

# Axes in the Ancient and Early Middle Ages in Iberia-Colchis

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An Axe belongs to the type of offensive weapons, which was used in fierce battles. This weapon was used in metal-paved wooden handle for agricultural purposes as well, so it is often difficult to separate between combat and economic axes. Based on the Archaeological data, we can argue that after spear the axe was the most massive weapon in the ancient Colchis-Iberia.

In Transcaucasia the iron axes appeared around VIII century BC. Initially they co-existed with Colchis-Koban type bronze axes and repeat them in form. It seems that at this time they mainly had a military purpose; however, it is also possible that they had some religious function as well, as an evidenced we can talk about the many miniature axes discovered in tombs. The bronze and iron axes are usually found in the tombs in the complex of other weapons (most often spearheads). The number of iron axes significantly increases in the monuments of the VII-VI centuries BC and from VI BC only metal samples are to be found [Esaian., 1985: 79]. At this time similarities with the bronze axes fall apart and the iron axes develop in their own, peculiar forms.

The starting point for the classification of Axes is the parts of the shape, width and proportions. For example, the head may be asymmetrical, which means that the head unequally expands from the haft/handle. A symmetrical axe is when it expands evenly on both sides of the haft/handle. The look of the Axe is determined by the ratio of the length and of the largest width and according to which we get broad-headed artefacts, when the head approaches or equals the width and height of the axe we have narrow-headed artefacts, whose total length is less than the width of a head twice or more [Gamkrelidze..., 2005:129].

According to the above-mentioned criteria in the Axes common for the Antique and Early Middle Ages in Iberia- three main types can be outlined: Khuakveriani Axe, Pickaxe and so-called "Tsebelduri Axe". The first two types were widespread in the early antique, Late Antique and Early Middle Ages in Iberia-Colchis, and the third type, the so-called "Tsebelduri Axe", was only found during the last stage of the Late Period of Antiquity and Early Middle Ages (IV-VII centuries AD).

### **I - Khuakveriani Axe.** There are different sub-types of Khuakveriani Axes:

**1) First Sub-type** is characterized by narrow, elongated outline. The handle hole is in the middle of the axe. They are characterized by high, square or round-wide-sharp spines and narrow mouth (average height - 21 cm., width of 3-4 cm.) [Picture1 1,2]. Such axes appear to be the earliest form of iron axes developed in Transcaucasia by the second half of the VII century BC [Kvirkvelia, 1982: 25]. The sites of discovery are - the red Shukura №11 burial, dating from first half of the VI and the second half of the VII century BC [Trapsh, 1969: 78-162], №6 burial of Ergeta I, №1 burial of Ergeta II, №4 burial of Ergeta III and №4 of Ergeta IV [Dziziguri 2002A: 4]. Similar forms of axes are found in the central Caucasus - Tqli cemetery of VII-V BC and Natsargora burial tomb №311 of the VII-VI century [Tekhov, 1980: 57-64].

**2) Second Sub-type** Compared to the first they stand out by a wider mouth and a low quit [Picture 1 - 3-9]. Some are prominent, rounded and have a bend like a flat hammer [Picture 1-7,8,9], others are straight with rectangular spines [3,4,5,6 Figure 1] (the height varies between 12-18 cm. The average width is between 6-8 cm). The axe-hammers mentioned here are found in the earlier monuments and are considered to be the prototype of the Colchis and Khoban axes [Meliukova, 1964: 67,68], in particular, according to P. Uvarov's classification they are B type of the Colchis axes, N. Japaridze names them as the II Type [Japaridze, 1953: 285], and D. Koridze states that they are IV species of the Colchis axes that was widespread during XI-VIII centuries BC [Koridze, 1965: 68-74]. They are found in burials of Ergetas and Dghvaba of the VII-VI centuries BC [Papuashvili, 1998: 40-50], 7 samples in the burials of Khulanurkhvis dating from the second half of the VII century BC to the VI century BC [Trapsh, 1951: 23], 3 pieces on the Ureki cemetery dating from the second half of the VII century BC to and VI century BC [Mikeladze, 1985: 33-34]. 15 similar objects were found in the cemetery of Brill dating from the second half of the VII century BC and VI century [Gobejishvili, 1952: 50-52], and at the cemetery of Mukhurcha of the same period [Gogadze, 1984: 28-55]. 3 copies were found in the burials of Paluris VII-V centuries BC [Baramidze, 1998: 150-155], Pichori cemetery of VII-VI centuries BC [Baramidze, 1998: 28-30], the Tomb in Dghvaba dating from VI century BC [Mikeladze, 1995: 39-43] and Sairkhe in the cultural layer dated by VII-VI centuries [Makharadze, 1991: 11-12]. They can be found in the Upper Svaneti [Chartolani, 1996: 357]. In eastern Georgia they are found in burials of VII-VI century [Tekhov, 1980: 57-64], Narekvavi cemetery of BC VII-VI century BC [Okropiridze, 1984: 212, pl. X3], 5 copies were found in Samtavro Burials of VII-VI centuries BC [Abramishvili, 1957: 115-140] and one piece in the "warrior's tomb," of Mtskhetijvris dating VII century BC [Davitashvili, 1998: 106-107]. They were recorded in the North Caucasus as well: Gelendzhik [Akhanov, 1961: 143-145], Dergavisi, Korta [Uvarova, 1900: 180], the upper rutkha [Pogrebova, 1969: 179-188], Chmi, Goliati [Uvarova, 1900: 117,285-292]. Axes with such forms were found in Iran and Armenia as well, for example, in the Toprakh-Kale settlement of the VII century [Piotrovsky, 1939: 162-163].

