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NATIONAL AGENCY FOR
CULTURAL HERITAGE
PRESERVATION OF GEORGIA

Report on the Archaeological Investigation of a Site identified on the Slope of Todadze Fort (Sachkhere Municipality)

(NAT250014671/ Permit No. 5/12/57)

Date	16.10.2025
Project director	David Darejanashvili

Tbilisi

2025

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Introduction

On 16 September of the present year, under State Procurement Contract No. N1-208-25T concluded between the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia and Ltd. “Layerco” (405721713), the latter conducted archaeological investigations in Sachkhere Municipality, on the southern slope of Todadze Fortress (permit No. N/12/57). The archaeological expedition was directed by Davit Darejanashvili.

The town of Sachkhere is located in Upper Imereti, on the banks of the Kvirila River, and today serves as the administrative center of the municipality of the same name. In antiquity, the territory of Sachkhere, as part of Upper Imereti, belonged to Colchis; during the Hellenistic and Roman periods it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Iberia. In the Middle Ages, it was under the control of the Eristavi or Racha, while in the Late Middle Ages it became a center of the Tsereteli noble domain.

The importance of the Kvirila Valley was determined by the major routes connecting western and eastern Georgia, which also functioned as trade and caravan roads. This factor endowed this part of Upper Imereti with particular importance from early times and contributed to the high concentration of archaeological monuments in the region.

Archaeological chance finds in Sachkhere Municipality have been recorded since the 1870s. Scholarly interest began in 1910 with Ekvtime Takaishvili, who excavated a burial mound in the village of Koreti. This was followed by investigations conducted by Boris Kuftin in 1945–1946 in the same village and at Tsartsigora, focusing on excavations of burial mound (kurgan) complexes. Subsequent research in Sachkhere Municipality has documented numerous sites from various periods, among which the excavations at Sairkhe and Modinakhe archaeological sites are particularly noteworthy. Archeological investigations conducted in the regions throughout past and present centuries have confirmed the presence of Paleolithic sites, Late Early Bronze Age kurgans, as well as settlements and cemeteries dating to the Late Bronze Age, pre-Classical, Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, and Medieval periods in Upper Imereti region.¹

One such archaeological site is Todadze Fortress and its southern slope. The ridge of Todadze Fortress runs north of Sachkhere and represents a southern part of the Racha–Imereti range. Its

¹ Gamkrelidze, G., Bragvadze, Z., Mindorashvili, d., KvaWaZe, M. *Topoarchaeological Dictionary of Kartlis Tskhovreba*, Tbilisi, 2013. Pp. 472-477.

western continuation forms the ridge where Modinakhe Fort is located. Modinakhe Fortress and its southern slopes represent one of the most significant archaeological sites of the area, which is characterized by multi-period occupation layers. Archaeological site of Modinakhe have been identified and studied by archaeologists since the past century.

Ruins of the ‘Todadze Fort’ or alternatively ‘Tsereteli Fort’ named by locals, is a small medieval fort located. The structure was built with roughly hewn limestone blocks and mortar. Given its scale, it likely functioned as a watchtower, controlling the routes passing through the Kvirila Valley that connected eastern and western Georgia.

Todadze Fort is archaeologically unexplored site. The first Archaeological surveys on the fort and its southern slopes were carried out in 2022 under the supervision of archaeologist Zura Bragvadze. The aim of the survey was to verify the information according to which various artifacts had been discovered during agricultural and other ground-disturbing activities in the area.

Archaeological surveys of 2022 confirmed the presence of a multi-layered archaeological site on the slope of Todadze Fortress, encompassing cultural deposits ranging from the Early Bronze Age to the Early Middle Ages.² Archaeological survey also highlighted the risks of the site’s damage due to the natural processes and human activity. As the surveys carried out in 2022 was limited to preliminary survey, the identified cultural deposits were not further investigated. However, a comprehensive study of the cultural deposits of Todadze Fort, together with the results of archaeological investigations of the excavated slopes of Modinakhe Fortress, would provide significant information into the early history of Sachkhere, particularly the Early Bronze Age period. Accordingly, the tender announced in 2025 by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia aimed to advance research in precisely this direction.

² The report on the Archaeological investigation conducted in 2022 could be accessed in the archives of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia.

