated with the local population¹⁶. This observation prompts a recall of Leonti Mroveli's information regarding the friendship and unification between locals and newcomers, particularly against common enemies like the Medes (Kartlis Tskhovreba I:125)

Following the second half of the 7th century BC on the territory of Eastern Georgia, alongside items characteristic of Scythian culture, there are artifacts that likely came from the north Caucasus, such as amber beads. This occurrence cannot always be attributed to invasions by Scythian tribes. It is more plausible to consider that the frequent occurrence of this jewellery resulted from relatively peaceful interactions between the populations of the north Caucasus and eastern Georgia.

Conclusion

The use of the Dariali Gorge pass by northern nomads during their Near Eastern campaigns, as mentioned in the Georgian Chronicles by Leonti Mroveli, can be substantiated by archaeological evidence. The same can be said about another detail from Leonti Mroveli, suggesting that the northerners initially bypassed the territory of Georgia, when entering the south Caucasus. In that case, it does not matter which route was taken - whether through the Darband pass, along the eastern coast, or along the western coast of the Black Sea. It seems that the owners of Treli burials №16 and №24, in accordance with the early phase of the northern nomads' movement, had already been to the Near East before coming to Georgia. It should be supposed that these two Treli burials (№16 and №24) are a material reflection of the initial wave of nomads ("Khazars") who came to Kartli and were mentioned by Leonti Mroveli.

The Georgian Chronicles also attest that the Khazars who came from the north, moved about the territories of the south Caucasus and, in particular, Kartli before the enthronement

of Phraortes in Media. The date of that enthronement of Phraortes is considered to be the 40s or 70s of the 7th century BC (647 or 674/678 BC). The Treli burials №16 and №24 belong to the same period. The connection of these sites with the nomads from the south is also confirmed by the fact that the minor plastics of Treli burial №16 among the archaeological material of Georgia is presented only in this burial as an exception, and finds a wide circle of parallels both with the Iranian world and with the sites of nomadic culture, which spread from east Europe to north China (Gomelauri2008; 2009).

The archaeological evidence supporting Leonti Mroveli's account of the arrival of Scythian exiles from the Near East seeking refuge in Kartli is more likely represented by the Samtavro burials. These burials exhibit funerary traditions characteristic of the local culture alongside a Scythian funeral inventory, suggesting the potential assimilation of the newcomers. The chronological gap in the Georgian written sources between the two waves ("Khazars" and "Turks") can be explained by the scarcity of written evidence and is bridged by the archaeological sites that came after the chronological group of Treli burials №16 and №24 (the Treli and Nakulbakevi burials of the second half of the 7th century and the 6th century BC). The burials of this later group contain horses, human sacrifices, and Scythian funerary inventory. The bone bouterolle from Treligorebi belongs to the same period. It is one of the earliest objects within this category of archaeological sites and is also associated with the wave coming from the south (Pirtskhalava 2016).

Thus, based on the archaeological data from Mtskheta-Tbilisi (Treli, Nakulbakevi, Samtavro), on the territory of Georgia during the 8th-6th centuries BC, the movement of populations of nomadic culture can be observed, without any chronological gap. Artifacts of minor plastics and the bouterolle from Treli indicate that early forms of some objects defining the so-called Scythian culture are associated with the Near East, and the south Caucasus, particularly Georgia, was involved in the process of their formation.