Axe-hammers were also used in the classical (VI-IV centuries BC) And Hellenistic (IV-I centuries BC) period, in West as well as East Georgia. They showed up in Dapnari in a tomb of IV century BC [Kiguradze, 1976: 61. Tab. V3], Dablagom [Kuftin, 1950: 36], Hellenistic period cemetery of Dzevrula [Kuftin, 1950: 198], four pieces were found in the local complexes of the VI century BC [Baramidze, 1977: 41-43] and in Kutaisi [Davlianidze, 1983: 52]. They are found in Abkhazia in Guadikhu in the so-called "top group" burials of the VI-IV [Trapsh, 1969: 76-78], the two tombs of the red district [Trapsh, 1969: 183], Sochi area [Voronov, 1979: 69], burials of V-II centuries BC in Sukhumi mountains [Kalandadze, 1954: 12-23], 4 pieces were found in the layer of III-II century BC in the Eschera settlement [Shamba, 1980: 47,48] and 3 copies at the Merkheuli burials of the VI century BC [Baramidze, 1977: 39]. In eastern Georgia they were found in Beshtasheni [Kuftin, 1949: 224-232], and Natsargorisa V-III centuries BC [Ramishvili, 2003: 97,98], two pieces in Abulmugis burials of VI-IV centuries [Khokhobashvili ... , 2008: 118-121], as well as Manglisi, Gomareti Asureti, Santa [Davlianidze, 1983: 50.139] and the cemetery of Etso [Shatberashvili 2003: 121].

The both versions of the Khuakveriani Axes described above (the first and second subtypes) bear great resemblance with the Scythian samples, so in scientific literature, they are often referred to as "Scythian axes" and, therefore, it was thought that they were brought in by the

Scythians [Martirosian, 1964: 290]. However, a significant part of scientists believe that on the contrary, the Scythians mastered it in the Caucasus based Colchis-Koban bronze axes of the VIII-VII centuries BC in the Western Caucasus, during the forming process of Khuakveriani Axes. During VII-VI centuries BC Khuakveriani Axes were widely distributed in central Caucasus. Presumably, at this period while traveling from Asia in the West and the East Caucasus, the Scythians were introduced to the weapon and learned it [Esaian ..., 1985: 86]. Khuakveriani Axes iron extended to the North Caucasus from Central Transcaucasia in the VI-V centuries BC [Vinograov, 1972: 250,251].

**3) Third Sub-type** is considered to be the so-called "sekiriseburi" (half-moon shaped) Khuakveriani Axes common in the Colchis in the IV-II centuries BC (The height varies between 11-17 cm. The width is of 8-12 cm.) [Picture 1. 10-24]. They are distinguished by a symmetric or asymmetric wide mouth, which sometimes amounts to a total height of the axe. One piece of such axe was found in Vani, Akhvlediani Hill, II exploration trench of the Hellenistic layer [Lortkipanidze, 1976: 182], 7 samples were in several tombs of the Sukhumi Mountain of V-II centuries BC [Kalandadze, 1954: 27-35], 6 pieces – in the younger groups of Guadikhus Burials [Trapsh, 1969: 242,247,260] and 3 similar axes in Eschera settlement in the layers of the III-II centuries [Shamba, 1980: 48]. The same are the accidentally discovered iron axes from the river shores of Besletis and Bombora [Voronov, 1969: 53]. The axe is found similarly by accident in Sochi [Voronov, 1979: 70]. This type of axe was unearthed in a tomb in eastern Georgia - Kanchaeti [Gagoshidze, 1964: 52]. We can say that such kind of Khuakveriani Axes appear on the verge of V-IV centuries BC and exist until centuries BC. They are found mainly in western Georgia (Abkhazia). They have not been found outside Georgia yet, but images depicting it are found on Scythian artefacts, which were discovered on the territory of present-day Russia.

