

## Archaeological reconnaissance on Samshvilde Cape and the adjacent area in 2015

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### Historical context

Samshvilde archaeological expedition of the University of Georgia was conducting field works in three main directions in 2015: the first – reconnaissance of specific sections of the former settlement by geoarcheological methods and identification of archaeologically prospective sections on the basis of the obtained information [Odilavadze D., Berikashvili D. 2015], the second – conducting archaeological expeditions in the citadel of the former settlement for the purpose of identification of stratigraphy [Berikashvili, Bukhsianidze, Gabunia...2015] and the third - reconnaissance of the cape, the adjacent valleys and areas.

The cape which is referred to as Samshvilde Cape is located between Ktsia-Khrami and Chivchava rivers (pic. 1). It represents a rocky massive created from 150-200 m high basaltic layers where the trace of human activity was observed from the ancient times. This fact was also confirmed by surveys conducted in various periods [Chilashvili 1970. 118; Mirtkhulava 1975. 10; Bakhtadze 2007. 25].

The Georgian historical tradition associated the ancient history of Samshvilde with the eponym of Georgians, Kartlos: “... Kartlos built the Fortress of Orbi which is called Samshvilde now. And afterwards he built the “Mtveri” fortress which is called Khunani now ...” [The Georgian Chroni-

cles of Kartli 1955. 8]. According to the source, after the death of Kartlos, the Orbi Fortress – Samshvilde fell to the share of his son Gachios who governed the area “from Skvireti river to the entrance of Abotsi ...” [The Georgian Chronicles 1955. 9] and who “...built the town of Gachiani which was called the hunting town by that time ...” [the same source. 10]. The fact that Samshvilde Cape was actually used by humans in the Pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic Era is proved by the archaeological reconnaissance works carried out in 1948-49 (Chubinashvili N. 1969. 15; 22-24] and 1968 [Chilashvili 1970. 118-119] as well. In addition, discovery of burial of pitchers of the Hellenistic period (pic. 2) on the ridge of the cape by 2014 Samshvilde Archaeological Expedition of the University of Georgia should be considered as a significant signal too [Berikashvili, Gagoshidze, Gabunia, Tsiramua. 2014].

However, by the recent historic-geographic, paleographic, epigraphic and linguistic surveys it is established that Samshvilde must have been formed as a significant political-economic center only during the period of Sassanids when “... the king of Kartli, Bakur son of Mirian (about 330/335-355) exchanged the country with Peroz for better protection of Kvemo Kartli (Tashir, Ashotsi) from the ally of Rome, Armenia, took Ran-Heret-Movakan, i.e. Albania and transferred the Duchy of Samshvilde – Tashir and Ashotsi to direct ownership of Peroz. Thus, the Sassanid King Peroz

became a “Duke of Samshvilde” according to the terminology of the “The Georgian Chronicles” where duke is a Georgian translation of “Pitiakhsh” [Sanadze M. 2016. 256].

Samshvilde actually became a significant center in the 5th century when the King Archil (grandfather of Vakhtang Gorgasali) transferred it to his son Mirdat (King Mirdat VIII) “... Samshvilde to his son with his duchy and Mirdat and Sagdukht had a seat there ...” [The Georgian Chronicles 1955. 142]. It is also seen from the source that after the Queen Sagdukht was converted to Christianity, she built Sioni Church of Dormition of the Mother of God . After the epoch of Vakhtang Gorgasali (“Adarnese, the Duke of Samshvilde”) the written sources actually do not mention Samshvilde. The Pitiakhsh-Duke “who governed Trialeti, Tashir and Abotsi” ... “ appears again only in the source dated by the second half of the 8th century [The Georgian Chronicles 1955. 241] [“Samshvilde Country” D. B.]. From the context we may assume that in the period after Vakhtang Gorgasali until the above period Samshvilde was under “governance” of Pitiakhsh again. This is confirmed by an inscription (777/778) on Samshvilde Sioni (756-777) where “Pitiakhshs by relatives”, “Varaz-Bakur” and “Iovane” are mentioned [Muskhelishvili 1943. 97].

