

THE EMERGENCE OF THE KARTVELIANS



THE ORIGINS OF THE GEORGIAN PEOPLE(S), THEIR ETHNO-
genesis, like that of most nations, precedes documentary evidence.
It is a subject where conjecture and wishful thinking have played
a greater part than science or logic. One source for conjecture is lingu-
istic: the Georgian language carries traces of its contacts and substrata over
many centuries, possibly millennia; place names give clues to the lan-
guages spoken by previous inhabitants of an area. Archaeology also sheds
light on early history, and can be eloquent about culture, about population
levels and dates, but it cannot reliably identify the ethnic, let alone the
linguistic affiliation of relicts of human activity. Finally, from the second
millennium BC we have terse, sparse, but often precise, records in clay and
stone of the Assyrian, Hittite and Urartu empires of Anatolia, which list
hostile, conquered and vassal neighbours and give material from which the
existence of the precursors of today's Kartvelians (Georgians, Mingrelians,
Laz and Svans) can be deduced. From the middle of the first millennium
BC, more extensive narrative accounts of the inhabitants of northeast
Anatolia and western Georgia (Colchis) are provided by Greek historians
and geographers, but the chronology is blurred, as are the lines between
observation, legend and rumour.¹

The oldest linguistic evidence lies in the modern Kartvelian languages:
basic items of vocabulary, such as *mk'erdi*, chest; *k'udi*, tail; *tbili*, warm;
zghmart'li, medlar; *rka*, horn; *krcxila*, hornbeam; *p'iri*, face; *ekvsi*, six;
shvidi, seven; *trevs*, drags, suggest links to an Indo-European dialect with
a consonant system reminiscent of the Italo-Celtic group from which Latin
derives.² Furthermore, names of 'noble' animals – those hunted by the
aristocracy such as deer and boar – seem to have Indo-European origins:
this phenomenon resembles the Norman element in English, or the Magyar
element in Hungarian, implying an invasion of a settled community by an
alien aristocracy and its language. Georgian also has grammatical features,
in noun declension and verb morphology expressing tense and mood,

which resemble Indo-European. These similarities are found in Svan, too, and since Svan broke off from Proto-Kartvelian millennia ago, the Indo-European element in Georgian must be ancient: it may coincide with the movement of Indo-Europeans from the Balkans into Anatolia three to four thousand years ago. (Subsequently, Georgian has borrowed extensively from neighbouring Indo-European languages, notably Old, Middle and Modern Persian,³ but this process can be dated precisely.) Another non-Indo-European origin which are also found in classical Greek: the Kartvelian languages communed with the pre-Indo-European Mediterranean world.

We have evidence to associate the Georgians, after the fall of the Hittites, with the Urartu empire that dominated central and northeast Anatolia from the early Bronze Age (about 1200 BC) to the early Iron Age (about 700 BC). It is uncertain which kingdoms or tribal confederations in conflict or contact with Urartu included Kartvelians, but the peoples known for four hundred years to the Assyrians and Urartu as Mushki, Diauhi, Uiteruhi and Karduhi are relevant. The consonants *m-s-k(h)* figure even today in the Meskhi, a southern group of Georgians, now entirely Turkish-speaking; fifteen hundred years ago (and recently in Dagestan) Meskhi or Moskhi denoted Georgians as a whole. The Georgian southern province Samtskhe means ‘land of the Meskhi’, and Mtskheta, the capital city from around 300 BC to AD 500, ‘city of the Meskhi’. Mushki are reported c. 1100 BC by the Assyrian king Tiglathpileser in southeast Anatolia: after their defeat they may have moved north. Greek writers later locate the Moskhi in the mountains south of Trebizond. Mushki / Meskhi also seem to refer specifically to eastern Georgia (Iberia or Kartli), which emerged as a state around 300 BC, when the Kura valley tribes coalesced into a kingdom. The pre-Christian religion around Mtskheta worshipped a moon-god Armaz, and a god of fertility, Zaden, showing continuity with Hittite, Hurrite and Urartu religions. Nevertheless, ‘mushki’, ‘moskhi’ and ‘meskhi’ may be ‘floating terms’, just as the word Welsh in Czech denotes Italian and in Bulgarian, Romanian.