**4) Four Sub-type** highlights sharp, Khuakveriani axes, which are found in Brille and in Samtavro [Esaian..., 1985: 86], in the Natsargori burials of V-III centuries BC and on the territory of Armenia (Musier VII-VIII centuries BC). They are more common outside the Caucasus, in the Scythian complexes, and therefore their Scythian origins re quite probable.

**5) Fifth Sub-type includes** flat-handled, a bit bent, wide-mouthed axes. Such axes were discovered in the layers of II century BC in the settlement of Sarkini [Dzidiguri 2002: 177,178].

In the archaeological remains of the Late Classical period in Iberia and Colchis, Khuakveriani axes were found, which stands closest to the above-described second subtype of early ancient Khuakveriani axes. They are characterized by low rectangle-shaped or round-shaped handle, and asymmetric, narrow or oval hole on the handle [Picture 5]. They are, in general, found in II-VI centuries BC. Totally in Georgia 39 pieces of Khuakveriani axes dating II-VI centuries BC were found [Picture 8], out of which 29 are found in Abkhazia. The Late Antique and Early Middle Ages archaeological culture, is called as the "Tsebelduri Culture", and its main characteristic feature is the large number of axes. In its various complexes about more than 200 different types of axes are revealed (the vast majority of them belong to the so-called "Tsebelduri type" of axes). Here, almost every other warrior was armed with an axe. In most cases axes are found in the tombs along with the spearheads. Three Khuakveriani axes are found in the three graves of Apushti dating IV-VI centuries AD [Voronov..., 1970: 188], 14 pieces of Khuakveriani axes were discovered in the different necropolis of Tsibilium (Tsibilium I, II, X and XI) [Kazanski. ...,

2007: 29]. On the right side of the River Kodori in the village of Khutia in the burials of IV-VI centuries AD six axes showed up, from which four of belong to the Khuakveriani type [Chartolani, 2010: 14]. Per piece is found in Akhachcharkhus tomb №44 AD of IV-VI centuries AD [Shamba, 1970: 44,45], one in the tomb of Abgidzrakhus [Voronov, 1969: 60], also in the burials of Akhatsarakhus, Azantis, Lari, New Athos, in the village Abgarkhuki (Gudauta district) and the IV century AD cultural layer of the Bitchvinta settlement [Shamba, 1970: 44,45].

These types of axes are found outside Abkhazia, in the rest of Georgia. It is found in №1 burial tomb dating from II century AD in the village of Li [Didziguri, 2002: 117]. Samples are found in Kldeeti and Armaziskhevi dating from II AD [Lomtadidze, 1957: 18]. Such Khuakveriani axes were found in the late Roman burial ground in Pichvnari [Picture 5]; it has a round hole and a massive, rectangular, slightly bent, mouth-narrowed handle. The tomb containing this material dates back to the IV century AD [Kakhidze ..., 2004: 128]. Similar axes are found also in Nokalakevi, Vardtsikhesa and Tsikhura [Ramishvili, 2003: 25]. In eastern Georgia they are found in Akhrisi tomb dating I-III AD [Makalatia, 1951: 185], and the Nedzikhi cemetery and Urbnisi [Ramishvili, 2003: 25]. Similar patterns are found in some burial ground outside of Georgia for example in Crimea, in the necropolis of Kharaksi, which V. Blavatskis dated by the first half of the V century AD and the North Caucasus, in particular, the Kortsii tomb [Shamba, 1970: 44,45].

The prototype for the Khuakveriani axes of the Late Antique and Early Middle Ages can be regarded the Khuakveriani axes that were common in the previous era in Georgia and the Scythian world (VI-I centuries BC).

Presumably, this type of axe used more economic activities, for example, for forging, making holes on logs, rather than fighting, but, if necessary, could be used for this purpose as well [Artalakva, 1976: 48].