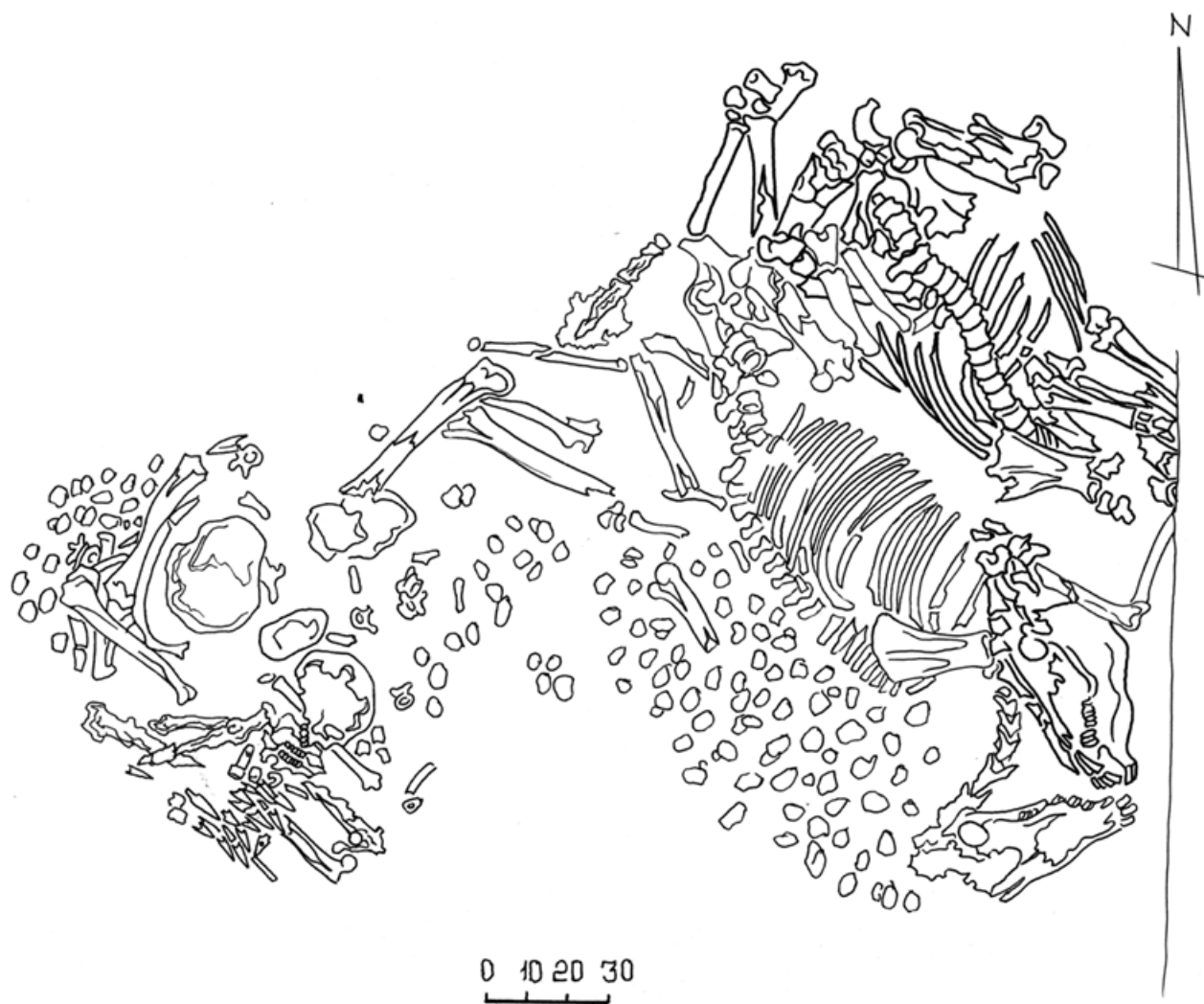


Figure 1. The Nakulbakevi burial 14 (After Abramishvili 2010)

