

## MIGRATION, MINORITIES & REGIONAL IDENTITIES

Turkey and the Black Sea region are located between various geographical areas such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Their location perforce constitutes them as a physical bridge and traditionally pitted them at the crossroads between different historical forces and empires. This was as much a feature in prehistoric as in historical and contemporary times when trans-boundary migration remains an important domestic and international concern. The interplay between these diverse historical forces and migratory patterns has been a significant factor in shaping the region's domestic and social make-up over time. It has played an important role in forming cultural identities at individual, regional, national and supra-national levels. Simultaneously, in relation to migrant communities, these processes have also influenced the neighbouring areas around Turkey and the Black Sea region. This strategic research initiative aims to promote research interests across different academic disciplines that relate to the themes of migration in Turkey and the Black Sea region.

### Forgotten borderlands: Guria and Adjara survey project

E.E. Intagliata | University of Edinburgh

D. Naskidashvili | Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University

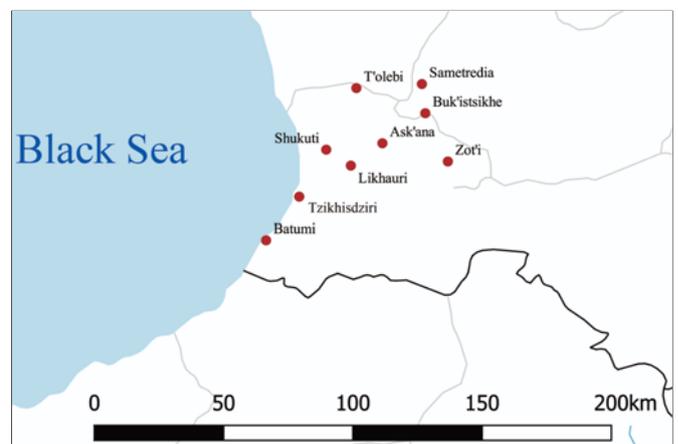
doi:10.18866/biaa2017.09

Ancient Lazica, modern-day western Georgia, enjoys a strategic location that made it a much sought-after borderland in the sixth century, controlling mountain passes through the Caucasus and direct access to the Black Sea coast. The region, a Byzantine vassal state after AD 522, was torn by a protracted war between the Byzantines and the Persians from AD 541. This was a war of position, dominated by the necessity, on the one hand, to secure fortified locations and, on the other, to maintain positive diplomatic relations with the local Lazi. The war ended in AD 562, when the Persians recognised Lazica as a Byzantine protectorate. Numerous forts are reported by written sources, including Procopius and Agathias, to have been restored or constructed anew by Justinian on this occasion.

The scope of this survey project is to contribute to the understanding of the frontier defensive system of Lazica by examining the standing remains of nine forts situated in the provinces of Guria and Adjara. The existence of this cluster of sites suggests that the control of the routes to eastern Pontus from Lazica might have been considered of crucial strategic importance. Without such protection, cities along the relatively accessible coastal route of the southern Black Sea, such as Trapezus (modern Trabzon), would have been left exposed to attacks from Lazica. This year, the fieldwork consisted of the documentation of standing structures, the collection of brick and mortar samples, drone photography and the planning of sites or isolated structures. Most of the work focused on Tzikhisdziri, a site situated close to the village of Kobuleti and some 17.5km to the north of Batumi as the crow flies.

Tzikhisdziri has been the subject of excavations and is considered by many the most likely candidate for Procopius' Petra. It is sited on two hills, one of which, the citadel, displays imposing fortification remains. The citadel includes a church, a bath complex, a warehouse and cisterns. The remains on the second, smaller hill to the south have been almost completely obliterated by the construction of a modern restaurant, now abandoned. The two hills are connected by a double wall that protects the access to the sea at ground level. The surroundings of the site have been affected by modern construction works, including the building of a sea wall, a railway and a road.