Separately, as the other type we can distinguish the so-called "pickaxe". It has a round hole in the handle, narrow mouth and a high flat spine [Picture 7]. They are rarely found in the tombs of men. Like the Khuakveriani axes, their prototypes can be found in the tools of the same shape in the earlier antique and Hellenistic period. For example, they show certain similarities with the above-mentioned fifth subtype. The weapon was of purely agricultural purposes and used for sharpening rock and wood or other purposes.

The third type is the so-called "Tsebelduri axe". If the above described Khuakveriani and pickaxe samples were used for agricultural purposes, the "Tsebelduri axe" was a sacred weapon. It is characterized by sharply separated or slightly noticeable throat, slightly bent forehead and curved, asymmetrical, down allowed wide entity.

In the type of Tsebelduri axes a few versions are distinguishable. The Archaeologist I. Voronov characterized two forms: axes with angular and axes with rounded handle holes. M. Kazanski provided a more extensive classification: the first is characterized by long corners of the throat [Picture 2], which is the earliest and was mainly spread in the last stage of the III century and IV century. The second is marked by short oval-shaped pipes as well as a relatively short mouth [Picture 3], and which are mostly found in the tombs dating from IV-V centuries.

The third has a short handle, but has an extensive, "bearded" mouth [Picture 4]. The latter can be found in the IV-VII century monuments [Kazanski, 2007: 29]. Their dimensions vary: the height of the axes ranges from 11 cm to 19 cm, the width - 9 cm to 15 cm., the spine is 2,7X4 cm in diameter on average. There is an assumption that the axes fully developed in the XIII-XIV centuries, and then continued its existence.

Tsebelduri type axes were found in the complexes dating from III-VII AD, such as Akhatsarakhu, Alrakhu, Akhachcharkhu, Apiancha, Apushta, Abgidzrakhu, Aukhuamakhu, Atara, Lari, Tsibilium and Shapka. Most of the axes fall in IV-VI AD. In the 12 cremation burials of Olginskoe along with other inventory eight such axes were discovered [Gzelishvili, 1947: 93]. Tsebelduri type axe was also found during excavations in the Tsibiliumi fortress, VI century cultural layer [Voronov..., 1982: 127]. Similar types of species were found in other places of Abkhazia as well: four axes were accidentally discovered in the village of Chkhalta [Chartolani ..., 2010: 10], two copies of the same axes on the right side of river Kodori in the village Khutia burials dating from IV-VI centuries AD [Chartolani, 2010: 14]; one piece was found in Gagra, Pitsunda, Khashupse, Lata, Merkheuli and on the left bank of the river Tsikhervis [Trapsh, 1971: 148]; 6 pieces were found in Sochi [Воронов, 1979: 97]. As a result about 160 "Tsebelduri type" of axes were discovered (which represents the majority of the total number), and 25-30% of the discovery is accidental. They are usually found in burials along with other weapons. This fact indicates that the axe was not the main weapon and was always considered as an auxiliary tool.

As for the rest of the Georgian territories, two pieces of the same axe were found situated in Ureki, which the N. Khoshtaria dates back to the Late Antique period [Khoshtaria, 1955: 63]. One similar axe showed up in Nokalakevi, Vani and Tsikhisdziri №1 inhumation tomb, which dates IV century AD [Inaishvili, 1993: 83.84]. A Tsebelduri type of axe was found in the village Makharia of Zugdidi district and which are nowadays kept in Zugdidi Museum. Three Tsebelduri types of axes were found in Pichvnari, two of them - in burials dating from IV-V centuries AD, and the third – by chance [Kakhidze ..., 2004: 128]. In the V-VI centuries layer of Vardtsikhe a Tsebelduri type of miniature axe was excavated [Japaridze, 1989: 107.108]. Accidentally in the Village of Kinoto a bronze axe was found [Lomtadidze, 1957: 6], which in its form can be attributed to the type Tsebelduri. There are also other verbal statements of their discovery: Racha-Lechkhumi, Dzveri, in the villages of Terjola, Gogna (reserved in the school museum of Chkhari), Azhameti [Japaridze, 1989: 107.108]. The same form of axes have been discovered recently in the near the mountain range burials of the V century near the river Inguri (v. Lenjeri) and Tskhenistsqali (v. Khopuri) [Chartolani ..., 2010: 10]. One of the latest achievements is the axe accidentally found in 2011 in village Nakipari of the Mestia District. In the Jieti burials (southeast of Chiatura) dating II-III centuries AD the №6 and №27 burials turned out to have Tsebelduri types of axes. The first is characterized by a short mouth and slightly noticeable throat. Its height of 15 cm., handle tube diameter - 4 cm. The second axe found in the tomb is marked by a wide mouth and a slightly separated throat. Its height is 12 cm, and diameter of the handle tube - 2 cm [Songhulashvili, 2006: 83]. From the Jieti artefacts noteworthy is the axe discovered in the tomb №6 which fall in form with M. Kazanski's second classification, which are placed in the IV-V centuries, and the second, the sample discovered in tomb №27, belongs to the third form of the same classification, which is the most typical and later modification of the

Tsebelduri axe (IV-VII centuries AD). Therefore, dating these burials from II-III centuries AD is quite controversial.