The situation changed in the region together with appearance of Arabs in Transcaucasia. After formation of the Emirate of Tbilisi (mid-8th century), significant part of Kvemo Kartli fell under jurisdiction of the Arab Emir. However, reference to the Byzantine Emperors – Constantine V Kopronymos and Leo IV the Khazar in the inscription of Samshvilde Sioni suggests that influence of the Emirate of Tbilisi on Samshvilde must have been fictitious or

minimal. During the campaign of Bugha the Turk in Tbilisi in 853 which aimed to punish Emir Sahak, the Emir found a shelter in Samshvilde Fortress - “... he (Sahak, D.B.) left through the door which led to Samshvilde Fortress ... “ (Tsagareishvili, 1976, 269] but in vain. In connection with the above issue, professor K. Kutateladze mentioned that “... If Samshvilde, this most significant center of Kvemo Kartli had not been under the jurisdiction of Emir by that time (853), how could the defeated Sahak go for shelter in this direction” [Kutateladze 2001. 68].

From the mid-9th century Samshvilde and the entire Kvemo Kartli in general fell under the influence of the Shiraki Bagratuni royal dynasty who managed to annex it from the second half of the same century [Kutateladze 2001. 83]. A bit later when the first representative of the lateral branch of Bagratuni Dynasty – Kiurikian Dynasty – Gurgen son of Ashot (Korike – Kiurike I, 979-989) was appointed as the ruler of Tashir, the basis was laid for formation of the Kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget which was a vassal to the Armenian Kingdom of Shirak [Մարտիրոսյան 1982. 71]. The Kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget existed on the territory of historic Kvemo Kartli-Gogarene until 1118 when David IV the Builder seized Lore and abolished the Kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget.

After Gurgen-Kiurike his elder son David (“Anhoghin”, 989-1046) became the king of the kingdom who appeared to be a really powerful ruler unlike his father. According to the Armenian sources, David, son of Gurgen strengthened his influence on “Vrats Dasht” (Valley of Georgians) by battles and owned a large and strong fortress – “Shamshulde” (Samshvilde) [Ստեփանյանի Տարեգրություն...1885. 256]. Movement of the Kingdom of Tashir-Dz-

oraget from Tashir to Samshvilde is associated with the name of David Anhoghin and because of that he is referred to as “of Samshvilde-Dzoraget” according to the “Annals of Kartli”. The King of Ani, Gagik I conducted a punitive campaign in Samshvilde in 1001 which aimed to weaken the power of his unruly nephew, David Anhoghin. “... astonished (Gagik – D.B.) attacked Samshvilde and the Valley of Georgians ... destructed and ruined everything. He spent three months here ... (David - D.B.) could not resist the large army of Gagik ...” [Ստեփանոսի ...1885. 279-280]. As it is seen from the source, despite the fact that Gagik I strictly punished David he still preserved his royal title because Anhoghin was the king of Tashir-Dzoraget after the death of Gagik too (1020).

During the reign of the successor of David Kiurikian, his son, Kiurike II (1048-1089) the Kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget gained independence when the Armenian Kingdom of Ani ceased to exist in 1045 as a result of Byzantine expansion. However, this independence did not last for a long time, because the capital of the Kingdom - Samshvilde was invaded by the Sultan of the Seljuk Empire, Alp Arslan in 1064 first and the same year the Georgian King Bagrat IV seized Kiurike II coming from Armenia and forced him to move the capital from Samshvilde to Lori. Heirs of Kiurike II (Abbas and David) tried to restore their power and return Samshvilde in the following period, but in vain.

