

GOLDEN FLEECE

"The great fame this country had in early time is disclosed by the myths, which refer in an obscure way to the expedition of Jason as having proceeded as far even as Media, and also, before that time, to that of Phrixos." Strabo "Geography"



Medea and Jason. 320-310 BC.
The red-figured krater from Paestum. Naples



Head of Pan
2nd c. BC.



ANCIENT GEORGIAN METALWORK

Thanks to the region's rich natural resources and its geographical location, Georgia developed metallurgical traditions which go back to the Early Bronze Age, namely the fourth to third millennium BC, when the Mtkvari-Araxian Culture (c. 3500 – 2400 BC) emerged on the territory of the East Caucasus. Unearthed artifacts from this period already demonstrate the advanced skills both in bronze metallurgy and in working with precious metals of Georgian artisans. These skills were further developed during the Middle Bronze Age, particularly during the era of the Kurgan culture. The early Kurgan culture, prevalent in south-central Georgia, is represented at two important sites: Martkopi and Bedeni. Tools and jewellery found at Martkopi and necklaces, pins, rings and temple pendants, as well as striking ornamental gold brooch discovered at Bedeni show an unusually high level of workmanship.

Alongside these artifacts a 23rd - 22nd century BC golden lion statuette, found in one of the kurgans in the Alazani Valley, is particularly noteworthy; it is the first sculptural image of its kind unearthed in the Transcaucasus area. The later Kurgan period, known for its Trialeti culture, demonstrates the further evolution of pre-Christian culture during 20th - 16th century BC. Rich burial gifts discovered include valued metal items, golden beads, standards, a golden goblet decorated with precious stones, and a famous silver bucket and goblet, the latter of which depicts a vinous ceremony scene. The first examples of golden and silver crockery - plates, jugs, mugs and other dishes – are found here.

During 14th - 7th century BC, known as the late bronze-Early Iron Age, two great cultural centres formed on the territory of eastern and western Georgia, the latter of which, called Colchis, was distinguished for its production of so-called Colchian axe heads. These pieces are adorned with a peculiar style of graphic ornaments that demonstrate both advanced metallurgical skills and artistic values. The middle period of the first millennium BC was notable for the wide use of iron in Colchis. Due to its especially advanced ironwork skills, one of the Georgian tribes – khalibs – were regarded by ancient Greeks as the founders of iron technology.

Between the sixth and third century AD, the western state of Egrisi, the legendary 'Colchis' preserved in ancient Greek mythology and literature, and the eastern state of Kartli, called 'Iberia,' flourished. The development of local goldsmithery was made possible, in part, by the regions' rich resources: gold-mines in southern Kartli and gold-bearing rivers in Egrisi. The latter, according to Greek authors, was especially 'rich in gold'. These authors reported on the method of collecting gold, a method that is still practiced in the mountainous Svaneti region, from the Egrisian Rivers: using sheepskins as sieves, so that the gold grains would get caught in the fleece. Such a fleece might be the inspiration for the Golden Fleece of Argonauts. Examples of Colchian gold work from the earliest eighth to ninth century BC include temple pendants, richly decorated with granulation and sculpted heads of predators, which have been found at Ureki on the Black Sea coast. These fine metal pieces attest to the high level of skills among craftsmanship.

Gold granulation attained great variety and technical excellence in the fifth and early fourth century. Outstanding examples, discovered in Vani, include exquisitely crafted gold diadems, with braid-patterned holders; diamond-shaped plaques, adorned with repousse images of fighting animals: earrings; arm rings: and temple pendants. All suggest the work of a skilled master. The plethora of such objects offers clear evidence of the existence of a distinct and original Colchian goldsmithery style that emphasizes extensive use of the granulation technique in combination with filigree. Colchian sepulchres of the sixth to fourth century BC have yielded lavish necklaces with miniature figures of birds and the heads of calves, goats, and rams - perhaps none more impressive than a gold necklace from Vani, which is composed of dozens of tiny granulation-adorned turtles.

Meanwhile at Iberian sites contemporaneous with Vani, the evidence of Achaemenid Persian influence becomes more pronounced, as can be seen in a splendid fourth century BC pectoral discovered amongst the Akhlagori treasure from northwest of Tbilisi. Indeed, perhaps the most extraordinary of the Akhlagori treasures is a pair of pendants designed to hang from a horse's bridle at the temples, crafted in the shape of two horses, with chains and acorn shapes hanging below.