Works Defined by the Project

1. Excavation of two trenches (6 × 10 m) on the southern slope of Todadze Fortress ridge;
2. Archaeological investigation of the trenches over an area of 6 × 10 m;
3. Cleaning and preparation of the archaeological deposits revealed in the trenches;
4. Excavation of test pits (evaluation trenches) (5 × 5 m);
5. Study of the Archaeological deposits identified within the test pits (5 × 5 m area);
6. Cleaning and preparation of the archaeological deposits revealed in the test pits;
7. Partial backfilling/re-cultivation of the excavated area (40 sq. m).

Description of the work performed at the site

The archaeological investigation was conducted on the lower terrace of the southern slope of Todadze Fortress hill. The works were carried out by LLC “LayerCo” under the direction of archaeologist David Darejanashvili. The slope directly borders a residential area. According to local residents, wheat was cultivated on this terrace in the past; today it is unused and periodically affected by erosion.

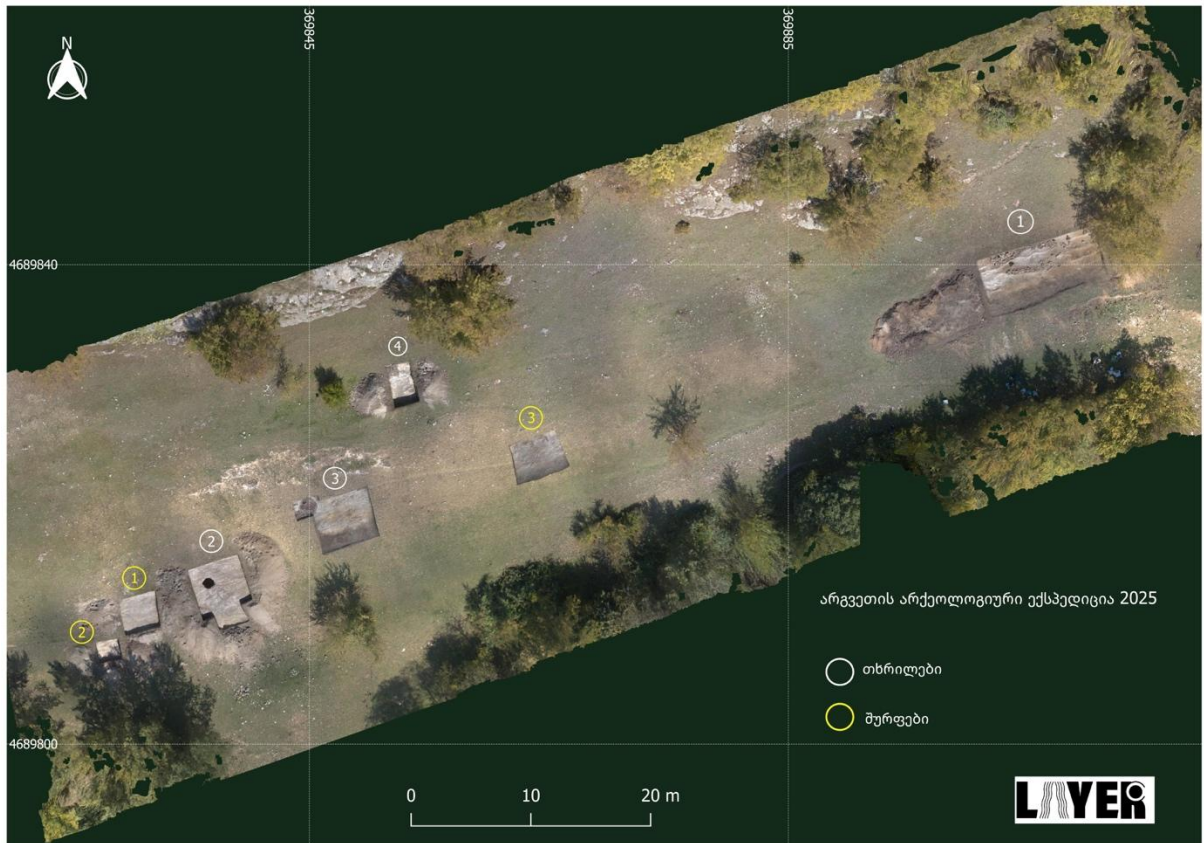
According to the requirements for the project from the National Agency of the cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia (tender requirements), two trenches and two test pits (a total of 170 sq. m) were to be excavated. However, due to objective circumstances and in order to sample a wider area, one trench was divided into three sections and distributed across different locations. One test pit was likewise divided into two parts. In total, four trenches and three test pits (test pits) of varying sizes were excavated.

