

## DMANISI AND ITS PAST

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An important region of Georgia, Lower Kartli was populated by ancient Georgian tribes, who occupied four principal river valleys: the Debeda, the Mashavera, the Khrami, and the Algeti. This has given rise to a rich Georgian culture, formed here throughout dozens of centuries.

The region of Dmanisi contains a wealth of diverse archaeological and architectural remains from the Early, Middle and Late Bronze, Early Iron, Classical, and Medieval periods.

One of the main attributes of the culture of a people is possession of its own writing. The Georgian nation, with its own script, holds a place of honor among the 14 peoples of the world with their own writing system. The oldest (5th century AD) examples of Georgian writing in Georgia have been found in Lower Kartli: in Bolnisi and Dmanisi. Scholars are inclined to believe that this region was the cradle of Georgian culture.

The ancient city site of Dmanisi is a unique monument in Lower Kartli, situated within 80 km of Tbilisi, on a high bluff overlooking the confluence of the Mashavera and Pinezauri Rivers. In the Middle Ages, Dmanisi was one of the strongest cities, after the Georgian capital Tbilisi. Traces of all periods of history have been brought to light on its territory.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a fortified city was built on the site, preceded by an urban-type settlement. Furthermore, traces of dense population have been discovered for the Bronze Age, especially demonstrated by the abundance of Late Bronze archaeological material.

Dmanisi is first mentioned in written sources in the 6<sup>th</sup> and then in the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Henceforth, written evidence on Dmanisi becomes frequent.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the city was razed to the ground as a result of the inroads of the Seljuk Turks who had come from Central Asia and settled

in the Near East. After their expulsion from Georgia the city was rebuilt at the turn of the 12th century. The city gradually gained in strength, reaching its acme in the 13th century. Georgian coins were minted here at this time.

Ceramic and glass manufacture was at a high level in Dmanisi, and local production was in great demand.

As a major city, Dmanisi had close trade and economic relations with many countries of the world, including Byzantium, Iran, Arabia, Europe and China. This is attested to by items, for example the coins of these countries discovered in archaeological excavations at the site.

After the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia, including Dmanisi, came under Mongol rule, which caused the weakening of the country. At the turn of the 15th century, Georgia was devastated by the numerous invasions of Timur Lenk, Dmanisi suffering the same lot. The city was partially rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this period, only the citadel of the city continued to function, but the repeated invasions of external enemies (including Iran and Turkey) brought about the total destruction of Lower Kartli, in particular of Dmanisi. Most of its population perished fighting the enemy, and those who survived found refuge in different regions of Georgia. The Dmanisi area lay waste, the once flourishing city a ruin.

The city was built on a bluff (13ha in size), and was inaccessible on three sides. The gate of the city was on the southern side. The inner fortress, or citadel of the city was also built on this side, and separated from the city by a specially constructed rampart wall. The Dmanisi Church of the Virgin, the chief ecclesiastical center (episcopate) of the city and of the region was built beside the fortress. This three-nave basilica was erected in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the first quarter of the 13th century, a porch, embellished with rich and varied ornaments, was built on the western part. A long Georgian inscription in the

asomtavruli (capital) script was detailed on the western facade. The inscription mentions Lasha-Giorgi, the Georgian king of the period and son of Queen Tamari, as well as the builder of the porch, Kalnapetisdze. Of great interest in this inscription is the following piece of evidence: "Newly-married couples are exempt from the church tax." Although the Dmanisi region was at this time densely populated, it seems that the church officials took active steps towards improving the demographic situation.

Archaeological excavations have brought to light the entire perimeter of the city wall, with buttresses and towers, and the palace with baths, and dwelling and economic structures (three-storey houses are evidenced). The ground was paved with flat bricks, while the buildings were covered with plain and grooved tiles.

Rich archaeological materials have been brought to light: pottery (glazed and unglazed); faience; metal and glass vessels, both local and imported; coins (up to 2000) of many countries - mostly Georgian; and a large number of ornaments: gold, silver, glass, etc.

The uniqueness of the Dmanisi city site lies also in the fact that here, beneath the medieval structures, in the solid stratum - earlier believed to be the bedrock - an Early Palaeolithic site of ancient humans has been discovered, its study yielding an extremely interesting result.

The Dmanisi Archeological Expedition (directed by V. Japaridze) conducted excavations in the central part of the Dmanisi city site for many years, in order to identify a quarter of the medieval city. A large refuse pit was found in the "soil" at floor level. After cleaning the pit, bones of fossil animals were found in the walls and at the bottom. The bones were studied by Professor Abesalom Vekua, a well-known paleontologist and researcher at the Institute of Palaeobiology (Director Acad. Leo Gabunia), in the Georgian Academy of Sciences. The bones proved to be those of a rhinoceros and other ancient animals.

In 1982, I excavated rooms B and C of the same quarter, which yielded analogous pits and bones of animals. It was therefore decided to conduct a test of the earlier deposits, carried out in the summer of 1983, involving plot XI, near the above-mentioned large pit. Along with palaeontological materials, stone tools were also unearthed.

In the same year, the well-known specialist of the Palaeolithic, David Tushabramishvili, accompanied by young specialists of the same period: Zaal Kikodze and Tengiz Meshveliani, visited Dmanisi to familiarize themselves with the materials brought to light. Impressed by what he had seen, D. Tushabramishvili recognized "a discovery of world significance."

The expedition developed a plan for the study of the site, and a special team was formed directed by Tamaz Bugianishvili and Nugzar Mgeladze. From 1984-89, this team conducted an intensive study of the early Palaeolithic site. Palaeontologist Abesalom Vekua, geologist Givi Maisuradze, geophysicists Jemal Sologhashvili and Elisabed Pavlenishvili, and palynologist Nino Klopotovskaya were invited to join the expedition. Plot XI and one square (2x2m) in plot X were excavated in their entirety. A large amount of material was brought to light - both palaeontological and archaeological. A study of this material has led Georgian scholars to the conclusion that the Dmanisi Early Palaeolithic site can be dated to a period prior to one million years ago.

Information about this site has reached beyond the boundaries of Georgia. In 1990, by invitation of his former student David Lordkipanidze, Dmanisi was visited by Professor Gerhard Bosinski, a well-known specialist of the Palaeolithic period. The material discovered made him, too, so enthusiastic as to ask for permission to participate in the excavation and the study of the site. In 1991, a special team was formed in the Dmanisi Archaeological Expedition for the study of the paleolithic deposits with Dr. Medea Nioradze, Abesalom Vekua, Givi Maisuradze, Jemal Sologhashvili, Elisabed Pavlenishvili, Nino Klopotovskaya, David Tushabramishvili, David Lordkipanidze, Merab Tvalchrelidze and German scientists Gerhard Bosinski and Antje Justus.

It was decided as a first priority to expand the excavation of the square in structure X, and on 24<sup>th</sup> September of the same year, human remains were discovered here: the mandible with 16 teeth. As a result of anthropological study it was attributed to *Homo erectus* and with other material determined to have an age of 1.8 million years.

The first international symposium held in Dmanisi emphasizes the great scientific value of the Dmanisi ancient man's site and its world significance.