The son of Bagrat IV, Giorgi II failed to maintain the achievements made by Bagrat IV in Kvemo Kartli. For the purpose of gaining goodwill he was forced to transfer Samshvilde to the powerful Bagvash family as a “present”: “... donated Samshvilde to Ivane ...” [“Annals of Kartli”, 1955. 316], who promised loyalty to the Sultan

of Seljuks, Malik Shah through his son, Liparit, in the battle against Giorgi II at the first opportunity. However, Liparit soon escaped from the Sultan’ palace (where he seems to have been kept as a captive) which was followed by a violent, punitive invasion of Seljuks in Kvemo Kartli: “... (Malik Shah, D.B.) was dislocated on Samshvilde plain ..” [The Life of the King David. 1955. 318], “...reached Samshvilde and captured Ivane, his wife and grandchildren and spouses and children of all the noblemen” [Annals ... 1955. 317]. Even though Giorgi II tried to change the situation in Kvemo Kartli in favour of interests of the Kingdom by struggling against the Seljuks and gained certain success at Partskhisi (1073), he failed to expel the enemy from Samshvilde. Since that period, Samshvilde was under the rule of Turk-Seljuks until David the Builder ultimately liberated it.

In 1110 George of Chqondidi, his nephew Tevdore and representatives of Orbeli family, Ivane and Abulet managed to seize Samshvilde by effective actions (“stole skillfully”) upon instruction of David IV and as a result, the fortress-city was subordinated to the central power. This victory was so effective that “... as they (Seljuks D.B) learnt about seizure of Samshvilde, they left most of Armenian fortresses and escaped at night ...” [The Life of the King David. 1955. 331-332].

The feudal family of Orbeli were the owners of Samshvilde in 1110-1177, however, the city was again subordinated to the King after suppression of the Orbeli revolt by Giorgi III in 1177. According to the source, in the late 12th century, after death of Giorgi III (1184) “... The nobles took from Samshvilde the Queen Rusudan ...” [The Histories and Eulogies of Sovereigns. 1959. 24].

The 12th century was the Golden

Age in the history of Samshvilde when it was subordinated to the central power of Georgia and was governed by Amirspasalar [commander-in-chief]. However, upon appearance of Mongols (the 1230s) it became one of the first target of the enemy and certainly this negatively affected the social and economic situation of the city. Kvemo Kartli and its main fortress Samshvilde were entirely raided as a result of Timur the Lame's invasions in 1400 and 1403. After a long-term siege Samshvilde was seized by the Turkmen Shah Jahan on the Easter day in 1440 and he punished the local population severely [Thomas of Metsoph. 1937. 24-26].

In the second half of the 15th century, after the kingdom of Kartli was disintegrated into duchies, the sadrosho [administrative unit] of Kvemo Kartli was formed which was led by the Baratashvili family [Klimiashvili. 1964. 122]. Samshvilde was the center of the sadrosho until division of the Baratashvili family [Kakabadze 1913. 38]. From the first half of the 16th century when representatives of the Baratashvili family, Iotam and Orbeli were divided, principalities of Kaplanishvili-Orbelishvil were formed which covered the entire Kvemo Kartli [Jamburia. 1955. 79]. It should be mentioned that the center of "Sakaplanishvilo" (village Tandzia currently) was located at the border of Ktsia-Khrami and Dmanisi ravine. Monasteries of Pitareti and Dmanisi, as well as fortresses in Dmanisi, Kveshi and Khuluti also belonged to them [Jamburia. 1955. 82]. As it seems, the Kaplanishvili family had a residence in Samshvilde as well which is established by the tomb epitaph discovered during 2014 archaeological excavations of the "Palace Complex" located on the former settlement. According to the art historian, G. Gagoshidze, "Mr. Erasti" men-

tioned in the inscription who buried his prematurely deceased (3 years of age) son Otar in the church of his palace must be Erasti Kaplanishvili mentioned in the Book of Purchases in 1725 [Gagoshidze 2014. 18]. This assumption may be confirmed by the data on the territories transferred to Erasti Kaplanishvili by the Ottoman Sultan in 1723 which covered "... Khojornia and Melikasheni with lands located between Lore and Armenia.." (Bolnisi, Shulaveri) [Abuladze. 1975. 226, 228].