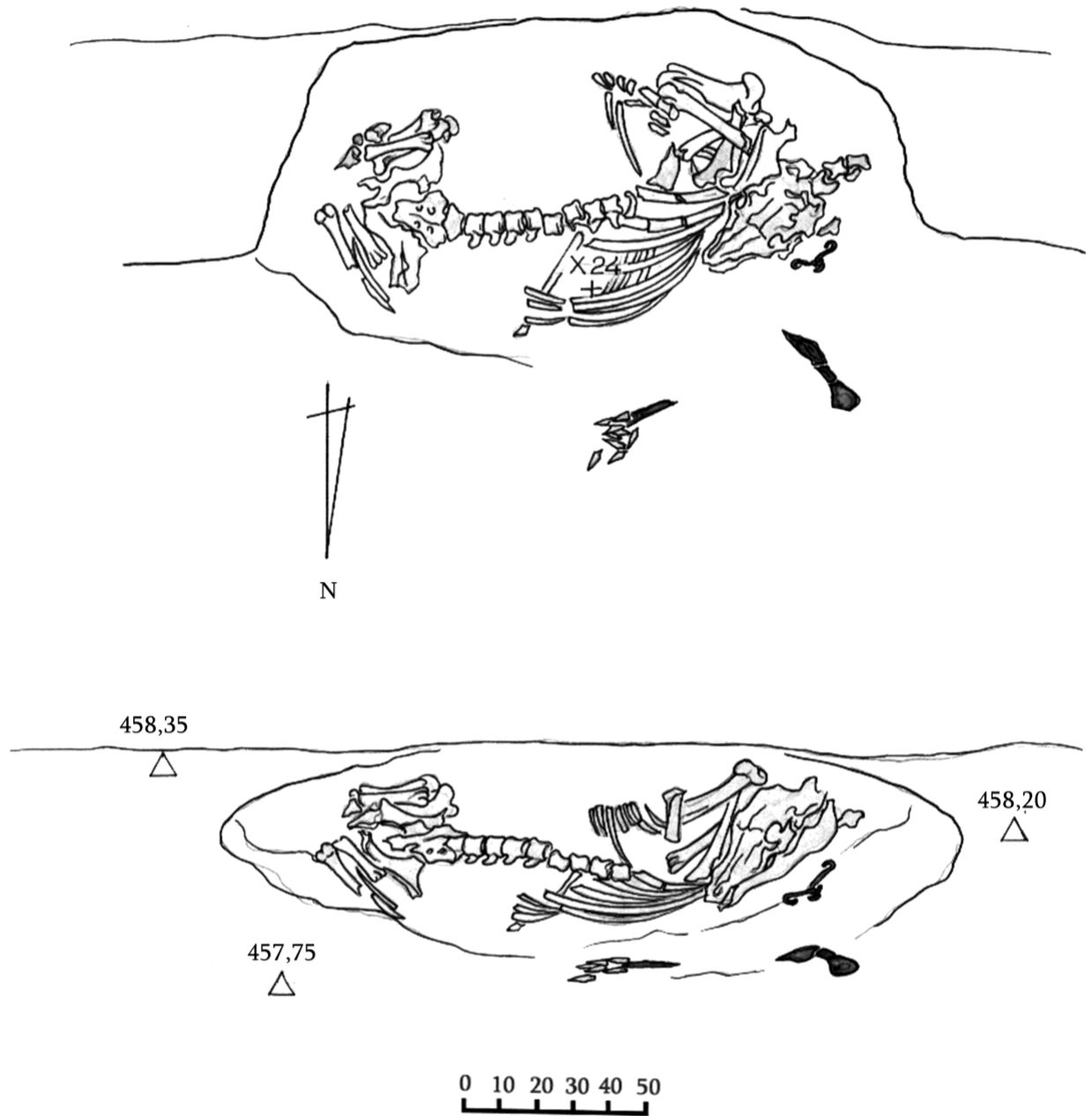


Figure 2. The Nakulbakevi burial 22 (After Abramishvili 2010)