The stratigraphy of all sections across the investigated areas was consistent: beneath a 5–8 cm-thick turf layer lies a 5–15 cm layer of brown meadow soil, which overlies a 10–25 cm layer of yellow silty sediment, itself underlain by sandstone bedrock. The thickness of these layers varied depending on the unevenness of the bedrock, which in some areas was elevated and in others depressed. As a result of this irregularity, remains of archaeological deposits had accumulated in the depressions of the bedrock.

Due to the steepness of the terrace and the loose nature of the soil, in areas with thin sediment and turf layers, traces of archaeological deposits were almost entirely eroded and survived only in the form of displaced pottery fragments and isolated chance finds. For the same reason, the artefacts

recovered from the investigated areas belong to entirely different periods: alongside pre-antique material, medieval pottery fragments were also identified, including glazed examples.

Following the completion of the excavations, the investigated area was fully backfilled and restored.



Orthophoto of the studied area with trenches (white circles) and test pits (yellow circles)



Excavation area after recultivation. General view



Trench N1 after recultivation

Description of the Trenches and test pits

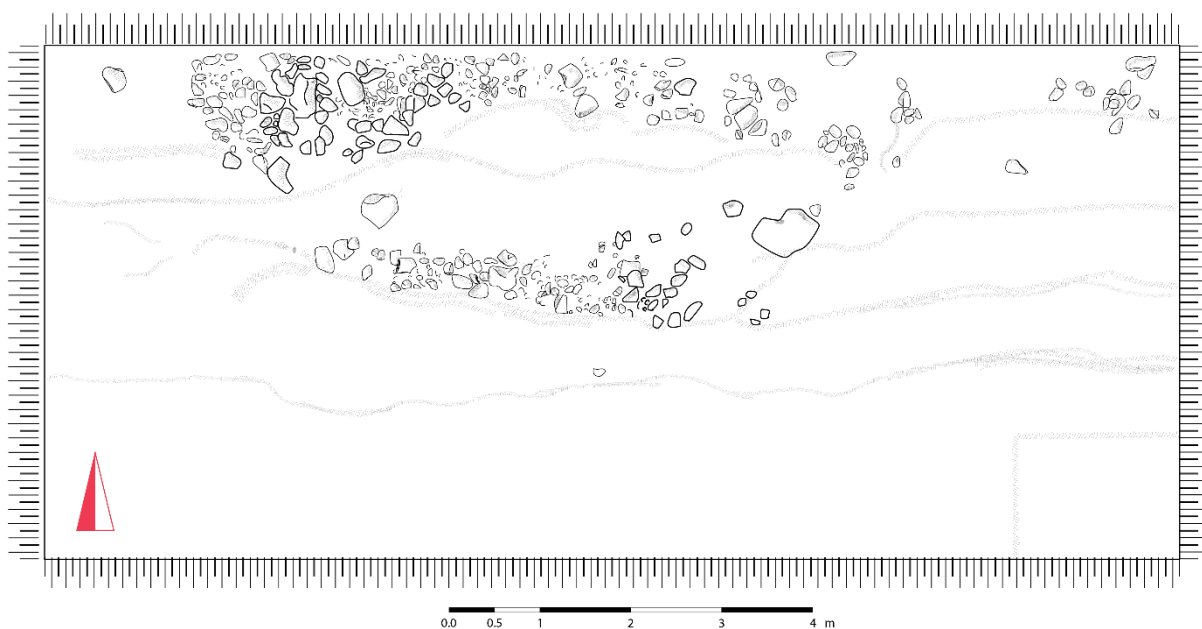
Trench N1 (6 × 10 m), was opened to the north of and adjacent to Trench N1 excavated in 2022. As the study area is located on a slope, a 50 cm-wide baulk was left between the previously excavated area and the current trench. Across the entire trench, the turf layer (approx. 5 cm thick) was removed; this layer already contained scattered ceramic fragments.

Due to the sloping terrain, the trench was divided into three terraces. On the northernmost (first) terrace, directly beneath the turf layer, an irregular stone concentration was identified extending for nearly 5 m. This deposit contained ceramic sherds and osteological material, mainly bones of small livestock. A similar condition was observed to the south of this stone concentration, on the second terrace, where less well-preserved and less dense stone spread was recorded.