In the mid-18th century Samshvilde Fortress once again witnessed significant constructions, renewals and battles. After the king of Kartli, Teimuraz II visited the palace of Nader Shah in Persia (1747), Archil Bagrationi (Abdulla Beg) who was converted to Islam occupied Samshvilde Fortress: "Abdulla-Beg Batonishvili took cannons and the weapon arsenal from Lore Fortress, brought them to Samshvilde Fortress ... Abdulla-Beg Batonishvili came to Samshvilde Fortress and began to reinforce the fortress ... " [Orbeliani. 1981. 127]. As it seems, Abdulla-Beg began to prepare for the battle against Erekle II by reinforcement of Samshvilde Fortress and meanwhile, the Baratashvil-Orbelishvil-Kaplanishvili also vowed to support him: "... we do not want other patron than you ..." (Orbeliani ... the same). According to the source, construction of Samshvilde abutments and water reservoirs is also associated with Abdulla: "... constructed two large abutments of Samshvilde, made a large water reservoir on both sides and made reserves of water

with everything ... " (the same). The war which lasted for two years (1747-1748) and was the last in the history of Samshvilde, ended by seizure of the fortress by Erekle II and the total victory. After that there were no battles in Samshvilde.

In the second half of the 18th century

the ethnic picture was significantly changed in Samshvilde and Kvemo Kartli in general. From the end of the century these places were occupied by newly entered Armenian groups, which settled down in Kvemo Kartli and Lore surroundings [Javakhishvili 1919. 31-32]. From the early 19th century the Turkish-speaking population, Germans (1818) and Greeks (1829) were settled in this region with the assistance of the Russian government [Kaukhchishvili 1924]. Kvemo Kartli represent a region settled by such mixed ethnic elements even today.

### **Results of the reconnaissance**

Even this brief historical review confirms that Samshvilde and the cultural layers presented there contain large amount of material remnants of various epochs and cultures. Besides, it is evident that significant amount of materials was washed off from the surface of the cape and thus were brought to the natural terraces on the river precipices and slopes (pic. 3). Therefore, in parallel to carrying out the archaeological excavations it is necessary to survey these terraces as well as the caves developed in the canyons of Khrami and Chivchava rivers (pic. 4). It is noteworthy that in the research published in 2007 N. Bakhtadze confirms the existence of a crematory sepulcher in one of the caves of the Khrami river valley [Bakhtadze. 2007. 25]. With regard to the above it is rather interesting that Samshvilde archaeological expedition of the University of Georgia discovered a an upper third molar tooth of a human in one of the caves located in Khrami valley (Lat. 41.50576 Long.44.4926) during the 2015 reconnaissance works [Berikashvili, Bukhsianidze ...2015]. This fact intensifies the interest in caves.

Before commencement of field works

the expedition preliminarily defined the routes which included: first – reconnaissance of the plateau located at 150-160 m above the river level on the left side of Chivchava river, to the north of Samshvilde Cape and the caves developed on its precipices; second - reconnaissance of the same type of terrace located on the right side of Khrami river, to the south of Samshvilde former settlement and third, reconnaissance of the group of caves located on the southern slope of Samshvilde Cape and precision of their access pathways.

The results of the performed reconnaissance works appeared significant because apart from superficially found archaeological material, the expedition observed megalithic monuments and ruins of cyclopean structure unknown until now.

### **Route I Village Samshvilde – I complex of Chivchava caves**

(pic. 5)

The pathway to the south-east of the village Samshvilde crosses a plateau which is located nearly at the height of the crown of Samshvilde Cape. From geomorphologic point of view, it is identical to the cape and is built from basalt layers created as a result of cooling the lava flows. The basalt rocks appear on the ground surface here similar to the former settlement and in some cases are found in the form of “hills” (pic. 6). Near one of such “hills” the expedition confirmed a megalithic structure – menhir (Lat. 41.50958 Long. 44.50213) which was unknown until now and represents a vertical stone with the height of 1.30 meters (pic. 7). It should be mentioned that similar megalithic monuments (two menhirs, tetralite, megaliths) on Samshvilde former settlement are superficially observed even

today and existence of a similar monument in their vicinity, opposite the cape is absolutely natural.