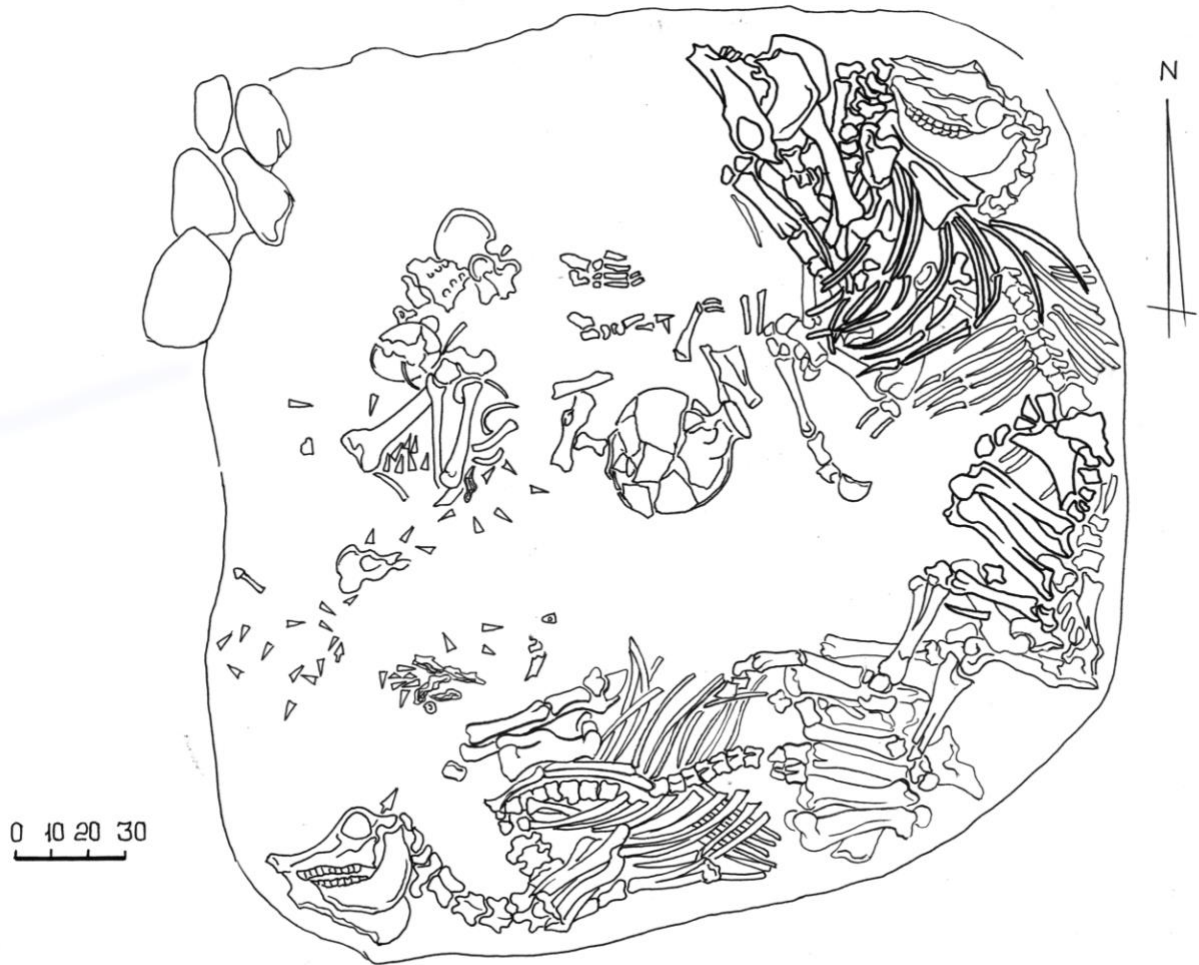


Figure 3. The Nakulbakevi burial 28 (After Abramishvili 2010)