This year, the structural study of the fortification works at Tzikhisdziri focused on three features of the enceinte, namely the northern gate and two wall sections. The remaining parts of the fortification circuit have been the subject of heavy restorations in recent times that have considerably altered their structure. The examination of the gate has revealed a complex palimpsest of building techniques, and it was built in at least five different stages





3D rendering of the site of Tzikhisdziri. 1 = gate; 2 = walls linking the two hills; 3 = wall from later phase.

(no. 1 on the figure above). These include the addition of a second fortification wall and the construction of a vantage court possibly flanked by two rectangular towers, which are now faintly visible on the ground. The section linking the two hills consists of two walls, one of which has a wall-walk supported by brick arches, constructed with a homogeneous building technique (no. 2). The third wall examined appears to be the product of a later phase of the site and includes reused bricks and blocks of mortar spoliated from pre-existing buildings (no. 3). Mortar and brick samples have been collected for thin-section, XRD and chemical analyses from these wall sections and other structures at the site, including the narthex of the church, the bath complex and a cistern. They will be processed in 2018 to shed more light on the relative chronology and construction techniques of Tzikhisdziri.

A similar methodology has been applied to a selection of other sites, including T'olebi and Ask'ana, where the standing structures have been documented; unfortunately pottery surface collection could not be conducted due to high vegetation cover. Although the autoptic analysis of the building techniques confirms the construction of these sites in different phases, without pottery studies or scientific analyses, a late antique dating can not be pinpointed at this early stage of the project.

The sites of Vashnari and Moedani, situated 16km to the southwest of Lanchkhuti and 4.5km to the northeast of Ozurgeti respectively, do not have any standing fortification remains, but they have been selected as case studies for this project due to their archaeological potential. At Vashnari, the standing wall of the apse of the church, which shows a characteristic building technique of bands of bricks alternated with stone courses, has been documented, and its bricks and mortar have been sampled. At Moedani, where a pottery surface collection was conducted, our attention was attracted by a brick stamp bearing the letters LEG and now on display at the Archaeological Museum of Lanchkhuti. The numerous brick types identified at Moedani in the course of our survey, one of which is strikingly similar to a fourth- to fifth-century type with finger impressions found at Shukhuti,

might suggest a long occupational history of the site. Data gathered during our fieldwork have been complemented by those from the showcases and depots of the archaeological museums of Lanchkhuti and Ozurgeti.

As far as wider, regionally focused studies are concerned, all data have been collated into a Geographical Information System (GIS) platform for easy consultation and several computer-generated analyses (viewshed analyses and least-cost path analyses) have been carried out in order to understand better the relations between the sites visited. The acquisition of CORONA satellite images has proved particularly useful in identifying changes in the settings of these sites. Tzikhisdziri, for example, appears to have been slightly affected by coastal erosion since 1968, the year when the CORONA picture was taken.

The survey, which aims to continue next year, has revealed the archaeological potential of the provinces of Guria and Adjara to shed more light on the frontier defensive system of ancient Lazica and late antique military architecture. The lacunose state of the archaeological record for several of these sites is objectively an important, but not insurmountable, obstacle to our understanding of much wider research questions, namely how the frontier tactics in Lazica compare to those of other borderlands in which a Justinianic intervention is better known.



Drone photograph of the remains of T'olebi.

#### *Acknowledgements*

Many colleagues and friends have contributed with their help and ideas to the success of the survey this year, including A. Kakhidze and his team, who kindly hosted us at the archaeological base of Pichvnari, and V. Licheli, N. Inaishvili, M. Mzhavanadze, L. Aslamishvili, Gela Sadradze and the personnel of the Lanchkhuti, Chochatauri, Ozurgeti, Kobuleti and Batumi archaeological museums. The Georgian-Polish and Georgian-British archaeological teams at, respectively, Gonio/Apsaros and Nokalakevi/Archaeopolis welcomed us with open arms during our visits to these sites. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of Adjara kindly allowed us to export mortar and charcoal samples from Georgia. Our field assistants this year were Shio Simsive and Marta Ravizza. To all of them goes our deepest gratitude.