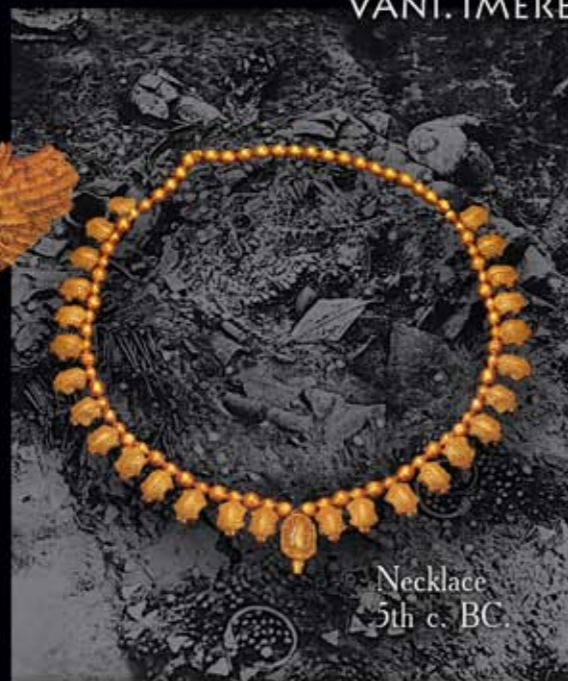
The further advancement of the metalwork in eastern Georgia is demonstrated by the first century AD discoveries in Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia. In addition to the abundance of unearthed golden jewellery, such as gorgeous necklaces, earrings, rings and bracelets adorned with precious stones, the necropolis of Armaziskhevi was rich in silver crockery, including second century bowls with the sculptural images in the centre. Another important example of silverwork from this period is the second or third century AD legs of a bedstead discovered in Bagineti. Overall, the rich finds at Mtskheta and the techniques employed in these objects-granulation, the use of multicoloured stone and cloisonné enamel-demonstrate that these methods, which were widely used by Georgian masters throughout the following medieval centuries were the accomplishments of ancient Georgian art.

COLCHIS CIVILIZATION

VANI. IMERETI. WESTERN GEORGIA



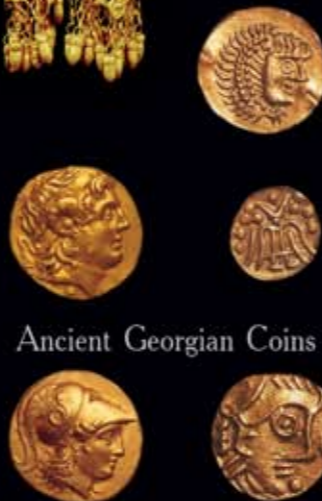
Nike
2nd c. BC.



Necklace
5th c. BC.



Earrings
4th c. BC.



Ancient Georgian Coins



Pectoral
4th c. BC.



Arm rings. 4th c. BC.

"It is said that in their country gold is carried down by the mountain-torrents, and that the barbarians obtain it by means of perforated troughs and fleecy skins, and that this is the origin of the myth of the golden fleece – unless they call them Iberians, by the same name as the western Iberians, from the gold mines in the both countries." Strabo, "Geography"

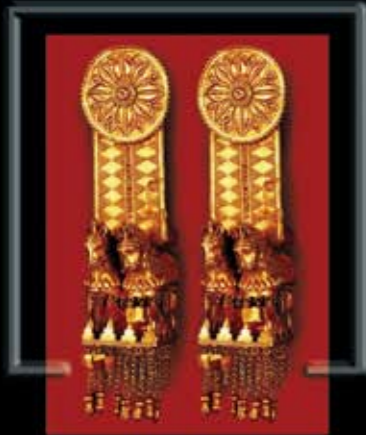
IBERIA OF CAUCASUS KARTLI KINGDOM

4TH C. BC - 3RD C. AD

"Iberia has mostly densely populated towns and cities. Houses have tiled roofs, they are designed well, and they have markets and other social establishments".
Strabo, "Geography"



Seal-rings. 4th c. BC. Akhalgori



Temple pendant
4th c. BC. Akhalgori

Uplistsikhe cave-town. 5th c. BC - 3rd c. AD.



Armaziskhevi. Bath. 2nd c. AD. Mtskheta



Dagger sheath
2nd c. AD. Armaziskhevi



Bowls. 2nd c. AD.
Armaziskhevi



Leg of a bedstead
2nd-3rd c. AD.
Bagineti



"Armazi Bilingual"
2nd c. AD.
Mtskheta

The tomb.
1st c. AD.
Mtskheta



EARLY MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE

5TH 7TH CENTURIES



Ateni Sioni. 7th c. Kartli

Martvili
The Ascension
7th c. Samegrelo



Bichvinta Mosaic
The deer at the fountain
5th c. Abkhazeti



Tsromi Church Mosaic
7th c. Kartli



Bolnisi Sioni. The capital relief.
Kartli

Tsebelda
Panel from
an altarscreen
7th-8th c.
Abkhazeti



Jvari Monastery
Tympanum of the south entrance
The Ascension of the cross

Urbnisi. 5th-6th c. Kartli



Bolnisi Sioni. 478-493 AD. Kartli



Jvari Monastery
586-604 AD. Kartli