To the north-east of menhir, a pathway goes down Chivchava valley at 1.5 km and reaches a large complex of caves which we call the first complex of Chivchava caves (Lat. 41.51067 Long. 44.50841) (pic. 8). The complex unites about 30 caves located in four tiers which represent more or less organized spaces designated for living of humans in various periods. Majority of caves are inaccessible today because pathways leading to them do not exist due to rock erosion. Despite this, it was possible to carry out superficial works in 5 of them resulting in finding of more than 100 ceramic fragments (pic. 9) most of which are fragments of household utensils common for the late medieval period. Glazed pieces belonging to the developed medieval period are presented in much less amount. It is noteworthy that such large amount of unglazed pieces compared to glazed ones is explained by the fact that they belong to the final period of human stay in these caves which seems to have been continued until the late medieval period.

Entrances of some caves which are inaccessible without special equipment are artificially disguised and protected by mortar wall (pic. 10). It is important to carry out reconnaissance of this type of caves in the future and make exploration trenches in them for the purpose of discovery of stratigraphy and older material which must be present here, in our opinion. It is also necessary to carry out reconnaissance of the second and the third complexes of Chivchava caves (pic. 11) following which an archaeological-geological map of this micro-district will be prepared which will form a basis of starting its planned surveys.

## Route II Reconnaissance on “Tapanebze” area (pic. 12)

In parallel to Chivchava canyon reconnaissance works were carried out to the south of Samshvilde former settlement, on the right side of Khrami river, on the plateau located at 150 m above the river which is called “Tapanebi” by the local population. Several “tapa”-“tepe” – hills can be seen on this place today which may be of anthropogenic origin.

The second reconnaissance route performed by us started from the village Samshvilde and was directed to the north-east, to the village Dagheti. A former settlement and a burial ground of the early stage of Kura-Araxes culture were accidentally discovered during cultivation of agricultural tillable lands in 1968 in this area [Mirtskhulava. 1975. 11]. With respect to the above it is rather interesting that we found a structure similar to Samshvilde tetralite at about 1 km to the south-east of village Dagheti. This structure represents a megalith built from four basalt stones placed on each other (Lat. 41.51797 Long. 44.53907) (pic. 13). The equilibrium of “Dagheti Tetralite” is upset today and it is laid to the side, however its resemblance with Samshvilde tetralite (pic. 14) is evident. This and other megalithic objects of this type located in Samshvilde in general are assumed to represent monuments erected in the Bronze era.

One more menhir (pic. 15) (H-1.75 m) and strong ruins of a large cyclopean structure are located at a distance of 35 meters to the south-east of “Dagheti Tetralite” (Lat. 41.51799 Long. 44.53911), (pic. 16). However, only by superficial inspection it is difficult to say ruins of what kind of structure these are, but existence of “te-

tralite”, menhir and cyclopean structure in the vicinity of each other is undoubtedly significant and suggests that future surveys are necessary.

From “Dagheti Tetralite” the road goes down to the canyon at the conflux of Ktsia-Khrami and Chivchava rivers. The top of Samshvilde Cape is located at the conflux and its height reaches about 180 m from the river level (pic. 17). There are mainly private tillable lands on the above territory and no archaeological material was discovered as a result of their reconnaissance. However, ceramic materials were collected on the right bank of Khrami river, near Ipnobi church which represents a monument of the 10-11th century (Lat. 41.50274 Long. 44.53868), (pic. 18-19). As a result of superficial inspection it was established that both the interior and the perimeter of the church need to be entirely cleared. The thickness of layer of ruins and the ground cover reaches 1-1.20 m here and it is possible to commence restoration-rehabilitation works of the above monument only after carrying out archaeological works.