Central Georgia in the Kura basin was first known as Iberia. Iberia has been derived from the Phoenician *ébr*, meaning ‘over there’, or explained as a typical parallel in antiquity, where countries on the eastern known world bear the same names as countries in the west, e.g. Albania in the Balkans, and Caucasian Albania (on the north side of the lower Kura, in today’s Azerbaijan). Iberian more probably derives from Speri, a people of northeast Anatolia known to Herodotus as ‘Sasperi’;⁴ from Speri comes the Armenian for Georgians, (i)virk’. The modern term ‘Georgian’ is a contamination of Persian / Turkish Gurji, itself drawn from Armenian virk’, with the cult of St George popular among Georgians, whether pagan or Christian.

The names of certain peoples and areas of interest to Urartu are perpetuated in the names of modern Georgian provinces: from the term *Diauhi* in the Hurrite language of Unartu it is reasonable to derive Georgian T'ao (Armenian *Tayk'* – the Urartu suffix *-hi* denotes 'people', the Armenian *k'*, plurality), a southern Georgian province now in Turkey; from the term *Zabaha* Javakheti (Armenian *Javakhk'*), the southeast borderland of Armenia and Georgia; from *Sheshet* today's Georgian district of Shavsheti.

Another possibly Urartu people, first mentioned by the Greeks, are the Karduhi. To 'Kardu-' has been attributed the Georgians' self-appellation, 'kartveli'. More probably, however, 'kart' is cognate with Indo-European 'gard' and denotes the people who live in fortified citadels,⁵ as the Georgians did in settlements around Mtskheta.

Despite historical links with Urartu, little of Urartu's language is reflected in Kartvelian. The only notable term, *qira*, found in Georgian in idioms to do with up-ending or diving, may be related to Urartu, *qi(u)ra*, ground. The refrain of a Georgian harvest song, *Ivri-arali, tari-arali, ari-arali*, may be an Urartu invocation to the god of fruitfulness: 'Lord Arale, mighty Arale, give, o Arale.'⁶ The Georgian (and Armenian) word for eagle, *arc'ivi*, is found in Urartu, but this is a widespread Indo-European and Hittite lexeme. (Likewise, Armenian, an Indo-European language which has equally perplexing relations to Urartu, has few words traceable to Urartu, whose yoke evidently lay easy on its neighbours' and vassals' languages.)

When Georgia emerged from legend into history it did so as two, possibly three, distinct entities. One is the core of the future unified state, Iberia (today's Kartli and Kakhetia), primarily the country east of the Likhi mountain range that divides rivers flowing into the Caspian (for example, the Kura) from rivers flowing into the Black Sea (the Rioni and the Çoruh). The second is Colchis, the Black Sea coast region that at its greatest stretched from east of Trebizond to north of today's Sukhumi, and whose border with Iberia in the Likhi mountains has fluctuated only slightly. The third is Svanetia, ancient Suania, which two or three thousand years ago was more extensive than today's landlocked highlands. Svanetia then reached the coast, and was at times subject to Colchis or Iberia (and their overlords), or divided, or autonomous. Greek geographers and the fact that the Svan language still has idioms figuring masts and sails testify that the Svans were once a maritime people, presumably peopling the Kodori estuary.

Colchis is mentioned as a kingdom long before Iberia: Urartu had to deal with an often powerful 'Qulha' on its northern boundaries. How Kartvelian a kingdom, or tribal federation it was, we do not know. By the sixth century BC, to judge by the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, and by archaeological data, Greek trading colonies dotted the Colchis coast, from the Caucasus down to Trabzon (the Hellenic Trapezunt or Trebizond). In

north Colchis a confederation of tribes kept its independence and even coherence, and there were towns inland from the Greek ports. One, about ten miles up the river Rioni in today's Poti, was allegedly called Aia. (Aia may be a back-formation from the legendary King Æetes; in Homer Aia is Circe's island; later it denoted all Colchis, or just ancient Kutaisi.) Another Colchian city is known as Archaeopolis, now Nokalakevi, the site of extensive excavations today:⁷ locally it was Tsikheguji, or the fortress of (King) Kuji; a third, near today's Kutaisi, was known as Rhodopolis (Georgian Vardis-tsikhe is a calque of the Greek). A major religious and political site, dating from the 8th century BC, was Vani, in central Colchis.