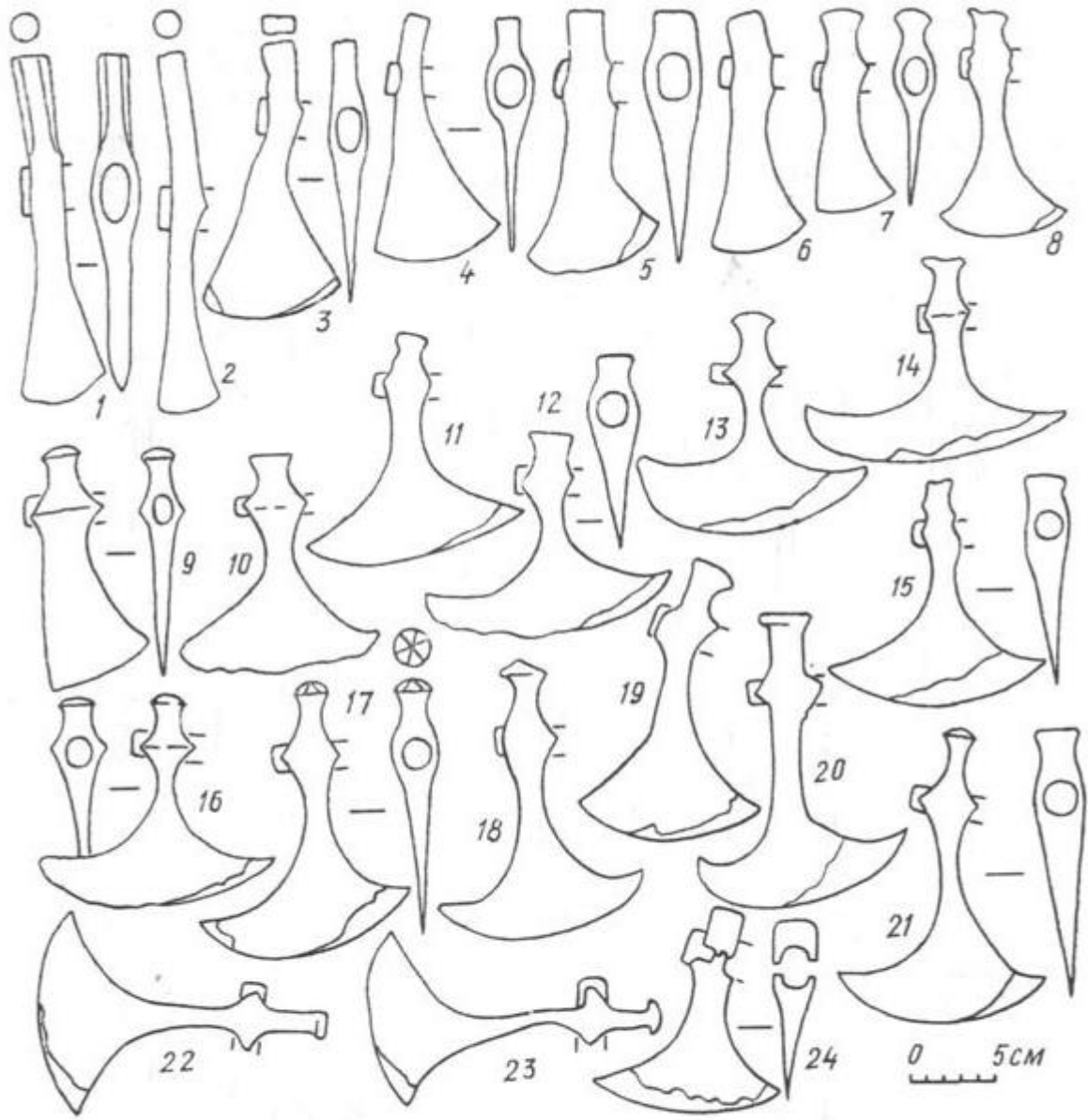
Their discovery away from Abkhazia demonstrates that this type was not confined to only one region, Abkhazia, but it was spread all over the West Georgia [Picture 9]. The same is indicated by a miniature axe discovered in Vardtsikhe that should be considered as a cult object or a toy, which further suggests that this type of Axe was spread throughout the historic Egrisi [Japaridze, 2006: 179]. It is called "Tsebelduri" according to the first place where it was discovered.