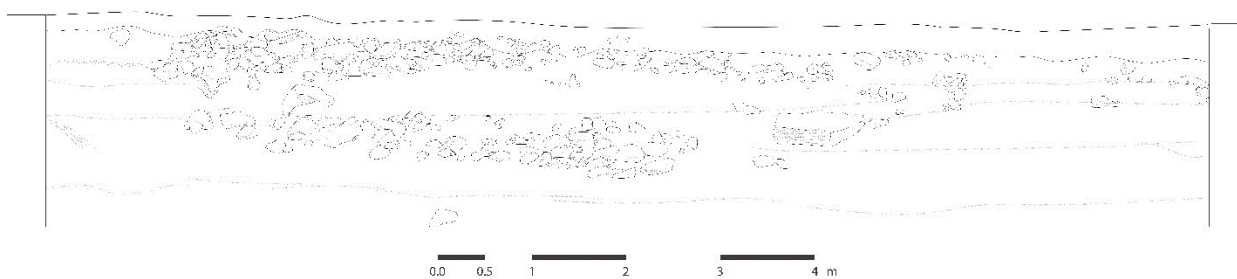
Both stone concentrations rested on a silty layer, whose thickness varied between 10 and 25 cm depending on the uneven sandstone bedrock beneath. Interpreting these stone accumulations with certainty is difficult for several reasons: although they are located on adjacent, narrow terraces and run roughly parallel to one another, they leave a rather narrow corridor between them—too narrow to convincingly interpret them as the collapsed remains of two parallel walls. Moreover, no traces of connecting east–west walls were identified, which would have indicated the presence of a built structure. However, the presence within these stone spreads of not only fragmented pottery sherds but also nearly complete vessels suggests that they are more likely associated with structural remains rather than natural formations. It is also noteworthy that in areas of the terraces where no stone concentrations were present, ceramic material was almost entirely absent. This is particularly evident on the southernmost (third) terrace, where excavation reached the bedrock only in the southeastern corner. This specific area was selected because, in Trench N1 excavated in 2022, a Kura–Araxes layer had been identified in close proximity to this location. Unfortunately, the deposits encountered in this extension proved to be sterile.

The ceramics recovered from the stone concentrations, including jug-like vessels, bowls, biconical jars, and cups, are predominantly black-fired, with some surfaces burnished to a high sheen. They closely resemble pre-antiquity ceramic assemblages. Accordingly, the stone structures/concentrations documented in Trench N1 should likely be dated to the same period. Among the finds, worth mentioning is an iron arrowhead (preserved length: 5 cm), which

morphologically resembles spearheads dated to the early third century BC discovered at Dablagomi.³



Plan of Trench N1



Section of Trench N1

³ Gamkrelidze, G., Shatberashvili, V., Pirskhalava, M., Carkviani, M., Davlianidze, R. Arms and Military Equipment in Georgia (BC 5th – AD 4th centuries). II. Catalogue. Tbilisi, 2018. 36-37.