Hippocratic doctors warned Greeks against the dangers of the Colchian marshes, with their endemic goitre and malaria (hence the Colchians' unhealthy squatness and swarthinness), but morbid heat and humidity also made Colchis fertile and prosperous. Colchis was already notable for its linen and other exports, although at first its currency was not coinage, but bronze rings in multiples of 8.2 kilograms (similar to Assyrian standard weights). Little is known of how the Kartvelian and non-Kartvelian indigenous inhabitants of northern Colchis organized their affairs. King Æetes may have been a historical personage, for as late as the second century AD Arrian, touring Colchis on behalf of the emperor Hadrian, reported seeing sites and ruins from Æetes' time, while Pliny the Elder asserts that a descendant of Æetes, King Saulaces, initiated gold-mining in Colchis (the Scythian name Saulakou appears on a second-century BC coin).⁸

No Colchian king has a Kartvelian name: Kuji, dated by Georgian chroniclers to the third century BC, has a name that means 'wolf' in Abkhaz. Æetes, the legendary father of Medea in Greek myth, may possibly be Abkhaz (Khai', god of the seas). Later, in the second and first centuries BC we have Aristarchos and Saulaces – Greek and Iranian respectively. As for Colchis's indigenous name, Mingrelia (Georgian: Samegrelo), the Georgian root is *egr*. This we find in the classical Georgian name for Colchis, 'Egrisi', and corresponds to the Mingrelian names of peoples identified by Xenophon and Herodotus as 'marg'. The word Colchis may be derived from the ancient southwest province of Georgia Kola, with the Urartu suffix *-hi* indicating 'people'. Another Kartvelian group mentioned by Roman writers, when Colchis became known as Lazica, are the Laz. The term Laz derives from the Svan 'la-zan' meaning 'country of the Zan (Laz)'.

Greek and Roman geographers assert that between 70 and 300 languages were spoken in Dioscourias (later Sebastopolis, then Tskhumi now Sukhumi); Colchis seems by the first century BC to be split into a northern, Hellenized state and a southern heterogeneous tribal confederation (for some time under Persian hegemony); Colchis was subsequently known as Lazica, then Egrisi, then Abkhazeti. It must have been ethnically diverse, and its tribes, when they coagulated into a confederation, led by an Abkhaz,

Zan (Mingrelian or Laz), Svan or Scythian ruler, or someone from an ethnos now extinct. By 500 BC the prosperous Greek coastal towns, Phasis (founded by Themistagoras of Miletus, near today's Poti, but by a large harbour since silted up), Gyēnos (near today's Ochamchira) and Dioscourias (today's Sukhumi) had economic, if not political, power over the indigenous inland centres of Rhodopolis, Tsikheguji and Vani (known to the Greeks as Souris).

Greek sources are sparse; some merely cite lost geographical treatises. Assyria and Urartu record only battles and victories; the earliest hint of the complexity of Colchis comes from the Assyrian king Tukulti-Nimuri I (1245–1209 BC) who records '40 kings by the Upper [Black] Sea'. Archaeology tells us little: Dioscourias lies either underwater or under today's Sukhumi, while Gyēnos (apparently half-underground) and ancient Phasis are still unlocated. Most Colchian cities, built of wood, were destroyed in the Bosphoran king Pharnakes' invasion from the north in 49 BC and the Pergamonian king Mithridates' attack from the west in 47 BC. Relations between Greek colonists (who never founded a state in the eastern Black Sea) and Colchians were generally peaceful, except in Dioscourias, where ethnic tensions were acute, and a fourth century BC bronze stele refers to armed forces. The Greek settlements were mostly Miletian, and their temples were usually dedicated to Apollo. Colchian native cities like Vani were centres for the elite, and only gradually Hellenized: Vani's main temple was dedicated to Leucothea and had its own oracle.