Typically, in the tombs of the deceased axes are fixed to the left shoulder, along with spearheads (rarely with the right shoulder). In some cases, they turned to be on the left or near to the left thigh of the deceased on the belt, with the head of the axe facing below. Therefore it can be assumed that these axes were worn on the left and on a belt [Voronov..., 1982: 128]. In Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the late Roman Axes discovered there bear resemblance with the Tsebelduri axes [Kuftin, 1949: 93]. The Archaeologist B. Kuftin based on the works of V. Osborn pointed out that axes of such forms are found in Germany and Bohemia. In the Museum of Maine axes are kept, which are known in German scholarly literature as Bardiche (from German can be translated as "bearded") and they are not different from the so-called "Tsebelduri Axe" [Japaridze, 2006: 178.179]. In the Western and Russian scientific literature they are often called "bearded" axes due to the shape of their mouth [Belurava, 2009: 28]. Such Axes are found on the territory of Turkey, so it is quite possible that the VI century Byzantine army axes, which are recorded in the written sources, are similar in form to the Tsebelduri [Voronov ..., 1982: 128]. It is also close to the Frankish axes, the so-called Francisca, which reportedly existed in V-VI centuries AD. The similarity between Francisca and Tsebelduri axe can especially be observed in the length of the handle. We have information about the Tsebelduri Axe's handle due to the image on the cult stone [Picture 6], which corresponds to a degree of the length of the axes discovered in the Frankish tombs (30-40 cm). Such short-handled axes the Franks used for throwing on distances. According to Procopius of Caesarea, the axes "The iron was strong... the wooden handles very short. They throw the axes at the enemy that breaks their shields and in such way they kill their enemies "[Voronov..., 1982: 128]. One would think that the Tsebelduri axes were used in the same form, especially when warriors had other weapons as well. The prototype of the Tsebelduri Axe is not defined. Linking them to the Colchian axes of the Bronze-Early Iron Age, then the classical and Hellenistic period is interfered by the significantly different forms, as well as a number of technological features of their production [Japaridze, 2006: 178.179]. As a prototype of Tsebelduri artefacts the Early- and Middle Bronze Age Khuamiliani axes cannot be considered, including to the lack of chronological distance and the non-existence of an intermediate type. Interesting seems the fact that in the areas populated by the German tribes similar types of axes appear relatively later, at the same time as the Eastern Black Sea Territory.

In conclusion, it can be said that the spreading of "Tsebelduri Axe" is connected with imports, which came from Northern-Western regions and was related to the activation of the Germanic tribes. Maybe this import was done due to the Roman and Byzantine garrisons. It is known that the "Germanization" process of the Roman legions begins from the end of III century AD, which meant not only having soldiers of German origin in the legions, but also to some extent the

adaptation of the German weapons arsenal to the Roman one. Archaeological excavations have revealed that from III-IV centuries AD along the coastal strip re-expansion and reinforcement of the Roman fortress become rather active. It can be argued that that for the time being the garrison stationed there should have been fairly "Barbarised" (Germanized). In the same period "Tsebelduri Axes" appear. Apparently, the local population adopted it quite fast and was of wide usage.

The opinion mentioned above can be confirmed by their topography of distribution in Georgia: all the samples are found in western Georgia, which confirms its western origin, and their large majority can be found near the sea coast, especially in Tsebelda, where important military-strategic way and the whole system of fortifications were gathered on the road from Sepastopol to Khlukhori; this statement once more indicates their direct connection with the Roman and Byzantine military garrisons.

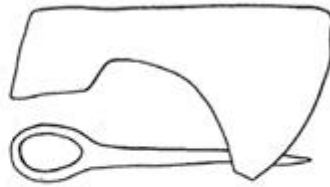


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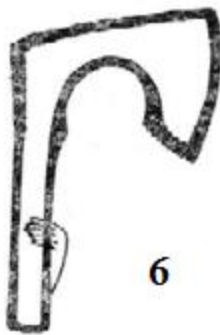
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