Aerial photo of Trench N1



Trench N1



Trench N1 - detail



Trench N1 – Ceramic fragments recovered in stone concentration





Pottery found within the stone concentrations, Trench N1

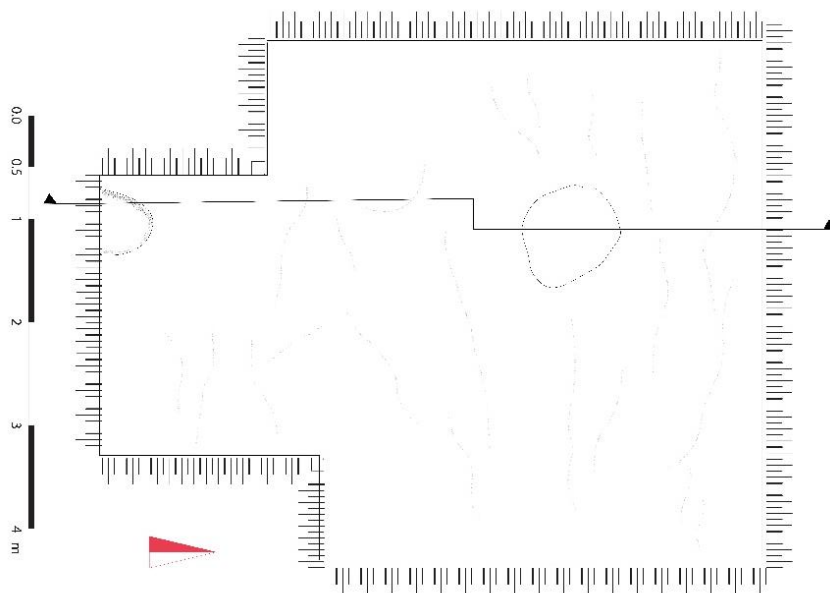


Trench N1. Pottery sherds, arrowhead, flint knife and obsidian from the archaeological deposit beneath the turf layer

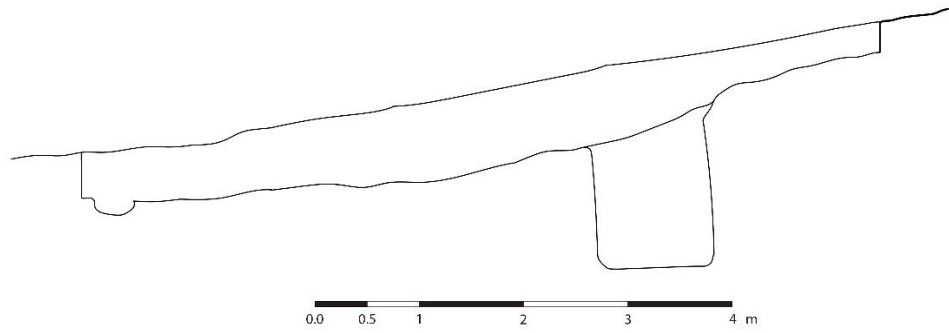
Trench N2, measuring 5×5 m, was opened to the northwest of Grave N1 investigated in 2022. It was subsequently extended southwards by 1.5×4 m, so that the pit of Grave N1 would fall within the limits of Trench N2. As in other areas, the removal of the turf layer yielded numerous ceramic fragments. The majority of these belong to the pre-Classical (eighth-sixth centuries BC) period; however, medieval pottery fragments were also present, including even a sherd of a glazed bowl. This suggests that the material was likely redeposited from the slope.

A fragment of the lower part of a grinding stone was also discovered. In the northwestern part of the trench, a pit cut into the sandstone bedrock was identified. It was filled with fragmented stones and sand, and sporadically contained undiagnostic ceramic fragments from various periods. The pit is so called ‘pear-shaped’, with a straight, widened base (maximum depth: 1.65 m; rim diameter: 0.95 m; base diameter: 1.3 m). Samples were taken from the bottom of the pit for palynological analysis. Since no significant ceramic or osteological material was recovered from the fill (apart from a few undiagnostic fragments likely introduced during the filling process), the feature may tentatively be interpreted as a storage or utility pit. However, assigning it to a specific period remains uneasy until the results of the palynological analysis become available.

Near the pit, to its south, a fragment of a bronze pin-like object was found in the soil. In the extreme southeastern part of the trench, approximately 70 cm from Grave N1, an open-ended bronze bracelet was discovered. This bracelet closely resembles the one recorded on the arm of the deceased in Grave N1. As no associated features or finds were identified around it, we may postulate that the bracelet may have belonged to the woman buried in Grave N1 and became detached during the burial process, going unnoticed by those conducting the funeral(?).