Greek sources speak of a Colchian kingdom, ruled by *skeptouchoi* (sceptre-bearers), as Iranian provinces were ruled by *varanaka* (cudgel-bearers): a golden sceptre has been found at one Colchian site. Whether *skeptouchoi* betokened devolved or disintegrated administration, we do not know. The ethnic make-up of Colchis is also obscure: Phasis may, like Apsari in the south, contain the Abkhaz root *-psa-*, 'water'. Kartvelian affiliation is conspicuously absent from the few anthroponyms found in Colchian burials: Metos, Otoios, Dedatos, Mikakados, Mēlabēs, Chorsip, Orazo are Greek, Anatolian and Iranian.

The origins of eastern Georgia (Iberia, or Kartli and Kakhetia) are equally obscure, but the early Georgian chronicles, compiled between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD possibly from lost early records, as well as from oral tradition, provide a narrative in which myth evolves into plausible legend and finally into verifiable fact. Like many European nations, the Iberians have a 'Remus and Romulus', or 'Lech and Czech' myth: each city has an ancestral founder – Mtskhetos, Odzrqos – descending from a national founder, Kartlos, whose brother is Gaos, ancestor of the Armenians, and who descends from Noah's great-grandson Togarmah. Not until the fourth century BC, after Alexander the Great invaded Persia, transforming, albeit bypassing Transcaucasia, do the accounts of

The Life of Kartli and *The Conversion of Kartli* leave the realms of fantasy.

Iberia, even more scantily than Colchis, figures in records of Urartu royal conquests and in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, as well as stories relayed by Herodotus. We can deduce a little of the eastern Georgians' early history, and archaeology fills a few gaps. Records of the early Anatolian empires name northern Caucasian peoples earlier, and further west, than the precursors of Transcaucasian Kartvelians. Hittite records (before 1200 BC) mention Kashki in northeast Anatolia: to the Assyrians these were Kashka (with whom King Tiglathpileser warred c. 110 BC), a variant of 'Kashog', a later designation of Circassians. The Assyrians list the Abeshla, known to the Greeks as Apsils, today's Abkhaz, while the Caucasian Albanians (whose capital city in the early Christian period was Bardavi) may be the nation called Parda by the Assyrians. The Hittites record among their vassals and neighbours antecedents of the Armenians: Hayasa and Zukhma (Hayistan is modern Armenia, and Somekhi the Georgian for an Armenian).

Georgia's archaeological record begins in the Stone Age: the country has been continuously occupied by *Homo sapiens* for tens of thousands of years. Grain cultivation, cattle-raising, wine-making and metalworking began as early in Transcaucasia as anywhere on earth. Nothing, of course, indicates the language or ethnicity of these prehistoric humans. Burials give minimal anthropological data, with a fluctuation between tall, narrow-skulled northern skeletons and shorter, broader-skulled Anatolian types. As in Britain, DNA testing shows a remarkable stability over thousands of years in the population. Despite historically recorded invasions, changes of language, ethnicity and culture, the DNA of 80 per cent of today's population typically shows continuity with prehistoric inhabitants.

At the end of the Neolithic, around 1500 BC, burial customs and grave goods like statuettes of gods, particularly in Trialeti, the hills south of Tbilisi, are significantly similar to those in nearby Azerbaijan and Armenia and in the Mesopotamian culture of the Mittani empire and the central Anatolian empire of the Hittites. Some Trialetian burials, however, show signs of human sacrifice (slaves or servants of the deceased).

Around 800 BC Urartu records mention seven regions or peoples who may be Kartvelian: Kulkha (Colchis); Uiteruhi (possibly today's Odzrkhe); Katarza (today's Goderdzi Pass located between the Kura and lower Çoruh valleys, and perhaps the southern province of Klarjeti); Zabakhae (today's Javakheti); the Lusha (possibly the Laz); Eriahi (from whom the eastern Georgian province of Hereti may derive, but who are more likely to be precursors of the Caucasian Albanians); and finally the Iganehi (who may be known to the Greeks as Heniochoi, although the latter are later recorded both around Dioscourias and east of Trebizond, and may have been Svans and Mingrelians). King Argishti refers to the Iganehi ruler as overlord of all Transcaucasia ('Etiukhi' in Urartu). Of all these

