

## Recently Discovered Late Bronze Period Burial from Samshilde Citadel

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### Summary

The multilayered archeological complex of Samshilde is situated in southern Georgia, in the region of Kvemo Kartli. It is often considered one of the most important historical sites in the region. It is located on the basalt promontory located at the confluence of the Khrami and Chivchava rivers, which was a convenient location during the Middle Ages. According to various Georgian historical traditions, the founding of Samshilde Saeristao (feudal unit) is related to King Parnavaz, although the latest archeological findings confirm that Samshilde and its nearby territories were already used by humans in the Neolithic Era.

In 2012, the University of Georgia established a long-term project focusing on archaeological and interdisciplinary research of the site. The project is still in progress and in the frame of that project, systematic archaeological excavations are conducted inside the Citadel walls – the main fortification system of the city.

During the field season in 2018 a notable discovery took place in the trench #68 of the citadel. Under the archaeological contexts of late and high medieval centuries a burial cist from the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age appeared, located at a depth of nearly 5 meters below ground surface. During excavation of the burial black polished fragments of pottery decorated with various geometric motifs were discovered. Horizontal and vertical lines, zig-zag lines, concentric circles and inscribed notches are among these motifs, but the most characteristic is a large sherd of a jug with a zoomorphic handle representing a wild goat (*Capra aegagrus*) or Caucasian tur (*Capra caucasicus*) with prominent horns.

This type of pottery is well known for Late Bronze-Early Iron age sites of Eastern Georgia such as: Tskhinvalis Natsargora, Satsikhuris Gora, Ghrmaghelis Kurgans, Phlevis Semetary, Qobalas Cemetery, Meligele – I, Treligorebi, Dmanisi, Tsiteli Gora, Grakliani Gora and Madnischalis Cemetery; and date to the second half of the second millennium B.C. We therefore estimate the date of this Samshilde funeral pottery and the burial to be 13-11 cc B.C.

A preliminary study of the skeletal remains and the mortuary context indicate this is a primary individual burial of an adult male in a typical semi-flexed position. Other than pottery, the only grave good is the antler of a fallow deer (*Dama dama*), which makes this grave significantly less richly adorned than other male burials of its time. Sharp- and blunt-force trauma wounds are visible on the skull, indicating this male was involved in warfare, interpersonal violence, or a ritual killing. Osteological markers also suggest this male was a habitual horse-rider.