Plan of Trench N2



Trench N2. Section



Trench N2



Trench N2



A storage pit discovered in the trench N2



Ceramic finds from trench N2



Ceramic finds from Trench N2



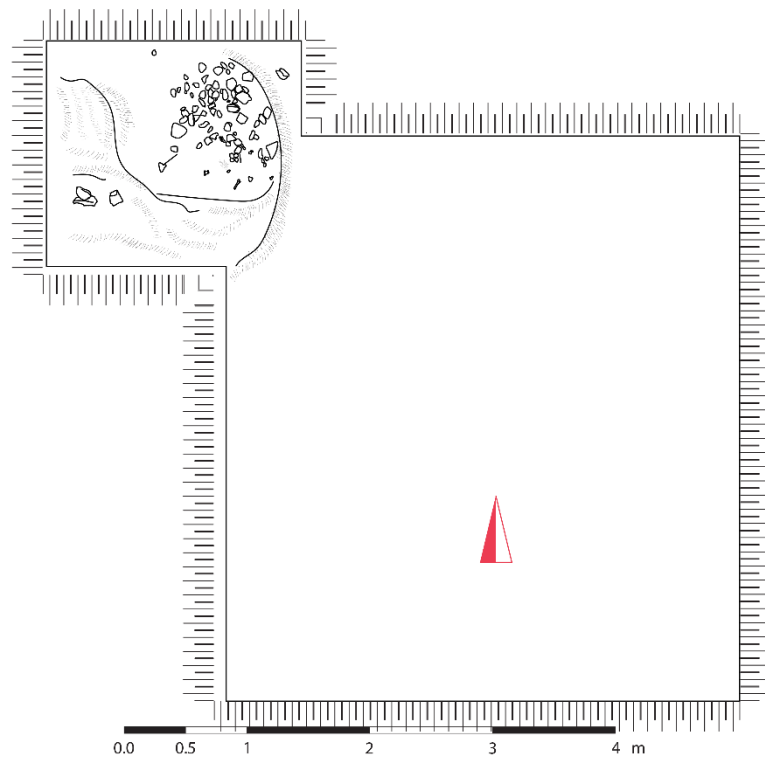
Finds from Trench N2

Trench N3 (5 × 5 m) was opened to the east of Trench N2, running parallel to it. Beneath the turf layer, two iron knives with curved backs, a bronze trilobate arrowhead, and ceramic fragments were recovered. Following the removal of the turf, a pit cut into the bedrock was identified in the northwestern part of the trench. The feature contained ceramic fragments, prompting an extension of the trench both westward and northward (2 × 2 m).

Within the cut bedrock feature (approx. 1 m in diameter), a silty fill was recorded containing ceramic fragments, burnt stones, and osteological material (including limb bones, a tooth, and fragments of vertebrae). After cleaning and processing the ceramics and stones, it became clear that the concentration of pottery was particularly pronounced in the northeastern part of the pit. This pattern appears to result from the “sinking” of pottery and stones into a mass of ash and water.

As noted, a bronze trilobate arrowhead was found in the trench without clear stratigraphic context. Similar arrowheads are known from sites such as Didi Lilo (6th–5th centuries BCE, Grave N1), Vani (5th–4th centuries BCE cultural layer), and Itkhvisi (5th–4th centuries BCE, Grave N21), among others.⁴

⁴ Gamkrelidze, G., Shatberashvili, V., Pirskhalava, M., Carkviani, M., Davlianidze, R. Arms and Military Equipment in Georgia (BC 5th – AD 4th centuries). II. Catalogue. Tbilisi, 2018. Pp. 43-44; 61; 86-87.