peoples mentioned by Urartu and Assyria (in the twelfth century BC the Anatolian empires counted some sixty 'peoples' on their northern borders), we know most about the Diauhi. Urartu kings name three Diauhi rulers, Sieni, Asna and Uturpurshini (persons and places presumably Kartvelian rarely have Kartvelian-sounding names – which implies that the elite were Hitticized or Hurritized – just as later Georgian rulers have Greek or Iranian names). In 1112 BC the Diauhi king Sieni was captured by the Assyrian king Tiglathpileser, but released after the Diauhi returned Assyrian prisoners and paid tribute. (The Diauhi were the only grouping significant enough for their leaders to be called kings by the Assyrians and Urartu.) Tiglathpileser led three campaigns against these 'northerners'. In 845 BC Shalmaneser III attacked the Diauhi king Asia and made him pay tribute; in 790 BC the Diauhi capital city, Shashilu, was captured by King Menua of Urartu: the records show him invading Shesheti, a province with a Kartvelian name (today's Shavsheti, now in Turkey), humiliating the Diauhi king Uturpurshini and forcing his people to dismantle their forts. (An area east of Diauhi is called Zabakhae, presumably today's Javakheti, southeast Georgia.) Five years later, Menua's successor Argishti renewed the campaign with 15,760 infantry and 66 chariots, taking 105 forts and 453 settlements in one province alone, and made Uturpurshini pay tribute of 20 kilograms of gold, 4,426 horses and 28,510 slaves (the Diauhi and their allies were evidently rich). Argishti then defeated a neighbouring Kartvelian tribe, the Uiteruhi, (from which the Greek 'Bizeroi' and medieval Georgian 'Odzrqe' [modern Odrzkhe] may be derived), and garrisoned their capital, Urienai. The Diauhi and their allies received no help in resisting Urartu from their fellow Kartvelians in Colchis. Urartu campaigns obliterated the Diauhi state by the eighth century BC: no more is known of them for 350 years, until Xenophon encountered people he called 'Taochoi' in 401 BC.

Having defeated the east Georgian people between the headwaters of the Çoruh and the Kura and around Lake Çıldır, Urartu came into conflict with the western Georgians of Kulkha (Colchis), which included one Diauhi province, Hushani. In 743 BC King Sarduri II attacked the Colchic king (I)mesha, capturing his capital Ildamush (apparently on the lower Çoruh) and commissioning an 'iron seal' there (the Colchians were now famous blacksmiths).

Like the Diauhi, the Colchians disappear from history in 735 BC, followed shortly by Urartu. Nomadic archers on horseback descended from the north Caucasus foothills: the Cimmerians via the Black Sea coast, the Scythians via the Caspian, others over the high Daryal Pass. Most were Iranian, but Circassians and Abkhaz may have joined them. Their attacks devastated all Transcaucasia and northeast Anatolia, and their armies reached Egypt's borders. The Assyrian king Sargon II (772–705 BC) records a rout of Urartu by Cimmerians on the upper Kura river in 720 BC.

Eventually, these Scythian and Cimmerian invaders were assimilated, as mercenaries, or, judging by place names, as settlers, from Trialeti to Cappadocia (both those toponyms are Iranian). Apart from thousands of bronze arrowheads, their passage is marked by grave mounds with horses and, sometimes, chariots. (They left a trace on the Georgian language: *khidi*, meaning ‘bridge’, is found in Mingrelian and therefore an early borrowing, is related to Ossetic and thus to these northern invaders.) In 676 BC, allied to King Rusa II of the chastened Urartu, the Cimmerians helped destroy King Midas’s multi-national Phrygian empire in central and western Anatolia, which is known as the Mushki empire, although these Mushki are probably not the Mushki-Moskhi-Meskhi thought to be precursors of the eastern Kartvelians. (The only link between the western and eastern Mushki lies in the gods worshipped: the Hittite moon god Armaz and the Luvian god Santush are the pagan Iberian gods Armaz and Zaden whose idols were overthrown by Christian missionaries in the fourth century AD.)