The road from south-east of Ipnobi church leads to “Tapanebze” place (Bolnisi Municipality) where the village Disveli is located. Disveli is populated with eco-migrants from village Tsablana (Khulo Municipality) affected by a landslide in 1989. Several monuments of the medieval period are located on the territory of the village: 11-13th century church (pic. 20) and tower (pic. 21) which date back to 14-18th centuries. Study of the above churches and the tower was not our goal and therefore, from here we moved to the place “Nasoplari” located to the south of Samshvilde former settlement, along the crown of the cape (Lat. 41.50155 Long. 44.49701) (pic.22). “Nasoplari” represents a natural

plateau where remnants of structures built on stone are superficially seen. In some cases the layout of these structures are clearly visible (pic. 23), sometimes it is covered with thick layer of ruins. No information is preserved in the memory of the local population which would give us some idea of the type and period of the ruins. This place overlooks the southern section of Samshvilde former settlement and the caves located there (pic. 24).

### **Route III**

#### **Reconnaissance on the southern precipice of Samshvilde Cave**

(pic. 25)

The path coming down from the district of traders and craftsmen goes along the caves located on the upper terrace, to the left of the river in Khrami valley (pic. 26). Significant superficial archaeological material was collected as a result of their reconnaissance. This material is analogous to the material found in caves of Chivchava I complex, however, there are more frag

ments of glazed pottery here. A salt-cellar painted with white engobe and glazed in green common for 11-12th centuries as well as fragments of multi-color glazed pottery and a fragment of vessel for drinking with thin walls decorated with slanted flutes burnt out in bright color common for the 11th century should be mentioned separately, from № 1 cave (Lat. 41.50659 Long. 44.49727) (pic. 27). Also, fragments of glazed and unglazed pottery and large amount of obsidian items and pieces from № 5 cave (Lat. 41.50608 Long. 44.50395) (pic. 28-29). But the most important asset is discovery of a human tooth in № 3 cave (Lat. 41.5064 Long. 44.50253) together with interesting archaeological material (pic. 30.4).

Considering the fact that 150 units of archaeological artifacts (ceramics, obsidian, stone, bone) were superficially collected in the above caves, we can assume that the layers preserved here contain rather significant material whose identification and study is necessary for getting a full insight into the nature of this unique monument.

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17. Samshvilde Cape from the east;
- 18-19. Ipnobi church on the right bank of Khrami river;
20. Disveli church of 11-13th centuries;
21. Ruins of tower near village Disveli;
22. “Nasoplari” area;
23. Ruins of structures preserved in “Nasoplari” area;
24. Samshvilde Cape from south-east;
25. Route III. Southern slope of Samshvilde Cape;
26. Caves of upper tier of the southern slope of Samshvilde Cape;
27. Superficial material of № 1 cave;
- 28-29. Material of № 5 cave;
30. Material of № 3 cave.

### **Description of illustrations**

1. Samshvilde Cape;
2. Burial of pitchers discovered in Samshvilde former settlement in 2014;
3. A bronze pinax found during superficial reconnaissance in Khrami canyon;
4. Cave complexes located on the southern slope of Samshvilde Cape;
5. Route I, village Samshvilde - I complex of Chivchava caves;
6. The adjacent area to the east of village Samshvilde;
7. Megalithic structure – menhir;
8. I complex of Chivchava caves;
9. Material collected during superficial reconnaissance of I complex of Chivchava caves;
10. A cave disguised with built wall in I complex of Chivchava caves;
11. II and III complexes of Chivchava caves;
12. Route II. village Samshvilde - “Tapanebi” area;
13. Dagheti Tetralite;
14. Samshvilde Tetralite;
15. Dagheti menhir;
16. Ruins of cyclopean structure near village Dagheti;