Trench N3. Plan



Trench N3. Aerial photo



Trench N3

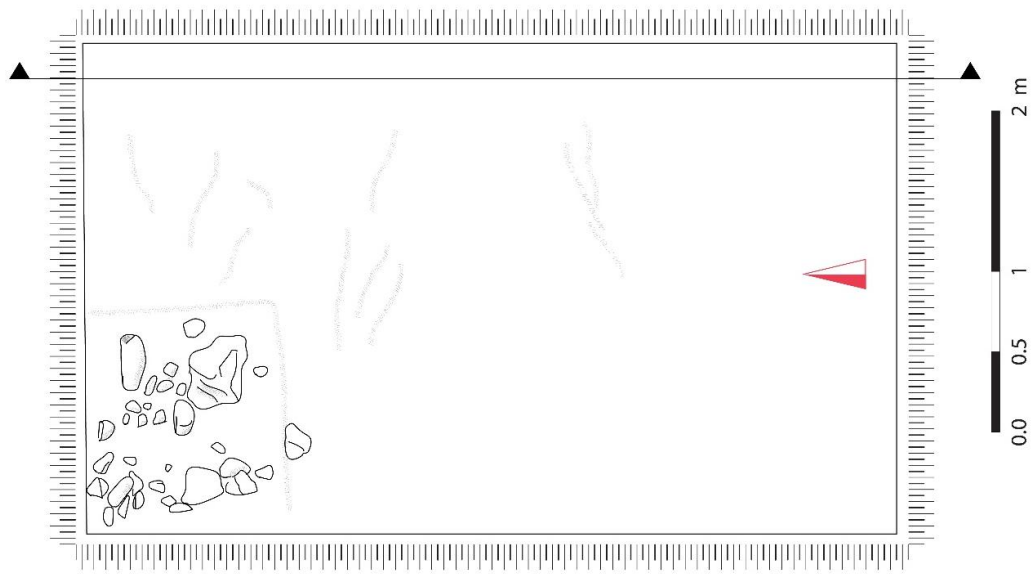


A storage pit discovered in Trench N3

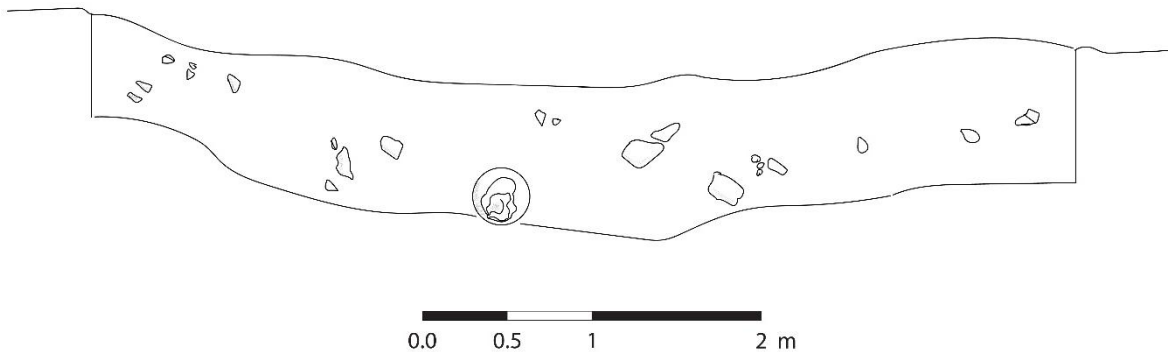


Finds from Trench N3

Trench N4 (3 × 4 m) was opened to the northeast of Trench N3, on an upper terrace. Prior to excavation, a rectangular depression was visible on a relatively leveled surface. The trench was placed in the eastern part of this feature. In the eastern section of the trench, resting on the bedrock, a three-spouted jug was discovered lying on its side toward the west. Based on its form and firing, the vessel can be dated to the Early Middle Ages (5th-8th centuries AD). The jug was filled with soil, part of which was sampled for palynological analysis. Whereas in Trenches N2 and N3 the material may plausibly be interpreted as redeposited from the upper slope, this explanation is unlikely in the case of the jug from Trench N4. The vessel was located at the base of a rock outcrop, and had it fallen from the upper terraces, it would not have survived intact. Therefore, the terrace at the base of the rock may represent a particularly significant archaeological context. However, due to objective constraints, this issue could not be further investigated within the scope of the present expedition.



Trench N4. Plan



Trench N4. Section



Trench N4



Trench N4. Section



Finds from Trench N4

Test Pit N1 (3 × 3.5 m) was opened to the northwest of Trench N2, on a sloping surface. As in other areas, small ceramic fragments appeared sporadically and without context within the turf layer and the underlying soil. No archaeological deposits were identified in this test pit.



Test pit N1



Ceramic finds from Test pit N1

Test Pit N2 (3 × 3 m) was opened to the southwest of Test Pit N1. A similar situation was observed: only a few scattered and contextless ceramic fragments were found within the turf and soil.



Test pit N2

Test Pit N3 (5 × 5 m) was opened to the east of Trench N3, running parallel to it, also on a sloping surface. No cultural layers were identified here either. The ceramics present in the upper turf and soil layers were very sparse and represented only by undiagnostic fragments.



Test Pit N3

Conclusion

The archaeological investigations carried out in 2025 proved to be highly successful. First and foremost, the abundance of artefacts recovered during the fieldwork should be emphasized. The collected material has been transferred to the Sachkhere Local History Museum named after Jurkha Nadiradze for further study, while the palynological samples will be submitted to the laboratory of the National Museum for continued analysis. The publication of the excavation results is planned for early 2026.

The fieldwork itself was conducted according to high professional standards, with the participation of both archaeologists and local staff. It is also noteworthy that students from the “Young Skhvitorians’ Club” of Skhvitori School visited the site, where they had the opportunity to observe the archaeological discoveries firsthand.



Drone photographing the excavation area



Trench N1. Working process



Trench N4. Working process