The Cimmerian-Scythian invasion, by weakening Urartu, let various Kartvelian peoples migrate, or expand, westwards and northwards over the next three centuries. Some groups, certainly the Uiteruhi (Greek: Bizeroi) and Katarza (Greek: *Kotarzene*, Old Georgian: *Klarji*) moved over the Goderdzi Pass towards the Black Sea, driving a wedge between southern and northern Colchis, eventually ensuring that Georgian would be spoken from the mouth of the Çoruh to the juncture of the Kura and Alazan rivers, while Mingrelian would be confined to the northwest littoral of Georgia, and the Laz in southwest Colchis were cut off from the Mingrelians. By the third century BC, the name Meskhi had migrated 150 miles northeast from the province of Meskhi (later Samtskhe) to the city of Mtskheta: the focal point of Georgia shifted from the mountains between the upper Çoruh and Kura rivers to the junction of the Kura and the Aragvi river that comes down from the central Caucasian passes, a crossroads for traders and invaders from north to south and east to west.

The Diauhi reappear in Greek records as Taochoi, but when Herodotus discusses the Kartvelians c. 450 BC, they also appear as the Sasperi, the name Speri with a Georgian prefix of place *Sa-*, which evolved into the term Iberian. (Today’s city of Ispir in northeast Turkey is derived from the Sasperi.) Herodotus thought Sasperi the only significant nation between Colchis and the new empire (or tribal alliance) of the Medes (Greek: *Madai*). The Medes were a northeast Iranian people who, allied to Babylon, destroyed Assyria in 600 BC and, allied to Scythians, then conquered Urartu; they were supplanted in 549 BC by Cyrus of Persia, who established the Achaemenid empire which dominated Anatolia as well as Persia until its defeat by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.

Under the Medes and the Achaemenid Persians, the Georgians of Colchis and of Iberia achieved parity, if not unity: Sasperi, or Iberians,

formed the eighteenth Satrapy of the Persian empire, and Colchians (Herodotus lists them as Moskhi, Tibarenes, Makarons, Mossynoeci and Mars) formed the nineteenth Satrapy. They benefited from the Achaemenids' efficient policing and organization of coinage, roads and caravanserais; they suffered heavy taxation and military conscription. Colchis apparently sent the Achaemenid king 100 boys and 100 girls every five years: these deportees served four-year terms as indented labour on Persian projects like the Susa fortifications. The recorded commanders of the 'Mares and Colchians' and of Iberia (the 'Saspies', as Herodotus called them) have Persian names, Farandates and Masistius, respectively.⁹ In wars against Greece led by Darius the Great and Xerxes, Colchian soldiers are reported to have served under their own officers. The southern parts of Colchis and Kartli were apparently integrated with the Achaemenid empire until Alexander the Great annihilated it.

To judge by its Greek ports, northern Colchis remained outside the nineteenth Satrapy. How the Greek colonies of Dioscourias, Gyēnos and Phasis, or those further south around the 'Deep Harbour' ('Bathys Limen', today's Batumi), interacted with the indigenous population we can only guess: Greek colonists were mostly male and married local women. On the other hand there are signs of violent colonial domination: the destruction of coastal textile-weaving villages by fire in the sixth century BC. But this northern Hellenized Colchis prospered. Gemstones were worked in great variety. Numerous small silver coins, mostly hemidrachms, some minted with a Greek letter to indicate their origin, all with a bull's or a lion's head on one side and a male human head on the obverse, were produced from the sixth to third centuries BC, and show an advanced monetary system. (They were so common and of such poor silver that later generations used them as buckshot.) The quantity of imported goods (Egyptian scarabs, Phoenician glass beads) match Colchis's reputation as an exporter of flax, hemp, pitch and slaves (one Colchian slave was valued at 153 drachmas, equal then to a skilled worker's wages for six months). Pheasants derive their name from Phasis and, as Aristophanes records, Greeks considered pheasant meat a luxury import from Colchis. Heavy pyramidal loom weights testify to a textile industry. The rich of Colchis lived in stone houses with tiled roofs, the poor under straw thatch or in pyramidal log cabins on hillocks dug out of the marshes. To judge by the iron ploughs and large arable tracts, central Colchis farmed grain, although the climate, especially near the coast, restricted the harvest to millet. Archaeologists have found large iron balls (fired from catapults), which indicate a military with artillery at its disposal. Little writing, however, survives: a few names on tombs, manufacturers' Greek letters on coins and pottery, a monogram in Greek and in Aramaic on a black-glazed kylix, Aramaic letters on a fragment of gold leaf found at Vani. Burial customs,

from cremation in pits to interment in jars, indicate a very heterogeneous population, with Cimmerian, as well as Caucasian highlander influence. Further inland, near the borders of Iberia, there are other signs of north Caucasian influence, for example, a bird's bill sculpted in gold.