Notes

1. The opinion that links „The Exodus of the Khazars“in the Georgian Chronicles to the Scythian campaigns in the Near East, belongs to I. Klaprot, indicated by G. Melikishvili and V. Kovalevskaya (Melikishvili 1959:35; Kovalevskaya1975:62).
2. The point of view, expressed by M. Rostovtsev that ancient Eastern and Greek sources distingvish two groups of nomads (Cimmerians, Scythians) from each other (Rostovtsev1918:27,2002:30), is shared by scholars.
3. LeontiMroveli relies on a number of earlier sources (See: Melikishvili 1959:35-37; Andronikashvili1966:499, 505, 507, 543; Kovalevskaya1975:63, 66, 72-73).
4. In the Russian translation of the Greek source (Strabo “Geography”), the name “Κώβου” is rendered as “Kob” (Strabo Geography, translated by G. A. Stratanovsky), in the English translation-“Cobus” (The Geography of Strabo, with an English translation by Horace Leonard Jones).
5. I extend my gratitude to Mrs. Marine Pirtskhalava, for introducing me to her unpublished work.

6. In some cases, the upper chronological date of Phraortes's reign is indicated as 653 BC.
7. According to G. Melikishvili, the Iranian Epic is the source of a number of ethnonyms and events mentioned by Leonti Mroveli (Melikishvili 1959:35-36).
8. Here I do not identify Deioces and Kekapos, but I emphasize that according to the source the appearance of the Khazars on the territory of Kartli and the Turks on the territory of Media are connected with the predecessor or predecessors of Phraortes - Pharaborot.
9. For the construction and burial rites similar to mounds 16 and 24 in the steppes of southern Russia, see (Pogrebova 1977:131-136; Abramishvili 1995:32).
10. The formation of the elements of Scythian culture in the south and their movement from south to the north are convincingly proved by M. Artamonov and V. Lukonin (Artamonov 1974:37-55; Lukonin 1977:8-36).
11. The monument is being prepared for publication. All the above-mentioned monuments of Treli are excavated in the area of the new construction.
12. We cannot say with certainty whether the horse skull found near this complex (Treli №221) belonged to the same burial.
13. The monument is being prepared for publication.
14. About this funeral ritual in the northern Black Sea see (Daragan&Polin 2022: figures 1-6, 8-10), in the northern Caucasus see (Erlikhet al. 2010: fig.3-5).
15. All the burials containing Scythian artifacts were excavated in the northern section of the Samtavro cemetery: №20- excavated in 1938; №№27, 50, 71, 99, 104, 106 – excavated in 1939; №№194, 196, 212 – excavated in 1940; №№291, 293 – excavated in 1947; №№ 295, 319- excavated in 1948 and the burial №592 excavated by Bayern. Among other items characteristic of the local culture, objects defining so-called Scythian cultural range were found: in burial № 20 – one arrowhead (bronze); in burial №27 - akinakes (iron), 20 arrowheads (bronze), bouterolle (bone); in burial № 50 - akinakes (iron), two bone clasps of a quiver; in burial №71- one arrowhead (bronze); in burial № 99 – akinakes (iron) and a distributor of bridle (bronze); in burial № 104 - two arrowheads and armband (bronze); in burial № 106 - six arrowheads (bronze) and eight ornamented fragments of bone two of which end with an image of a horse's hoof, two bone clasps of a quiver; in burial №194 - two arrowheads (bronze); in burial №196 - Iron battle axe with conical head; in burial № 212 – akinakes (iron); in burial № 291- akinakes (iron), eight bone clasps of a quiver; in burial № 293 - four arrowheads (one of them is made of iron, the rest – of bronze); in burial № 295 - akinakes (iron), bone clasps of a quiver; in burial № 319 – one arrowhead (bronze); in burial № 592 (excavated by Bayern) – one arrowhead (bronze).
16. During the Near Eastern campaigns of the Cimmerians and Scythians, a political alliance between these peoples and the local population of the south Caucasus is suggested by G. Melikishvili (Melikishvili 1959:224-225). Based on the materials of Samtavro and

Treli, R. Abramishvili suggests the same relationship between the people who came to the territory of East Georgia and the local population (Abramishvili 1995:38).

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