According to Plutarch, writing five hundred years later, the north of Iberia, like northern Colchis, was autonomous. The archaeology of all Georgia for this period suggests the emergence of an ostentatiously wealthy elite, with graves full of gold and jewellery, while the masses remained poor. Under the Achaemenids, key centres like Uplistsikhe, Urnisi and Kaspi arose in central Georgia, skilfully built in stone. The plentiful weaponry in graves implies that the elite was military, even if living under an Achaemenid *pax imperialis*. One such centre, Uplistsikhe, is now dated to the eighth century BC, but, when Colchis was densely settled with trading and manufacturing communities, Iberia's cities were primarily fortified war-time refuges, or temples dedicated to Anatolian gods and serving clerics and pilgrims.

Very briefly, Achaemenid Persia, under a treaty with Callias of Athens in 459 BC, controlled the Black Sea, thus unifying all Kartvelians for the first time in history. The first period of Iranian domination of Georgia, first under the Medes, then under the Achaemenid Persians, lasted three hundred years, from the mid-seventh to mid-fourth century BC, but left little historical trace. But it began a process of lexical borrowing by Georgian from Iranian languages that would carry on until the end of the eighteenth century AD. From the little-known language of the Medes, from Old Persian and from Avestan religious terminology, Georgia took basic vocabulary, for instance: *st'umari*, guest; the root of *masp'indzeli*, host; *gandzi*, treasure; *sp'ilendzi*, copper; the root of *savane*, dwelling; *ts'minda*, pure, holy; *eshmak'i*, devil; *drosha*, banner.

In 436 BC Pericles of Athens reconquered the Black Sea, and probably the ports of Colchis. Greek colonies in southern Colchis, such as today's Pichvnari near Kobuleti, had not been disrupted by Persian occupation. By 410 BC the Achaemenid empire was riven by fratricidal rivalry: the brother of King Artaxerxes hired Greek mercenaries. Their coup failed: the Greek mercenaries' retreat in 401 BC is related in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Xenophon's main interest was to get home, but his observations are our first eyewitness record of the state of Georgia in 400 BC. He reports the Colchians, Makrons (probably Mingrelians) and Karduchoi as freed from Persian servitude; the Karduchoi, the most easterly Kartvelians, are said to be at war with Armenians, but the 'Hesperites' (Sasperis or Iberians) to be subjects of West Armenia under Tiribaz, presumably Satrap of the eighteenth Persian Satrapy. Herodotus names the Taochoi as the most aggressive Kartvelian tribe, many living outside the control of the Satrap, defending themselves by throwing rocks from their fortresses, committing mass suicide by jump-

ing off cliffs when faced with defeat. The frontier between the Persian eighteenth Satrapy and 'free' Iberia ran through Taochoi territory.

Xenophon's men reached the lower Çoruh in Colchis. There they could converse: one Greek soldier, born in Colchis and exported as a slave, now interpreted with the local Mingrelian-speaking Mars and Makron or Tzanoi (Georgian: Zan), who had a coastal city, Gyminas. Herodotus thought the Tibarenes and the Chalybes (named for their skills with iron smelting) were identical to the Mingrelians. The only specifically non-Kartvelian people Herodotus records on his way into Colchis are Scythians, presumably remnants of nomadic invasions three centuries earlier. Leaving Trebizond westwards for Gerasun, Xenophon encountered the quarrelsome Mossynoikoi. Despite the Kartvelian prefix *Mo-* and the resemblance of their name to Saniga, who were located in northern Colchis and may have been Svans or Mingrelians, and despite their custom of living in fortified towers, the Mossynoikoi were not Kartvelian – their name derives from *mosyn*, an Indo-European (perhaps Thracian) word meaning 'tower': they are memorable for Xenophon's horror at their acrid wine, diet of salted dolphin, copulating in public and setting fire to towers in which their kings were imprisoned.

When the Greeks returned to eastern Anatolia 70 years after Xenophon, the changes for Georgia and the known world were far more radical.